



FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

# THE WORK AND LIVES OF SOUTH KOREAN TEACHERS

## Lower-Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of the Teacher Profession

**Hyeryung Jang**

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Supervisor:	Petra Angervall
Examiner:	Ernst Thoutenhoofd

# Abstract

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**Aim:** Historically, the teaching profession in eastern Asian countries is often considered as a prestigious and desirable occupation with great respect in social and cultural contexts. Even though South Korean secondary school teachers have been part of and influenced by a devaluation of their authority compared to the past, there is not enough research about Korean teachers' work and lives in international research. The aim of this study is to describe and analyze how teachers in contemporary south Korea understand, reflect on their situation as teachers, conditions, tensions, and new challenges based on discourses on teacher professionalism but also the pandemic.

**Theory:** The study is based on the combination of policy theory (Ball, 1994) and theory based on symbolic interactionism. Policy frames the work of teachers and needs to be understood in order to analyse the context of teachers' practices. Symbolic interactionism believes an individual does not passively receive input from society and is actively creating its meaning through interaction, interpretation, and re-interpretation; hence, society is continuously created and recreated as humans inevitably meet new challenges over time. As teacher professionalism is largely affected by the constant interaction between, on the one hand, their beliefs, attitudes, and emotions and, on the other hand, the social, cultural, and institutional environment where they function, the concept of symbolic interactionism and education policy theory will enhance the understanding of the importance of individuals' different voices and how teacher's professionalism and perception toward the profession have been changed over the time.

**Method:** A qualitative discourse analysis was applied in order to determine how the Korean teachers experience their work. The research data is gathered by analyzing previous empirical studies, directives, and policy, but also by four in-service semi-structured individual interviews of Korean teachers.

**Results:** The result of this study indicates that the contemporary Korean secondary school teachers are confronted with changing directives and conceptions toward the teaching profession in Korean society. This in combination of traditional values and expectations create a difficult situation for the teachers today, in their trying to adapt to it and construct meanings of their profession from work. Each teacher perceived the situation similarly or differently depends on his/her personal experiences and the social, cultural, and institutional environment where they work on a daily basis.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

KEDI	Korean Education Development Institute
OECD	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
KICE	Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation
CSAT	College Scholastic Ability Test
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
KFEA	Korean Federation of Educators' Associations
SI	Symbolic interactionism
SHRO	Students' Human Rights Ordinance
EBS	Education Broadcasting System

# Chapter 1 Introduction and Purpose

## 1.1 Introduction

Teachers' professional lives are busy. They are constantly overloaded with lecturing, preparing class, teamwork, and dialogue with colleagues, marking/correcting student work, providing counseling and guidance to students, participating in school management, engaging in extracurricular activities after school, professional development activities, supervising students during breaks, communicating and cooperating with parents or guardians and general administrative communication and paperwork. Moreover, they are not only taking on the role as a teacher and lecturer, but also tend to carry the expectation of role model for future generations; they need to understand each student and find a way to teach and communicate with each individual student effectively. To a larger extent, they play a crucial role in conveying cultural and social values, such as tolerance, dialogue, and equal rights (Marinette, 2017).

Accordingly, as teachers do not merely deliver the curriculum, it is important to recognize what teachers believe, think, and do will ultimately shape students' learning. Furthermore, teachers' working conditions, teachers' relations with their colleagues, the conditions of status, reward and autonomy, teachers' aspirations or the frustrations from work - all these influence teachers' commitment, enthusiasm, and morale, which will affect the quality of what they do in the classroom after all (Hargreaves, 1994).

Even though most people agree that teachers play a crucial part in education and also can greatly impact students' lives, recent decades of globalization, new economic demands, and standardized measurements questions on the teaching profession has been raised (R. M. Cohen, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kaplan & Owings, 2001; Viadero, 2010). In many countries, general debates on education quality also seem to open questions about what it means to be a good teacher today as well as the meaning of being a teacher/teachers' professionalism.

Images and ideas regarding teachers' professionalism and the essence of teaching have been changed and challenged according to rapid changes in the contexts – culturally and politically. In the Western perspective, teachers in East Asia are often depicted as playing a reverence role because of the influence of Confucianism (Bermeo, 2014; R. M. Cohen, 2017; Sorensen, 1994). However, as living in a globalized world, no country stays solely without changing, and South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) is no exception. Following the advent of globalization, the Korean government has been pushed ahead with several education reforms to match the global values (e.g., student-centered method, multicultural education, etc.)

Therefore, Korean teachers are facing new challenges under the constant changes of education policies and changes of traditional values, such as lowering the teachers' retirement age and portraying negative images of the teachers in the mass media. However, there are limited empirical research conducted to describe contemporary Korean teachers' work and lives.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

For a relatively short time, Korea has achieved impressive economic development from the ashes of thirty-six years of Japanese colonialism (1910-1945) and four years of the Korean War (1950-1953). As the nation had little natural capital, the driving force that made such an outstanding development possible is said to be the passion of citizens for education (Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), 2019). A good education is considered as the key to upward social mobility in Korea. The level of educational achievement not only help in providing direct economic benefits, but also profoundly affects social status, job opportunities, social life, choice of a spouse, and a range of interpersonal relationships, which Seth (2002) described this cultural context as “education fever” in his research.

Given this cultural context, education policy is one of the main issues that everybody focuses on, and national education reform pledges serve as political tools for political leaders who are seeking to win elections (So, 2020). Since the Korean government was established, there have been twelve presidents, but the policies on college admissions have changed fourteen times so far. Most of the time, whenever the government renounced the new education policies, the staff and facilities to proceed with it were not ready (J. W. Kim, 2004; So, 2020). Yet, the burden and responsibilities went to teachers’ shoulders.

Despite all the hard works to meet the demand of the government, students, and parents, teachers are vulnerable to criticism on several fronts. In July 2018, there was an appeal in the Korean government’s open petition board <sup>1</sup>abolishing Education Officials Act 41 <sup>2</sup>and proposing that teachers should not have the same vacations as students have. More than 16 thousand people supported the appeal and criticized teachers as “welfare parasites.” Many people do not know what teachers actually do during the school vacation as well as the school period.

On the other hand, in spite of these demands and the criticisms regarding the role of teacher, South Korean teachers’ annual turnover rate is approximately 1% (Auguste, 2010). However, another significant report from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2014b) showed Korean teachers answered the highest among OECD countries that they are regretting their decision to become a teacher. Many people could assume that a relatively low turnover rate would indicate Korean teachers were satisfied with their profession, yet it was not. These two outcomes indicate that there should be further contextual explorations because teachers’ turnover rate did not reflect a cultural background in Korea.

Moreover, OECD (2014a) informed that lower-secondary school teachers in Korea teach less (less than 600 hours) than the average of teaching hour (694 hours per year) among OECD countries, and even from the recent research (OECD, 2020a) reported that Korean lower-secondary teachers’ working time is spent on teaching on average 35% or less, compared to 44% of average OECD countries. On the other hand, OECD (2020b) reported regarding administrative work; the burden is highest in Korea, where teachers spend at least 5 hours per week on administrative work, compared to the average of 2.7 hours per week among OECD countries.

Thus, this study started from the pure curiosity regarding teachers’ work and how they conceive their profession from the daily interaction. I believe it is necessary to identify what lower-secondary Korean school teachers’ workload is and how they perceive their profession and how the policy or the criticisms

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<sup>1</sup> [교육 공무원 <41 조 연수> 폐지를 청원합니다. > 대한민국 청와대 \(president.go.kr\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Educational Officials Act. Article 41 (Training in other Places than Training Institutions and Offices)  
Public educational officials may undergo training in other facilities or places than in training institutions or offices with approval from the heads of administrative agencies to which they belong, to the extent such training does not interfere with the classes. Retrieved from  
[http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_mobile/ganadaDetail.do?hseq=39748&type=abc&key=EDUCATIONAL%20OFFICIALS%20ACT&param=E](http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/ganadaDetail.do?hseq=39748&type=abc&key=EDUCATIONAL%20OFFICIALS%20ACT&param=E)

from media affect their working environment. This is the basis for this study, which intends to explore the contemporary perceptions among a group of Korean teachers about the current conditions and basis for the teaching profession.

### **1.2.1 Purpose**

The aim of this study is to describe and analyze how teachers in contemporary Korea understand, reflect on their situation as teachers, conditions, tensions, and new challenges also in regards to the pandemic. More specific the following questions have been guiding the study:

Research Questions:

1. What does it mean to act, work navigate as a teacher in Korea?
2. How does teachers' professionalism act in Korea?
3. How do contemporary culture, policy intentions impact on Korean teachers' working environment?

### **1.3 Limitations**

It was a challenge to gain informed consent from teachers since not only bureaucracy and authoritarianism have prevailed in Korean society so that participating teachers can be considered as whistleblowers and/or smear reputations of the Korean education environment, but also the reason for the first COVID-19 outbreak in Korea hindered gathering of more participants for this study. When I posted recruitment for the participants for the study in a blog that is made up for secondary teachers, I had many accusations from the people whether I was involved with Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a religious cult group founded in 1984 in Korea. As Shincheonji followers approached people to exploit personal information to turn them into future follower by faking university research survey, and teachers were one of their main targets because of the teachers' social and economic status in Korea, suspicion and distrust prevailed among the people, especially after Shinechenji was the main culprit of spreading the virus across the nation.

Due to the special situation and financial restraints, even my acquaintance could not help much to recruit participants, as it will be a big favor to ask because the interview demands teachers' spare time, especially with 7-8 hours of the time difference between Korea and Sweden and risk to share personal information without proper compensation. Together with the special situation and the fact that senior teachers were not familiar with using technical devices hindered to gather of more senior participants. As a result, I could find one senior teacher to participate in the study by the introduction of an acquaintance.

There was no challenge with language, and participants were able to express themselves freely. However, as I am a native of the country, some participants sometimes assumed that I would automatically understand what they meant and often used the phrase "as you know..." Even though I am already familiar with a situation they are describing, it might have created a barrier for participants to explain themselves better and could make some necessary words disappear in those conversations unwillingly.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 History of Teacher Education in Korea

In 1945, when Korea was declared independency from Japanese colonial rule, the Japanese teachers, consisting of 40% of primary school teachers and 70% of secondary school teachers, returned to Japan shortly after the liberation, and much of the school facilities were damaged during the Korean War (1950-1953) (S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010). According to C. Lee, Kim, and Byun (2012), 53% of the population aged 13 years and over (about 15 million) was illiterate after the colonization and the war. In these conditions, the most critical challenges in this mission were to ensure equal opportunity for those who had previously been unable to engage in education by expanding access and implementing educational changes in order to incorporate a modern education system and curriculum (Yoo & Lee, 2014).

According to S. Kim and J. H. Lee (2010), with the deficiency of educational resources, including professional teachers and infrastructure, the Korean government soon faced a challenge. Hence, several teachers' colleges were established in order to train elementary school teachers as soon as possible during Rhee's government (1948-1960). However, the qualifications to become a teacher was not too strict. For example, elementary school teachers were expected to have completed middle school from 1951 until 1961 (ibid).

Accordingly, from the historical context, the teacher training policy and education in Korea focused on quantitative aspects, not the quality, until the 1990s when the government decided to adopt an open, competitive employment exam (Yun, 1997). While the government was eager to expand educational resources to provide elementary education for everyone, it contributed to the loss of public trust in teachers and the disregard for the professionalism of teachers, which led to building mistrust on public education among parents and students as the quality of teachers it produced was questionable (S. Kim & J.-H. Lee, 2010; Yun, 1997).

Currently, as stated in the Act on Primary and Secondary School Education, teachers are generally classified into Class 1 and Class 2, and Class 2 teacher certification is granted through the completion of the required credit hours in teacher education institutions without a separate test (KEDI, 2019). Recruitment processes are different depending on the types of schools. Those certified class 2 teachers can take the public recruitment examination, which is an open competition operated by each metropolitan or provincial office of education once a year and should pass to officially work at public secondary schools. Private schools, on the other hand, can hire a teacher who possesses a class 2 teaching certificate based on their own criteria. Yet, more and more private schools recruit through open competition national examination (Eegyeong Kim, Kim, & Han, 2009).

According to KICE (2019), a consortium is organized by the regional or metropolitan education offices to establish first-round written tests that evaluate the general knowledge of teacher applicants in education as well as content/pedagogical knowledge. The second round is managed by each provincial or metropolitan office of education: in-depth individual interviews for teaching aptitudes, lesson plan, demonstration of teaching class, and performance as required.

The national teacher recruitment exams are extremely competitive. Even though identical salary tables are used by both public and private schools in all states and metropolitan education offices, public schools tend to provide better benefits and working conditions, such as opportunities for teacher training and promotion (J. Lee, Kang, & Park, 2019).

Although Korean teachers are claimed to be one of the best teaching powers in the world, given that the top 5 to 10 percentiles of young people out of a given age cohort by means of College Scholastic Ability

Test (CSAT) scores are hired, parents and students are not satisfied with public education and rely more on private tutoring or private for-profit cram schools (called *hakwon* in Korean) (Eegyeong Kim et al., 2009; Hyunjoon Park, Byun, & Kim, 2011).

## **2.2 Education Policies in Korea**

The most prominent characteristic of Korean primary and secondary education is its high degree of standardization of education with nationally adopted uniform standards and centralization that promotes standardization (K. S. Kim, 2005; C. Lee et al., 2012; Hyunjoon Park, 2007). Many aspects of education are closely governed by the government including teachers' training, salary and recruitment, school budgets, and curricula and pace of instruction. It administers the CSAT and enforces government standards for teaching, learning, and assessments. Even though the recent education reform aims to allow more autonomy for each school and for teachers in schools, the overall level of standardization and centralization of the South Korean education system is still high compared to that of other countries (Hyunjoon Park, 2007).

### **2.2.1 Education Policy in Military Regime (1961-1992)**

#### **Equalization policy**

Every middle school and high school, regardless of public or private, was allowed to select students through competitive entry examinations, and this causes serious problems, including rising demand for private tutoring until 1961 when General Park Chung-hee took over the power (S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010).<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the middle school (Grades 7-9) equalization policy was first carried out in Seoul (the capital of and the largest city in Korea) in 1969 and expanded to major cities in 1970 and all over the country in the following year. The high school (Grades 10-12) equalization policy was first implemented in Seoul and Busan (the second-largest city in Korea) in 1974 and was gradually expanded to several major cities until 1980. However, the government faced growing opposition, and the government had to slow down the implementation in the 1980s, so the old system is still maintained by some small and medium-sized cities and rural school districts.

The equalization policy aimed to reduce the differences among high schools and alleviate intense competition for admissions to the best high schools; the government banned school-specific entrance examinations and replaced them with national entrance examinations with a random allocation of students within separate school districts (Seog, 2013). In other words, regardless of whether the school was private or public, single-sex or co-educational, students were randomly allocated to a school. It also made tuition costs, teacher salaries, and private school curricula equal to those of public schools by means of strict regulations and the necessary financial assistance to private schools. Private schools, therefore, have been almost similar to public schools in terms of student accessibility, learning content, and teacher quality. Strong government regulations and controls have virtually eliminated competition

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<sup>3</sup> First, the severe pressure of planning for the entrance exam hinders the healthy (physical and psychological) Second, schooling in the elementary schools, particularly in grade 6 (twelve years old), was focused too much for the preparation of the exam. In the results, it was hard to teach the normal curriculum. Third, to prepare their children for the exam, a substantial amount of household expenditure was spent on private tutoring. Fourth, the standard of middle school education ranged greatly from school to school, and students and their parents were obsessed with getting into the most prestigious schools. Many students who missed the opportunity to get in to their preferred schools repeated the same grade again to prepare for the next year's entrance exam. Many parents also wanted to send their kids to an elementary school that was more successful in sending their graduates to more prestigious middle schools. This produced an unbalanced demand across school districts for allocations for elementary school students.

between high schools, but certainly not among students. On the contrary, they caused a runaway escalation in private tutoring expenses (S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010).

### **Banned Private tutoring/Cram schools**

In 1980, another military coup government led by Chun Doo-hwan issued a so-called 'July 30 Special Order', which prohibited elementary and secondary students from benefitting from any kind of private tutoring or cramming schools and from selling supplemental learning materials to students (Seog, 2013). However, it was difficult to enforce such a restriction, and the private tutoring did not stop, so the government allowed two types of private tutoring: private tutoring by university students and cramming schools (S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010). The government enforced rigid legal controls on private tutoring even after the military regime before the ban was declared unconstitutional in 1999 (ibid).

### **Different perspectives regarding military regime education policy**

According to Seth (2012), military governments took advantage of the people's 'zeal for education' to develop a sense of loyalty to the state and the regimes that governed it. Likewise, K. S. Kim (2005) criticized the equalization policy during the military regime acted as a mean to control the military elite's power so-called 'Statist Education Policies' since the military elite regulated the major aspects of the operation of all educational institutions: institutional licenses, student quotas, selection of students, curriculum and textbooks, exams and evaluations, recruitment and management of teachers, and even day-to-day operations.

However, Darling-Hammond (2015) claimed Korea had undertaken consistent, long-term reforms, setting targets for the expansion, equalization, and development of the education system, and consistently investing in a quality workforce of teachers and in the school curriculum and teaching resources that have established the foundations for success.

Another significant aspect of equalization policy is that Park (2007) reported Korea's wealthy students outperformed poorer students by an average of 33 points in reading comprehension, the smallest gap among the more than 40 countries participating in the PISA in 2000, which indicates that a comparatively low degree of educational inequality in Korea, represented by the weakest correlation between socio-economic background and student performance. C. Lee et al. (2012) also highlighted the fact that Korea has not only large proportions of students performing at the highest level, but also relatively few students at the lower levels in PISA in 2009 (e.g., 6% of Korean students earned scores below Level 2 on the reading proficiency test while the OECD average was approximately 19%).

Hence, some researchers claimed that the government's equalization policy rather affected education inequality as the policy could not satisfied with students and parents' need of getting better education (Kang, 2007; K. S. Kim, 2005; S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010), though others found that the equalization system was at least neutral or supportive in terms of alleviating overheated competition for high school entrance and demolishing the hierarchical structure of secondary education (C. Lee et al., 2012; Hyunjoon Park, 2007; Seog, 2013).

### **2.2.2 The Democratic Civilian Governments (1993-Present)**

Historically, whenever a new government comes to power, the Korean national curriculum is revised. As national curriculum revisions are followed by a 5-year period of regime change, ironic situations frequently follow, such as the development of a new curriculum even before the previous one has been fully introduced in all schools or even withdraw it (So, 2020). For example, the Lee Myung-bak government (2008–2013) carried out an educational reform to change English education in Korea called NEAT (National English Ability Test). It provided for testing in speaking, listening, writing, and reading instead of evaluating merely on listening and reading comprehension, which is based on multiple choices. In 2008, the Ministry of Education unveiled a draft proposal to introduce a new English aptitude test to

replace the English portion of the national college entrance exam, starting in early 2015. However, the next Park Geun-Hye government (2013-2017) abolished the plan.

Many researchers have found that despite the government's numerous efforts to provide better education and lessen the burden for students and parents, the massive reform of the national curriculum in Korea has not significantly changed in actual school practice and demand for private tutoring (J. W. Kim, 2004; S. Kim, 2016; S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010; So, 2020; So & Kang, 2014). For example, research show that parents and students have lost the trust in public education and could not success the education reforms (K. S. Kim, 2005; S. Kim, 2016; S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010; So & Kang, 2014). Dawson (2010) claimed that the heavy dependency on private tutoring of students and parents also poses a serious challenge to the authority of the public school system to extend that students and parents view the pedagogical strategy and curriculum of private tutoring as more effective than those of the formal school system. So and Kang (2014) blamed heavy government control, which hinders teachers' professionalism from developing their own curriculum and allowing them to remain close to textbook guidelines. So (2020) asserted policymakers and stakeholders are not interested in taking responsibility for implementing the changes proposed in national curriculums, and teachers should be involved in education reform. So, Kim, and Lee (2012) assumed the curriculum reform process was not successful because of the conflicts and challenges in the formation of Korean identity. As Korean society is dominated by the Confucian traditions and values that form the root of the Korean identity together with strong ethnic identity, it challenges to accept the global values.

Even though researchers have a different opinion regarding the reasons, many of the researchers agreed that frequent changes in education policy confused the parents, students, and teachers and brought losing faith in public education (K. S. Kim, 2005; S. Kim & J. H. Lee, 2010; Yoo & Lee, 2014).

### **2.3 Korean Teachers' workload and lives**

There is not much international research-based research related to describe Korean teachers' workload and life in teachers' perception. Some research described a glance at teacher's working environment/situation, which could help to understand teacher's workload and lives in Korea. There are few studies conducted in Japan, Taiwan where shares similar cultural background (R. M. Cohen, 2017; Yorimitsu, Houghton, & Taylor, 2014). Both studies indicated that teachers were nostalgic because of losing teachers' authority. Historically, teachers' teaching role has been played as a 'life educator' and considered as a respectful profession, but the belief is faced in a challenge with the new teaching reality (Yorimitsu et al., 2014).

Many studies, based on the Western perspective, have stated that Confucianism has strongly influenced Korean society - values hierarchy, obedience, loyalty, and reverence for humanities education - has resulted in a culture of great respect for scholars and teachers (Bermeo, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Jonathan, 2017; Seth, 2002; Sorensen, 1994; UNESCO, 2015). Sorensen (1994) emphasized that as "the teacher's word is a law," it is rare that a student would question a teacher's authority, and teachers are also expected to use their authority to push students on. Darling-Hammond (2015) and Sami (2013) asserted that Korea's quality education system rests on national teaching policies that built strong teacher education programs and hired qualified teachers to teach. Also, OECD (2016, p. 30) highlighted that "Korea places a high value on the teacher candidate selection process and pre-service teacher training and has a national evaluation process, strengthened through recent reforms as noted above, all of which serve to ensure only the best and the brightest join the ranks of teachers."

As education has been regarded as a basic human right and considered as one of the most justifiable vehicles to climb the social ladder in Korea, the teaching profession is valued in society (KEDI, 2015). It is recognized in society that individuals with one of the most competitive academic records in the nation are served by the teacher education program. Besides, Korean teachers earn comparatively high salaries when compared to other OECD member countries (see figure 1).

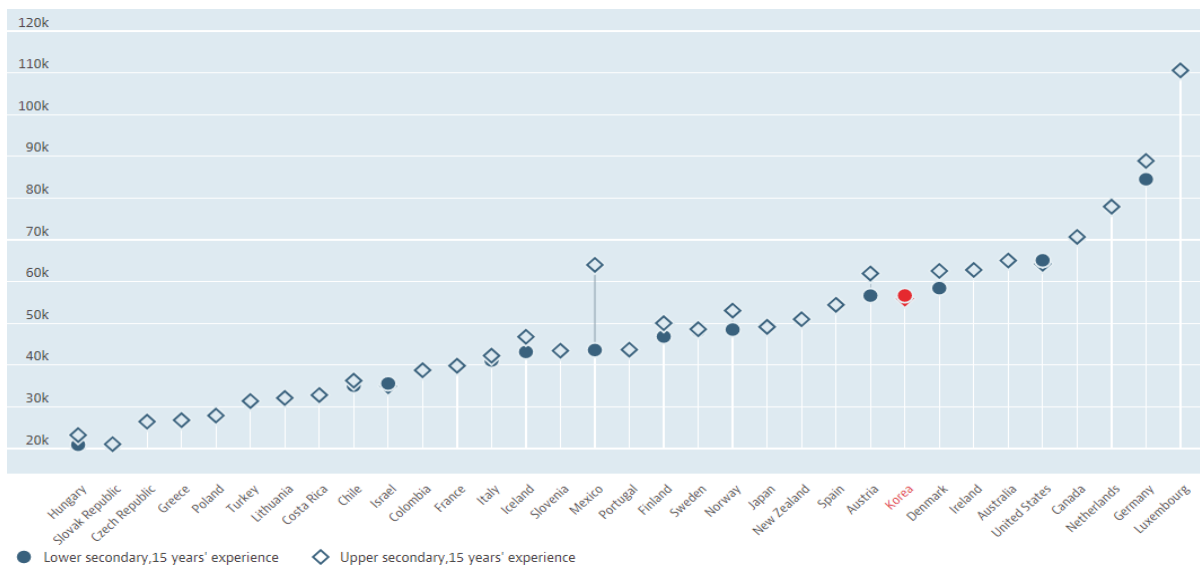


Figure 1 Teachers' Salaries: lower/high secondary 15 years' experience, US dollars, 2019  
 Source: OECD (2020), Teachers' salaries (indicator). doi: 10.1787/f689fb91-en (Accessed on 30 December 2020)

However, according to Seth (2002) and Yun (1997) teaching profession in Korea was not always considered as an attractive occupation in the past. Korean teachers' life was tough, driven by long hours and few vacations and abnormally big class size (Seth, 2002). According to his research, 38 percent of secondary teachers wanted to change jobs due to the low salaries in 1966. A study by the Korean Federation of Educators' Associations (KFEA) in the late 1960s cited in Seth (2002) showed middle and high school teachers worked 55.1 and 57 hours a week, respectively. In his research, he described teachers' poverty and misery were regularly published by the press, presenting stories of teachers' suffering from hunger because they could not feed both themselves and their families at that time, alongside with high teacher resignations because of mistreatment by both parents and an abusive government that was indifferent to teachers' needs yet teaching had remained a respected profession.

Year	Elementary		Middle		Academic High		Vocational High	
	Class size	Student-Teacher ratio	Class size	Student-Teacher ratio	Class size	Student-Teacher ratio	Class size	Student-Teacher ratio
1965	65.4	62.4	60.7	39.4	59.8	32.2	53.5	27.7
1980	51.5	47.5	65.5	45.1	59.9	33.9	59.6	32.6
1990	41.4	35.6	50.2	25.4	53.6	25.4	51.5	23.4
2000	35.8	28.7	38.0	20.1	44.1	20.9	40.3	18.2
2010	26.6	18.7	33.8	18.2	35.5	16.5	29.1	13.1

Table 1 Class size by education level and year  
 Sources: Sang Hoon Bae et al. (2011)

In the days of the military regime, teachers fought for democracy rights with students, and several teachers transferred to the countryside or even got arrested for criticizing the government (Seth, 2002). The dissident political teachers organized the Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union in 1989, protesting actively toward democracy and enhance their working conditions, then the government banned the union and menaced members with immediate dismissal (ibid).

Even after the military regime, teacher's union was still regarded as an instrument of state control even though it played an important role in improving teachers working conditions. Yet, teachers' working condition was still in rough condition as stated in Yun (1997) research; the teaching profession is in "bad working conditions like overpopulated classes, overloaded class hours, too many unnecessary chores, poor school facilities, and unreasonable personnel administration have a disheartening effect on the morale of teachers" (p.3). In July 1999, President Kim Dae Jung's government finally legalized the teacher union, which was now able to publicly act as a pressure group for a more responsive educational system to the needs of students, teachers, and parents (Seth, 2012).

In J. Lee et al. (2019) research, they presented Kim's research<sup>4</sup> conducted in 1995 and 2003 to compare and contrast secondary preservice teachers' motivations to choose teaching as a career. In 1995, 206 participants (185 females, 21 males) chose intrinsic motivation (46.3%) and job security (24.5%) as the two most significant factors for their decision making. In 2003, however, salary (32.5%) and job security (25%) rated highest while intrinsic motivation rated the lowest among 400 participants (360 females, 40 males). According to their research, as the economy collapsed in 1997, the socio-economic status of teachers moved up significantly due to the job security and stability, which attracted more teacher candidates with a high academic profile.

According to Kim (2004) and Park et al. (2016), both studies pointed out that the government was forced to enact the new policies even though there was a lack of administrative, financial support, and infrastructure to implement the new policies; that led to increase teachers' burden and workload. For example, J. W. Kim (2004) described that teachers had to become multifunctional in the schools with limited resources and be 'good technologists' in utilizing multimedia in teaching in order to enforce the demand of new education policy: Information Communication Technology (ICT) education in 2001. As a result, because of the frequent changes of education policies, teachers stick to their own teaching methods and wait for the government to be replaced, rather than responding to the reforms enthusiastically (So, 2020). Moreover, Many teachers perceived Korea's frequent reforms of the education policy as mere political plans implemented for government's own benefits (So, 2013)

## 2.4 Professionalism

The term 'professionalism' is changing and being changed throughout time and in different contexts. Ozga (1995) asserted professionalism has been transformed in conjunction with social, political, and economic contexts but particularly in the policy context.

Early attempts to define the characteristic features of professionalism were largely focused on the most visible distinguishing characteristics of traditional Anglo-American professions such as law and medicine of the 19th and 20th centuries (Helsby, 1995). By that time, professions were "organized bodies of experts who applied esoteric knowledge to particular cases" (Martimianakis, Maniate, & Hodges, 2009, p. 831). Along with admission through examination and other formal prerequisites, they had elaborate instruction and training programs. They usually have a code of ethics or conduct to follow it.

Later in the 1950s and 1960s, the definition of professionalism was expanded to include the roles performed in society by professionals because of the influence of 'structural-functionalist.' (Murray, 1992) presented five central requirements of professionalism in this time: "performance of a function

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<sup>4</sup> Kim, N. (1995). A study on the attitude of teaching college students. [in Korean]. Korean Teacher Education, 11, 133–154.

Kim, N. (2003). A study on the attitude of teaching college students. [in Korean]. Journal of School Guidance, 22(1), 103–116.

essential to society, specialized knowledge and skill requiring extended training, a strong affiliation to the occupation, authority and autonomy over the practice, and an orientation to public service” (p.3).

As Weber and Johnsen (2012) mentioned in their paper, the contemporary concept of professionalism has evolved and requires not only knowledge of and the skills to incorporate research-based practices, but also reflective thinking and the production of new knowledge and skills. Besides that, professionals are now required to cooperate with others and fill leadership positions in an increasingly dynamic and diverse society (ibid). Accordingly, OECD (2016) conceptualized teacher professionalism to examine the nature and extent of support for the teacher professionalism in a composite of three domains:

1) a knowledge base, which includes necessary knowledge for teaching (including pre-service and in-service training); 2) autonomy, which is defined as teachers’ decision making over aspects related to their work; and 3) peer networks, which provide opportunities for information exchange and support needed to maintain high standards of teaching. (p.21)

In terms of terminology that appeared related to professionalism: professionalism, professionalization, de-professionalization. Hoyle (1974) first introduced the term ‘*professionalism*’ and distinguished the term ‘*professionalism*.’ He referred ‘*professionalism*’ to status-related elements of teachers’ work, such as strategies practiced by members of an occupation in order to improve status, salary, and conditions. However, he referred to ‘*professionalism*’ as those knowledge, skills, and procedures used by teachers in their work. Hoyle (1980) believes ‘*professionalization*’ has two major dimensions: ‘the improvement of status’ and ‘the improvement of practice.’ The improvement of status dimensions that vary from society to society includes those efforts of “the organized profession to meet the criteria which characterize the ideal type of profession or, in the case of an established profession, to maintain or even improve its privileged position” (p.43). Another dimension, the improvement of practice, can be equated with ‘professional development as it involves the continuous improvement of the knowledge and skills of practitioners. Meanwhile, Hargreaves (2000) clarified the definition between professionalization and professionalism as with “*professionalism* (improving quality and standards of practice) and *professionalization* (improving status and standing) are often presented as complementary projects (improve standards, and you will improve status), but sometimes they are contradictory” (p. 152). It connoted that stronger *professionalization* does not always indicate greater *professionalism* in teaching. Thus, professionalism is sometimes distinguished from professionalism or professionalization, but at other times these terms are used interchangeably.

Haug (1972) defined de-professionalization as "a loss to professional occupations of their unique qualities, particularly their monopoly over knowledge, public belief in their service ethos, and expectations of work autonomy and authority over the client" (p. 197). The issues of de-professionalization in teaching have been addressed by several studies (e.g., De Saxe, Bucknovitz, and Mahoney-Mosedale (2020); Hoyle (1980); McDaniel (1979); Milner IV (2013); O'Hara (2018); Ozga (1995). Many of the studies discussed education reform lowered the professional status of teaching, which led to de-professionalization in teaching (De Saxe et al., 2020; Milner IV, 2013; Ozga, 1995). Milner IV (2013) pointed out negative messages regarding teachers' abilities often emerged from the media influence to raise negative perceptions toward teachers and, consequently, bring de-professionalization.

In Helsby (1995) research, when teachers were asked what it means to be professional, teachers’ responses were divided into two distinct categories: (1) being a professional, (2) behaving professionally. In his research, teachers referred to ‘*being professional*’ as the importance of training and to the knowledge and/or skills that would be demonstrated by a professional as well as to be able to demonstrate certain personal or interpersonal skills to instill customers (students, parents, and society in general) a feeling of trust in their special expertise. Meanwhile, ‘*behaving professionally*’ was referred to as creating and sustain appropriate relationships with students, parents, and colleagues; ability to meet

individual needs; the notion of competent practice in responding to various demands in a dynamic and multifaceted environment.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework**

The teaching profession has historically been characterized by role conflict, ambiguity, and a heavy load of work. Teacher professionalism is largely affected by the constant interaction between, on the one hand, their beliefs, attitudes, and emotions and, on the other hand, the social, cultural, and institutional environment where they function (van Den Berg, 2002). In order to describe Korean teachers' meanings of their profession and lives, I applied two theories: Symbolic interactionism and Education policy theory by Ball (1993).

### **3.1 Education Policy Theory**

According to Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2011), the policy is “complexly encoded in texts and artifacts, and it is decoded (and recoded) in equally complex ways. To talk of decoding and recoding suggests that policy ‘making’ is a process of understanding and translating” (p.3). In other words, the policy is formed in texts and artifacts with implicit knowledge and intentions and is interpreted differently represented by different policy actors in a different context. With this basis, Ball (1993) emphasizes the definition of policy by dual conceptualizing it as ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse.’

#### **3.1.1 Policy as Text**

Ball (1993) asserted the texts are not “necessarily clear or closed or complete” and are “product of compromises at various stages” (p.11). In other words, the policy as text reflects the conception of policy as a product of compromises between different agendas and interests, and there is no completed policy since policies are interpreted differently by different actors and interests. Texts have a history of interpretation and representation, and a ‘political sediment’ builds up around them. School actors such as teachers, who enact policy, are in the processes of ‘interpretation’ and ‘translation’ of policy texts (Ball, 2015). A researcher is therefore always dealing with a specific piece of policy that should be considered in relation to other policy texts and the history of policy responses (Ball, 1993). Thus, I tried to see how the history of culture and policies affect the changes of the policies’ intentions and purposes over time as well as how the policy texts have translated differently based on the policy actors’ interests.

#### **3.1.2 Policy as discourse**

Ball (1993) draws on Foucault’s famous description in his definition of policy as discourse “Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak [...] Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault 1977 p.49 cited in Ball (1993). He added to this definition that discourses are also about “who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (p.14). Thus, the meaning and use of propositions and words are embodied in discourses. Hence, certain possibilities for thought are constructed. (ibid). He recognized ‘policy as discourse’ is the formational component implied in the means of ‘policy as text’. Ball (1993) borrowed Foucault’s words that discourses are linked with ‘desire and power’ and are ‘irreducible to language and to speech’, and expanded it to the relationship between discourses and actors by saying:

“We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not know what we say, we are what we say and do” (p.14)

Accordingly, Ball (2015) summarized *policy as discourse* as “the ways in teacher subjects and subject positions are formed and re-formed by policy and are invited (summoned) to speak, listen, act, read, work, think, feel, behave and value in particular and specific ways” (p. 307). Thus, the discourse reflects the cultural and political positions of that time, place and space, and is an output of the reflection.

In my study, there are common discourses that teachers articulated throughout the interview—a new culture of schooling, teacher’s professionalism, and de-professionalism— and those are intertwined in a complex process of changes in patterns of values in society and policies.

Ball et al. (2011) also advocated that the central concepts to understand the educational policies in a discursive perspective are enactment, interpretation, translation, and contexts. They asserted the policies are not only ideational or ideological, but they are also rather material. Policies rarely force you to what to, they rarely dictate or determine practice, but they might narrow the range of creative responses from the actors (Ball 2015). Every policy has different trajectories and life spans, as well as the teachers, defined as ‘actors and subjects; subject to and objects of policy.’ As the policy is done by and done to teachers who have all different experiences, beliefs, and values, interpretation varies from policy to policy and from person to person (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015). Thus, the policy is not implemented at once; it is always a cycle of ‘becoming,’ which can be reviewed and revised or discarded with or even merely forgotten (Ball 2015).

Therefore, with the basis of this theory, I strive to discover how certain policies are enacted similarly or differently depending on the conditions (material, interpretive, and discourse) and those policies affect teachers’ workload and lives.

### **3.2 Symbolic interactionism (SI)**

Ball (1994) conceptualized policy theory by considering both macro-level analysis (history, economics, culture, and education system) and micro-level investigation (agency’s interpretation). Similarly, Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a theoretical approach to understanding the relationship between human beings and society. SI sees that the individual and society are interdependent and inseparable, and both are formed through shared meanings (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). As SI focuses on the interpretation of subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their world from their unique perspective, this theory help to understand how Korean teachers perceive their professionalism and meanings in Korean society.

The most important theorist of SI is George Herber Mead, who greatly influenced to develop the foundation of SI, incorporated the idea of Dewey’s pragmatism and evolution that individuals, as selves, decide their world and point to the conception of gestures by Wilhelm Wundt as the mechanisms that enable social interaction to emerge from mind, self, and society (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Later, Blumer was the first to use the term for symbolic interaction, so he is also named as the founder of symbolic interaction (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın, & Demirbuken, 2009). According to Schenk and Holman (1980 cited Akasan, Kısac, Aydın & Demirbuken, 2009, p. 902), symbolic interaction is a dynamic theory because objects have meanings within themselves according to this theory and individuals formulate their actions in the direction of their evaluation of themselves and also of individuals and objects around them.

Thus, according to Carter and Fuller (2016), theory and research regarding SI have expanded over three major areas of focus, following the work of Herbert Blumer (the Chicago School), Manford Kuhn (the Iowa School), and Sheldon Stryker (the Indiana School). Blumer emphasized that in order to study human behavior, qualitative methods are the only way to understand the nature of the behavior; however, Kuhn and Stryker believed that SI’s ideas could and should be evaluated by using quantitative methods

(Carter & Fuller, 2016). Although methodologically at odds with Blumer, Kuhn and Stryker share most of the same theoretical orientation as Blumer, followed by Mead.

Blumer (1969) described the foundation SI in three simple premises.

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Based on these three simple premises of SI, I will introduce few concepts of this theory that I have applied in this study.

### **3.2.1 Self and Society**

SI, influenced by Mead, describes human beings as an acting organism that not only responds on a non-symbolic level to others but also as one that indicates and interprets their actions to others (Blumer, 1969). Blumer (1969) emphasized that Mead (1934) interpreted the self as a 'process' and not a structure. The self, according to Mead (1934), consists of two parts: 'I' and 'me.' These words apply to the psychology of an individual, where the 'me' is the person's socialized aspect. The 'me' is likely to meet social expectations because the 'me' reflects what people learn through interaction with others and requires knowledge about the environment (i.e., society). It also contains a person's sense of self. By observing the reactions of others, individuals learn who they are (man/woman, young/old). The 'I' is the individual's active aspect, engaging creatively (although still in the sense of 'me'), and is more likely to attempt to modify social norms. The two were described by Blumer as the personal 'I' (how one sees oneself) and a social 'me' (how one imagines that one is seen by others) (Pork, 2017). Based on this perspective, I try to see teachers' 'me' and 'I'. How teachers' 'me' perceive their profession through the interaction with society and others, and how their 'I' respond differently. For instance, what is it like to be a teacher in Korea? How teachers react differently toward the criticism from the media or possibly from the education policy.

Moreover, SI sees society derives from interaction and forms self, but self forms interaction, playing back on society (Blumer, 1969). As humans inevitably face new challenges, culture is continually developed and recreated. Therefore, change, like emergence, is a constant in the social process: the occurrence of new, unexpected experiences that demand creative adaptation. In other words, through the social process, self and society are constructed; each is constitutive of the other, and neither has an ontological priority (ibid). Considering the dynamic changes in Korean society in the past few decades, I would like to see how it has affected teachers' working environment and how teachers' work affected to the society in this study, as well as the issues contemporary teachers are facing and dealing with it.

Additionally, the concept of SI will enhance the understanding of the importance of individuals' different voices and how teachers' professionalism and perception toward the profession have changed over time. In the view of the fact that teachers' professionalism can be interpreted differently from teachers to teachers depending on the result of an interaction between their personal experiences and the social, cultural, and institutional environment where they work/interact on a daily basis.

Therefore, combining with Ball's education policy theory and SI helps this study highlight how relations between teachers and society, and between teachers themselves, both affect and are affected by the education policy, and how teachers make sense of their world from their unique perspective. In other words, these theories offer the opportunity to study the ways in which teachers collectively or individually make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative approach in order to uncover lower secondary teachers' workload and lives in Korea. The research data was gathered by a semi-structured individual interview from four in-service teachers based on narrative inquiry with constructivism worldview and the literature reviews. My understanding is that qualitative methods enable us to have a better understanding of the mindsets, beliefs, and expectations of teachers as well as the contents and contexts of the work of teachers. Here discourse analysis is briefly discussed and followed by methods of data collection, data analysis, ethical issues, and considerations of researcher position.

### 4.1 Discourse Analysis

Based on the desire to uncover Korean teachers' work experience, articulate what they do and how they feel about their profession, I found discourse analysis was the appropriate method relied on for this research. Discourse Analysis is an approach to language analysis that looks at language patterns through texts as well as the social and cultural contexts where the texts occur (Paltridge, 2012). The term 'discourse' is used to refer to all forms of talk and texts, whether it be naturally occurring conversations, interview material, or written texts of any kind (Gill, 2000).

Teachers' voice to be heard is important since "it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings, that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes" (Butt, Raymond, Mccue, & Yamagishi, 1992, p. 57). They also added that the notion of the teacher's voice addresses the right to speak and to be represented in a political context, which can "represent both the unique individual and the collective voice; one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups" (ibid).

Gill (2000) advised discourse analysis has four main themes: "a concern with discourse itself; a view of language as constructive and constructed; an emphasis upon discourse as a form of action; and a conviction in the rhetorical organization of discourse" Themes are summarized as:

1. Discourse is a topic: Discourse analysis is a focus of enquiry itself rather than a means of 'getting at' some reality that lie behind it.
2. Language is constructive: Discourse is a means of creating a particular view of social reality. In addition, choices are made in rendering the view on the most suitable way to present it, and these will reflect the disposition of the individual who is responsible for devising it.
3. Action orientation: Discourse analysts see all discourse as social practice and language is not viewed as a mere epiphenomenon, but as a practice in its own right. People use discourse to 'do' things in order to accomplish the acts and the discourse is influenced by the context in which he or she is confronting.
4. Treats talk and texts as organized rhetorically: Discourse analysis sees social life as being characterized by conflicts of various kind. It emphasizes that all discourse is organized to make itself persuasive as discourses is concerned with 'establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions.'

Moreover, this study places discourse analysis within the framework of SI, which sees human society as a diversified social process in which individuals are active in the creation of collective behavior to deal with circumstances that confront them. Together with discourse analysis, it will give insights into how different versions of goings-on can be construed in different texts and teachers' discourses. As Korean teachers' lives and their professionalism have been situated in a dynamic society with frequent policy changes, discourse analysis would be an appropriate method to find out how they perceive themselves in the society.

## **4.2 Method of Data collection**

In the study the source of data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, research diary, and policy context were used as sources of data collection this research.

### **1.2.1 Semi-structured interview**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the means of data collection in order to find out Korean teachers' workload and lives, especially how they conceive themselves as being a teacher in Korea because the semi-structured interview is well-suited for examining respondents' perceptions and opinions on complex and often sensitive topics and allowing more information and clarity of responses to be examined. As Seidman (1991) stated, telling stories is a 'meaning-making process'. When people tell stories, they choose details of experience from their flow of consciousness and their consciousness allows access to the most complicated social, and educational issues, since "social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people" (ibid, p.1). In-depth interviewing provides access to the context of the behavior of people and further provides researchers with a way of interpreting the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 1991).

Questions did not follow exactly in the way outlined on the schedule like a structured interview. As semi-structured interviews are non-standardized, questions that were not included in the guide was asked as the interviewer picked up on things said by interviewees in order to generate free-ranging conversations about research topics that were directed by what participants had to say (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). However, by and large, all questions were asked, and a similar wording was used from interviewee to interviewee.

### **1.2.2 Research diary/Reflection**

Because of the fragile nature of human memory, research diary/notes have been a helpful method to reflect on the moment (Bryman, 2016). Gibbs (2007) also pointed out that keeping a research diary will enable you to reflect on your work and make you aware of how your own position and interests, and prejudices have influenced your analysis. Indeed, I personally have been keeping my diary even before the research to keep the memory, reflect on the day, my feelings, and thoughts.

However, take the advice from Engin (2011), I applied research diary not merely acts as a reflective journal or a repository of reflection to increase validity or credibility, but also as a written account of my journey throughout the study, which gives an insight into my experiences of following through the research and coding, analysis and interpretations. I read and re-read several times together with the transcription to find the common themes and analyze the data. Here are extracts from my research diary:

2020-03-12 Post conversation reflection after the first phone call with Robert

Today was the first time I have ever interviewed someone through the phonecall. I think it was the first time for both Robert and me, so both of us were a bit nervous. It was 19.00 in Korean time, so he sounded a bit tired. Even though the school was not opened due to the COVID-19, he still had many things to take care of, such as contacting his future pupils and sending messages regarding new guidelines from the government, and documentations. He showed helpless feelings many times, and I was also quite shocked that the school setting had changed a lot compared to when I was a student. When he said, "Swearing to teachers is not a big deal these days," I just could not get the words out properly. When I went to practicum in 2013, the school setting was not very different from the time when I was a student in the sense of showing respect to the teachers. I have never heard students using bad words directly to

teachers. Maybe because of the school location since I did my practicum in a conservative and rural area. I would like to find teachers from different areas, but it is not easy. I wonder whether SHRO affects students' behaviors toward teachers or not.

2020-04-10 Post conversation reflection after the first phone call with Lisa

Because of the bad Internet connection, the conversation did not go smoothly. It was a really irritating moment since she was talking about something serious and sensitive event that she was hesitating to talk about. Thankfully, Lisa called me with her expenses from Korea. After that, the interview went well without disconnection. However, I felt like I lost the moment to open her heart truly to me. Lisa sounded very stressed with the online class and current school setting. She said the workload was actually reduced compared to the normal school days, but she felt more pressure inside. She was getting very stressed from the students' behaviors, and she actually took mental sick leave for two months. I think the reality of being a teacher was contradictory to her ideal of being a teacher. She expressed the great regret of choosing to be a teacher. Her story was a bit here and there, so it was quite hard to understand her. What I understood from the conversation as she did not seem to tolerate students' rude behaviors toward teachers. Yet, she seemed it was acceptable to be an authoritative teacher. She talked about the story that one teacher told a student to "get lost/go away" since the student did not go back to her/his seat, and the student sued the teacher for bad language use to the student. I thought it was quite extreme that the student sued the teacher, but the teacher should not have said extreme language to the student in the first place. However, Lisa thought it is okay to do such a thing, and she talked about the past when she was a student when students and parents respected teachers and did not question teachers' words. She also believed the reason for the falling of teachers' authority is caused by private tutoring took over the teaching position. As both students and parents believed private tutors are better teachers than school teachers, they do not respect teachers, so it is more reasonable to take responsibility for the students' academic score on private tutoring/cram schools than the teachers in the school. I thought this way of thinking/belief would not be possible in other countries, at least not among Western countries where private tutoring/cram school is not common as in Korea.

### **4.2.3 Policy contexts on education in Korea**

In Korea, the educational administration system is two-layered. The central government, consisting of the President, the Prime Minister, the National Education Council <sup>5</sup>, and the Ministry of Education, is planning and implementing national education policies, while local governments are empowered to decide on educational policies that are relevant to local communities.

The Ministry of Education provides guidelines for the current administration's education policies, including university affairs and academic research, vocational education, higher education, innovation in schools, national curricula, education welfare, support for students, lifelong learning and future education, information on education safety and education statistics.

Given the fact that the Ministry of Education has delegated much of its decision-making authority regarding budget planning and administrative decisions to local offices of education, policy rules are enacted differently under the direction of superintendents who are elected in a general election in order to meet the diverse local educational demands and needs.

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<sup>5</sup> This is an advisory organization that deals with education policies, directly reporting to the President.

## 4.3 Research Process

The semi-structured interviews for the data collection were conducted with three sessions in 2020. In the first session, the participants got interview questionnaires including themes concerning personal information and a table with job requirements based on OECD (see appendix 2). This survey also included open-ended questions that the participants were able to describe daily lives and participants' wishes in order to improve the teaching environment.

The second and third sessions were conducted thirty minutes of the phone called interviews individually, and some interview questions were varied depending on participant's answers from the previous session. However, I asked questions related to research questions such as "What do you think of being a teacher in Korea?", "Would you choose to be a teacher if you can have a second chance?". Participants were free to respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and I probed these responses. The use of telephone interviews has long been recognized as an effective data collection tool and is a common survey research practice (L. Cohen et al., 2007).

As the study was conducted from abroad and participants did not want to have a video call, an online telephone interview was the only option that I could use for this study. Accordingly, this way of data collection has a risk of credibility, as it is difficult to identify the participant's identification from abroad and online. Therefore, I asked for their teaching certification with their first six digits of the social number (birth-date) to check whether the information matches the certification or not.

### 1.2.3 Sampling

Based on purposive sampling, I targeted teachers who work in lower-secondary schools because the reason to get interested in this topic was due to the OECD reports, which I have stated in the problem statement. I started this study based on pure curiosity about what Korean lower-secondary school teachers actually do since they have comparably fewer teaching hours than other OECD countries. First, I posted on the Internet blog in which teachers can join that I want to study regarding teachers' work and lives. Later, I asked my acquaintances who work in the schools. I tried to gather teachers who have more than three years of experience and from different areas. However, as I stated in the limitation, skeptical perspectives toward the research prevailed, and the limitation of using technical devices restricted the choice of samplings.

### 1.2.4 Participants

The key participants interviewed for the study are summed up to four. Three of the participants are from the Metropolitan area. Robert and Amber are from the same Metropolitan area, so they share the same Metropolitan Offices of Education and, applied the same education policy rules. Lisa is from another Metropolitan area, so the rules are slightly different but share mostly similar policies. Tom is from a rural area, where governed by the Provincial Offices of Education, and the policy rules are different from the other Metropolitan area. For instance, there is no Free semester<sup>6</sup>, Students' Human Rights Ordinance (SHRO) and Equalization policies in Tom's area.

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<sup>6</sup> The Free Semester System aims to enhance the happiness and well-being of students by shifting the focus in the Korean education system from knowledge accumulation and competition onto self-directed learning and future-oriented capability development. During their middle school years, students can choose to spend one

Name	Gender	Age	Subject	Teaching experience (years)	Location	Class size	Teaching hours (week)
Tom	M	Late 50s	Korean	34	Rural area	25	24
Robert	M	Early 30s	Korean	4	Metropolitan	24	17
Amber	F	Early 30s	Information and computer	7	Metropolitan	30	18
Lisa	F	Early 30s	English	8	Metropolitan	20-22	18

Table 2 Participant information

#### 4.4 Thematic Data analysis

Thematic analysis, which is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis, is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). According to Bryman (2016, p. 584), a theme is:

- a category identified by the analyst through his/her data;
- that relates to his/her research focus (and quite possibly the research questions);
- that builds on codes identified in transcripts and/or field notes;
- and that provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus.

As thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences, it is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The steps of thematic data analysis are adapted from suggested by Bryman (2016). First, read through at least a sample of the materials, such as transcripts, documents, research diary, to be analyzed. Secondly, I started initial coding in order to develop the data. For instance, during the initial coding process, instances that depicted workload all grouped together. Later, elaborate many of the codes into themes in order to reduce the number of codes and to search for common elements in codes. For example, the discourses were first divided into professionalism and de-professionalism (See the table 3 and 4). Then, evaluate the higher-order and label the codes to the themes and their subthemes in order to capture the data—for instance, professionalism regarding the theme of restless teachers or political impact. Next, I tried to refer to the literature that related to the focus of study regarding the theme. Lastly, I ensured the themes are related to the research literature and my research questions through reading transcripts, documents, literature reviews.

Table 3: Example of coding process

Findings	Theme
In middle school, teachers have little time to rest. [...] the administrative chore is to be carried out in a large amount and have to take care of my classroom students such as discipline. <b>(Robert)</b>	Professionalism

semester on exploring their dreams and aptitudes and planning their future through activities encouraging self-reflection and all-round development (KEDI, 2015, p. 45).

When you are a homeroom teacher, it is difficult to take break because students are keep coming to the teachers' room. For example, asking for sick leave, feel longing for teacher, asking questions and etc... so teachers' room is full packed with students during the break time. <b>(Amber)</b>	
Nowadays, students treat teacher like nobody... no respect... If I knew this, I would have worked differently than a teacher. I wouldn't be a teacher. <b>(Lisa)</b> because of Students' Human Rights Ordinance <sup>7</sup> . It is even more difficult than teaching in the class. Teachers cannot do anything even though students are talking, sleeping, interrupting the class and even being rude to a teacher, teachers cannot do anything... <b>(Robert)</b>	De-professionalism

Table 4 : Example of categorization of broad themes into specific analytical themes

Findings	Specific theme	Explanation	Related literature
In middle school, teachers have little time to rest. [...] the administrative chore is to be carried out in a large amount and have to take care of my classroom students such as discipline. <b>(Robert)</b> When you are a homeroom teacher, it is difficult to take break because students are keep coming to the teachers' room. For example, asking for sick leave, feel longing for teacher, asking questions and etc... so teachers' room is full packed with students during the break time. <b>(Amber)</b>	Professionalism -Restless teachers	Instances which show how busy they are with workload and take care of students in daily life.	OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2014b) showed South Korean teachers answered the highest among OECD countries that they are regretting their decision to become a teacher.
Nowadays, students treat teacher like nobody... no respect... If I knew this, I	De-professionalism	Reports that depicted the fall of teachers' authority and respect	"Particularly, the problems of continued decline of teachers'

<sup>7</sup> Students' Human Rights Ordinance (Korean: 학생인권조례) is an ordinance in operation in some cities and provinces in South Korea. It first began in Gyeonggi-do Province (2010) and expanded to Gwangju (2011), Seoul (2012), and the Jeollabuk-do Province (2013) (North Jeolla Province). The primary objective of the ordinance is to extend human rights protection for students and youth in Korea.

would have worked differently than a teacher. I wouldn't be a teacher. <b>(Lisa)</b> because of Students' Human Rights Ordinance. It is even more difficult than teaching in the class. Teachers cannot do anything even though students are talking, sleeping, interrupting the class and even being rude to a teacher, teachers cannot do anything... <b>(Robert)</b>	-The fall of teachers' authority  -Political impact	and even showed the regret of becoming a teacher.	rights and image since the mid1990s, combined with many facets of educational problems accumulated over a long time, has expanded to a massive social problem called the crisis of public education.” (E. Kim & Han, 2002)
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#### 4.4.1 Transcribing the interview

The interview with participants was held in Korean. Therefore, there was the need to translate all the information gathered from Korean to English. It was a great advantage that I am fluent in English and familiar with the cultural background in Korea, which enabled me to familiarize myself with the data and be in a better position to understand and explain what participants said. Bryman (2016, p. 485) asserted that “when transcribing an interview, it is important that the written text reproduces what exactly the interviewee said, word for word” However, as I am not a professional translator, some words from Korean to English were not translated word for word because it might twist the meaning of the essence of what participants were describing. Instead, the focus was on conveying the message and explaining the phenomenon based on the contextual meaning of what participants said.

Transcribing interviews indeed can be time-consuming; therefore, taking Brinkmann (2013) advice, only data relevant for the study were transcribed. However, in order to encourage myself to make a fair judgment on participants' mood pauses and the general atmosphere of the interviews, laughter and emotional situations were noted through their intonation changes, high pitched voice and etc. These were done throughout the transcription stage, and they aided me to easily identify the themes, associating the themes to respondents during the coding process. Later, the transcribed document was reviewed repeatedly with the audio records to justify its accuracy, and the research diary was read several times to facilitate coding.

#### 4.5 Research reliability and validity

In qualitative research, validity does not hold the same connotations as in quantitative research, nor is it a companion to reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the present study, I followed Creswell & Creswell's advice to prove that the study's validity and reliability. I used triangulation, a rich thick description to convey the findings and clarify the bias that I bring to the study through my research diary to increase the validity. To enhance reliability in this study, I checked transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription confirmed that there was not a drift in the definition of codes.

#### 4.6 Ethical issues

According to Vetenskapsrådet (2017), ethical issues in research should concern not only research ethics, which is limited to the simple consideration of ethical issues that relate to those involved in the research, but also professional ethics, which is the researcher's responsibility toward research, such as researcher's behavior in various roles, research misconduct, and publication. Similarly, Sikes (2006)

asserted that ethics influence all stages from the choice of research, methodology, method, and writing style. Thus, ethical decisions regarding research should be taken on a case-by-case basis, including reflecting on the researcher's personal position at that particular time, beliefs, and values (ibid).

The first ethical issue that I have concerned about was informed consent. The principle of informed consent concerns autonomy and derives from the right of a participant to freedom and self-determination (L. Cohen et al., 2007). As Frankfort-Nachmias (1996) asserted, the right of self-determination enables the participants to have the right to refuse to take part or withdraw once the research has begun; all participants were informed of their rights to withdraw anytime they want to.

Another ethical issue that I have considered was voluntary participation. In the process of the research, participants were required to reveal their personal information about themselves, such as their personal contact profile, which could be intimidating to participants to be revealed to the stranger. Interviewees in this study voluntarily decided to participate in the research without any form of force from me. In fact, I showed gratitude for participating in the study by giving \$18 worth of gift since it would be impolite not to show any gratitude to the participants who were willingly shared their precious time in Korean culture. Participants signed the consent forms as evidence of their willingness to participate in the study, thus validating that they understood what the research was about and what the results would be used for.

Lastly, protecting the identity of participants is central in social research (Bryman, 2016), therefore throughout this study, every consideration has been taken to ensure that the data given in the work cannot be traced back to the participants, either by publications, presentations, or some other means of distribution, in an attempt to manage confidentiality (Bryman, 2016; L. Cohen et al., 2007). In order to achieve this, the thesis applies the use of pseudonyms.

#### **4.7 The researcher's position**

It is inevitable that every research process is influenced by the researcher (Bryman, 2016; L. Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, my teaching/learning background in Korea, and my academic interest in the education system in Korea influenced the choice of the research topic as well as the interpretation of data. Based on social constructivist's worldview, I recognize that my own background shaped the interpretation and 'position myself' in the research to acknowledge how my interpretation flows from my own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. However, I tried to stay away from my personal experiences as a teacher and skewed to teachers' position, and to position myself as a researcher who tries to learn more about the Korean teachers' working lives.

As researcher-participant relationships underpin the quality and quantity of the data, Hogan (1988) addressed several significant issues regarding the research relationship: the equality between participants, the caring situation, and the feelings of connectedness. He described, "Empowering relationships develop over time, and it takes time for participants to recognize the value that the relationship holds. Empowering relationships involve feelings of 'connectedness' that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention" (p. 12). Therefore, I tried to build a good relationship and trusts between the participants and myself through a number of mechanisms suggested by (Horn, Edwards, & Terry, 2011), including sharing my personal contact information to show accountability shared interests and experiences, such as my teaching experiences in both Korea and Sweden, in order to ensure that I am not a scammer who tries to exploit their personal information.

## Chapter 5 Findings

The findings of this study are divided mainly into two parts: “Professionalism” and “De-professionalism” Each part is organized into multiple themes that have been developed from the empirical work and analysis. The interviews are presented by pseudonyms and with the question asked in italics.

### 5.1 Professionalism

In this study, Korean teachers’ professional lives are described as busy. It includes dealing with matters of class/students/parents and taking teacher professional development, and to be responsible for their class, which makes it hard for teachers to take a sick leave. Even though OECD (2014a) reported job requirements are at the discretion of individual schools in Korea, all participants expressed a consensus about their presence in their job, which can be explained as a cultural tacit agreement of teachers’ job. Several also talked about the pandemic and how that affect their job. For example, some highlighted a lack of support and infrastructure to deal with the pandemic, yet teachers showed their belief and confidence to overcome the crisis.

#### 5.1.1 Restless teachers

Here, I described teachers’ hectic lives in the different time periods over a day (during school, after school, during the vacation). According to the teachers in the study, it is not easy to rest or prepare for the class during school hours, although the hours for teaching is relatively less than in other OECD countries. During the school day, Robert and Amber describe how they even missed out on a proper lunch break/recess since they were constantly engaging with students or working on documentation.

[Excerpt from Robert’s first interview]

In middle school, teachers have little time to rest. The number of hours of teaching per week is high (17 hours a week), the administrative chore is to be carried out in a large amount, and I have to take care of my classroom students, such as discipline. It is difficult to take a rest during recess because students often come to the teachers’ staff room, and even if they do not come, it is necessary to look around to ensure that students do not act dangerously. Also, teachers take a turn to instruct students during lunchtimes, such as getting in a line properly, prevent cutting the line and etc. After that, I usually patrol around the school or conduct counseling with few students whom I need to talk separately.

[Excerpt from Amber’s first interview]

When you are a homeroom teacher<sup>8</sup>, it is difficult to take a break because students are keep coming to the teachers’ room. For example, asking for sick leave, feel a longing for a teacher, asking questions and etc.... so teachers’ room is fully packed with students during the break time. Of course, it can be varied from the school atmosphere and which teacher would be in the teachers’

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<sup>8</sup> Korean secondary schools adapt the homeroom teacher system. Homeroom teachers, with a specialty in any subject, supervise his/her students for one academic year. Students remain in the same class, but teachers with specialized subjects come to the class for 40-50 minutes of lectures. At the beginning and end of each school day, homeroom teachers have regular interactions with their students, monitoring the students’ behaviors and academic performance.

room. Teachers usually go to the toilet when they do not have class. If it is really urgent, then teachers will go to the toilet during the break time.

During lunchtime, there are many students who visit teachers' rooms as well, but lunch break is longer (approximately 45mins-1hour), so I can work on documentation or other kinds of stuff. Especially when I don't have a class in the fourth lesson period (11:45-12:30), then I have enough time to deal with students visiting me and continue to work. However, if I have a class in the fourth lesson period, I have only 20-30 minutes, then I don't have enough time to do other things than dealing with students.

Lisa and Tom also describe that they lack time for a break, but they tried to alleviate their stress and spend time focusing only on themselves during lunchtime.

[Excerpt from Lisa's first interview]

Students come to hand in the assignment or come to talk to me, so I cannot take a rest during recess. Instead, I take a rest during lunchtime (1 hour). I eat lunch with other teachers, and I exercise for 10 minutes.

[Excerpt from Tom's first interview]

I have 24 hours of teaching class during the week. I do have 45 minutes of non-teaching time a day, but it is not enough time to rest since I have to deal with administrative chores, prepare for the class, and have to check some errands such as a teaching director. However, I tried to alleviate my stress and take care of my health during lunchtime.

The above quotes concern time and space for rest during school hours. It is recognized that time is seen as scarce which can cause stress. The coming dialogues are discussed regarding taking sick leave and vacation during the school semester was addressed in the interviews. From the interview with teachers, I recognized it is not easy for teachers to take few days off for sickness during the school period unless it is for a long-term leave. As teachers must cover the class they have missed, teachers seemed taking a few days off means causing more troubles.

Robert, Amber, and Tom describe below how they did not take sick leave unless they were in a critical condition and Robert and Amber have never taken sick leave during the school period. Unlike other teachers, Lisa took a mental sick leave for two months.

[Dialogue with Robert 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

Well.. I have never taken it. It is really hard to go for sick leave during the school semester unless you are really, really sick.... We need to teach, and if I cannot cover the class, then another teacher has to cover my lesson. Then, it will be bothersome to another teacher because his or her workload will increase because of me. So.... if you don't feel like you will die, you do all the classes that you have to do for that day then leave.

*Then, what happens if you couldn't cover the class because of sickness?*

There are two ways to cover the class. One is that I would do all the classes that I missed after I came back to the work. Another way is that other teachers cover the class while I was sick, then I don't have to do extra work to cover my classes. However, you need to show some appreciation to the teacher, who was on my behalf, like give some presents.

[Dialogue with Amber from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

I have never used sick leave, but I used early leaves... I went to the hospital early in the morning then went to school later. But... I have never rested the whole day. You can only use annual leave

or sick leave when you changed the teaching schedule to other days so that you would not miss teaching classes.

*How many days do you usually have for annual leave?*

It depends according to the number of consecutive years of service of being a teacher. New teachers get eleven days for annual leave... But the funny thing is that we cannot use them at any time. As we have to teach every day, we can only use annual leaves when we give a birth or really, really sick. It's crazy! Teachers cannot use the annual leave days freely. That's why teachers use annual leaves during the vacation. Teachers are supposed to work at home during the school vacation, but that is the only time we can use annual leave.

[Dialogue with Tom from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

Well... I have used few times... I think... when... my son went to military service or when I had an appendectomy. I don't use sick leave such as for flu or cold... I will just do all my classes and leave early.

[Dialogue with Lisa from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

I have never used annual leaves, but I have used sick leaves...

*How many times did you use sick leaves?*

Well... last year... I was having a hard time because of one student.... I got a lot of stress, and I felt sick, so I asked for sick leaves.

*How long did you take a rest?*

I was out for two months. After I became a teacher... well.... I became a teacher because I wanted to be a teacher like my school days.... However, when I actually became a teacher and worked in the school, it was not the same school as it used to be anymore.... Then, I got a lot of stress, and I had to see a psychiatrist.

*(More conversation will be presented in de-professionalism part)*

The above dialogue with Lisa implies feeling nostalgia for her school days and the cause of sick leave was derived from the different school settings compare to the past and the present. In other words, Lisa's 'me' of the meaning of being a teacher was contradicted to the reality of being a teacher, and then her 'I' faced emotional distress and had to see a shrink to restructure her 'me' so that she could continue her profession.

The teachers also stated that their work is an ongoing process after school, such as dealing with parents or students or preparing for the class. Robert did not seem bothered by getting in contact after working hours since he said he did not have a plan to have another phone number to protect teachers' privacy. Lisa sounded happy that her previous pupils kept contacting her and asked her for advice even though it was not her obligatory thing to do. She showed Confucianism value that 'Once a teacher, forever a teacher' indicates that both teacher and student should respect each other to keep the teacher-pupil relationship.

[Dialogue with Robert from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*What do you do after the school?*

I prepare for the class that I couldn't do during the working hours... Also... I think parents and students think it is ok to .... Umm.. contact to teachers. It's not a really urgent thing, but they sometimes text or call very late at night, like 22:00.

*What do they ask for?*

Umm... Nothing really important. Usually, students ask questions about the study thing, especially just before the exam period. Haha.

[Dialogue with Lisa from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*How do you do the students' counseling?*

I am not a homeroom teacher, so I don't do students' counseling officially, but I do get some phone calls or send text messages from the students... whom I have met before. Privately... I believe 'Once a teacher, forever a teacher'... For example, I met a student when she was a first-grader and became a high school student now, and we still talk when she wants to talk about university admission to get some tips from me. Even though I work in a different school, there are some students who keep contacting me, then I just listen to them and give some advice.

[Dialogue with Amber from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*When do you prepare the class?*

If it is the same subject/contents that I taught before then, I just revise a little bit at the school. If it is the new contents, I do not have time during the working hours. Then, I work at home after work or during the weekends.

The coming discussion is regarding how teachers spent their time during the school vacation period. Robert implies he could not rest because of the teachers' professional development program. Given that he did not mention any positive effect of the program, I categorized his discourse as in the 'Restless teacher' theme than 'Professional Development' theme. However, other teachers seemed they could rest more during the school vacation period.

[Excerpt from Robert's first interview]

I teach afterschool classes or taking teachers' training courses during the vacation. Teachers have training hours that are mandatory to take per year. It is not easy to fill the mandatory training hours during the semester, so I use school vacation to fill the mandatory training hours. Teachers, who do not do those kinds of things as I do, will just take a rest during the school vacation. I had 30 days of winter school vacation last year, and I actually rested only seven days.

Amber and Lisa mentioned the Education Officials Act 41, which is a 'Non-commission Oversea Trip' that I have stated in the 'Problem Statement.' Under the law, teachers could travel abroad with teachers' own expenses during the school vacation, ground for learning something helpful for the class instead of going to school to work. Lisa indicates that she got some inspirations to utilize in her class during the travel.

[Excerpt from Amber's first interview]

Usually, I travel during school vacations. Because I do not go to the school with the title of Education Officials Act 41, I go abroad as 'Non-commission Oversea Trip.' After the travel, I prepare for the class, and if I have another task or report to do, then I do those things. And the summer school vacation takes three weeks. If there isn't spring vacation, winter vacation will last six weeks. Otherwise, winter vacation is normally four weeks, and spring vacation is two weeks. I work at home during the school vacation period, so it doesn't mean that I take holidays like 4-6 weeks. There is a discretionary school holiday about two days in a year as a real holiday except for weekends.

[Excerpt from Lisa's first interview]

I come to the school one day for the duty of the day during the school vacation, then I do some documentation and answer the school phone that day.

[Discourse with Lisa from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*What do you think about the petition to abolish the Education Officials Act 41?*

Umm... I think teachers actually need it. School vacation is the only time we can take proper rest. Recharge our energy so that we can work hard again. I also sometimes travel abroad, and sometimes I get some ideas to use in the class during the travel.

Tom illustrates how he spent time during the school vacation. He seems to take all his annual vacation leaves during the winter vacation. It might be caused as a new school term starts in March in Korea, and most of the school events are finished before the Winter vacation. Thus, summer vacation is in the middle of the school academic year, then it might be more things to do during that time than the winter.

[Excerpt from Tom's first interview]

I come to school irregularly to take care of administration work/chores and prepare for the next semester's class during the summer/winter vacation. I usually have 15 days of vacation days in summer, but I come to school almost every day. Winter vacation is longer. It is around a month and a half. If I don't travel during Winter vacation, then I go to school to work every once a week.

So far, I have presented how teachers' lives are hectic in different time contexts. During the school period, they were occupied with teaching class, dealing with students and documentation, so they could not take proper rest nor able take sick-leave unless it is a long-term break or critically ill. After school, teachers were still busy preparing the class that they could not do during the working hours at the school and to give counseling to the students or answer parents' calls. Most teachers indicated that they could take more rest during the school vacation period since they could use the annual vacation leaves during that time, which they could not able to use during the school period.

### **5.1.2 The Pandemic and Professionalism**

When COVID-19 cases soared in February 2020 in Korea, during the winter vacation, the government decided to prolong the winter vacation to see how the situation goes. The academic year was originally scheduled to begin on the 2nd of March, but the date was rescheduled three times. Then, the government encountered massive criticisms and the government announced to offer online classes. In a set of guidelines for virtual classes announced on the 27th of March, the ministry categorized remote learning into three types: real-time interactive classes which students and teachers can discuss or provide feedback via video conference platforms; content-based classes where students watch videos of lectures produced by Education Broadcasting System (EBS) or their teachers, and teachers check what the pupils have learned; and assignment-based classes where students are given book reports or workbooks. Additionally, the government announced to open the online classes on the 9th of April 2020.

It was a relatively short time to prepare for this change, but the teachers showed confidence in their ability to handle the situation, and Amber was already preparing her online lectures before the official announcement. In the third phase of interviews, she sounded a bit more stressed and tired, but she showed her confidence in teachers' capacity and collaboration to get over the difficult situation.

[Dialogue with Amber from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*Is there something different than usual because of COVID-19?*

Well... Many things are different, haha ! I am preparing for an online class since I don't think this will finish soon. It will take a long time to go back to normal. Since I am an Information and Computer teacher, which is not the main subject, there are not so many good... quality lectures offered from EBS. So, I am trying to make my own class and plan out how to give the assignment...

[Dialogue with Amber from 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

In my area, it is announced officially that all the teachers have to start work in the school from tomorrow... And my school started today. We had a meeting all day...(sigh) since every teacher

wants to use a different online learning platform. And there are many other options.... But, if teachers use different platforms, then it will confuse the students. From the student's point of view, you go in here to take these classes, then go in there to take those classes, and then you have to sign up for membership here and there, and the kids are confused about what class is going on and where. So, we compared all the pros and cons of all the platforms all day long... and decided what platform to use by the majority vote. Then, I gave the training guide for using the platform to senior teachers... so...huh... I was really really busy, especially my subject (Computer and Information). Many teachers are assigned to work with the Education of Ministry starting from copyright education program to the other teachers these days...

I think teachers' problem is that.... Well... maybe not a problem... but I think teachers feel more because of the online school opening this time. The Ministry of Education was like "I don't know anything how you are going to do it, but anyway you have to start online school class. Figure out by yourself". It came down like this all the time... without proper infrastructures. But, I know we will do it somehow professionally. We always did. I think that can be a problem... Make the impossible possible. Haha

From the dialogue with Amber, I read how she handled the pandemic situation professionally through collaboration with other teachers and posed the government's lack of taking responsibility for implementing policy somewhat increased teachers' professionalism.

Lisa sounded more content compare to the previous interview and was shy to tell me about her accomplishment during the pandemic. Previously, she was nervous about taking online-class, but the outcome was better than her expectation, which triggered her to regain her professionalism and changed her mind toward the teaching profession.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

There was a little change in the past two weeks... two weeks ago, I was a little stressed that I would fail and receive criticisms like when I teach in offline classes... But when I started the class... I thought the kids were making fun of me... all together... because ... well... actually... it was not. They wrote comments like thank you so much for the class. Your class is very interesting. When I was teaching offline, students made noise and joke around me... so I thought...like... that I regretted becoming a teacher. But in the online class, the kids rated my class very well. Some teachers take 3-4 pages of A4 scripts in their hands while taking online class videos, and when they get NG, they record the video again and again. But I did not do that. I recorded it at once without reading scripts... So... I realized that I am a little talented in teaching, so I've changed my mind about being a teacher. But if the kids come back to the school and meddling the class and don't listen, I might regret it again. Haha.

As a senior teacher, Tom describes how he struggled with the online class since he was not used to using technical devices. However, he seemed to enjoy learning new things and tried his best to help vulnerable children in his position by calling them regularly.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

It is tough since I am not so used to this... you know... technical devices since I am an old school guy... haha. I am trying. Learning new things every day. But, I am mostly worried about students from poor families. Like... for many low-income, single-parent, or grandparent-children families, I think the biggest worry for them is about having to leave their children at home when they have to go to work. I try to help these families by either calling the children by phone to check up on them... Another thing that worries me is that I have not built any rapport with them as we begin the semester online. I am in charge of a homeroom teacher for first-grade students who graduated

from elementary school. They don't know me, and I don't know them... umm so, I am wondering whether I can offer them classes and assignments customized for their academic level.

In-service teachers are required to go through various programs for their own professional development to improve their teaching competency in Korea. These programs are classified according to the types of training purposes, such as on-the-job-training to develop the ability to perform tasks, qualification training for promotion, which is prescribed by the government, school-based training typically organized and guided by the principal or vice-principal, and voluntarily initiated self-directed training by self-motivated teachers. Various types of training completion records are used in order to decide on promoting teachers and raising their wages. Tom thinks it is helpful to enhance his competency and wishes for more supports from the government.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*How is your class look like? How do you like to teach?*

I think I am quite strict... and since I am a senior teacher. Students are usually well behaved. These days, the government emphasizes collaboration.. and discussion.. so I am trying to change my teaching style. And actually, I attended the training session. Haha. I think it is good for the students like... encouraging them to be more creative... stimulate a different point of views from others. I think this kind of class is possible because of the low birth rate. Because the class size is comparatively small, these days compare to the time when I started to teach.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*Do you have anything you want to add?*

I wish the salary would raise more. Haha. Also, I wish there is more time and supports from the government to develop teacher's self-development, then there will be a better environment to re-establish the relationship between teachers and students.

Amber implies status-related professionalism that teachers' unique working conditions, such as taking vacations during the school vacation, guaranteed maternity leave, and stability, provoked jealousy from the people. As I stated before, there was an appeal to abolish Educational Officials Act. Article 41, which allows public educational officials to take training in other facilities or places than in a specialized institution. Amber describes her opinion with regard of abolishing the Article 41 and she believes it was an act of envious and lack of knowledge of teachers' working environment. Amber herself also acknowledges that being a teacher as a woman has more benefits than other occupations, especially regarding marriage life, which is one of her driving forces to keep her in the teaching profession.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

I think the person who appealed that petition was being jealous of us (teachers). And... I thought that petition was appealed by the people who don't know about teacher's work reality... Teachers needed that law because we cannot rest properly when we are sick during the semester, but others can rest whenever they feel sick.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*What is the driving force for you to be as a teacher?*

First of all, you have to love children. That's the most important part. The second thing is well... stability. I cannot ignore this part. If I was a man, I would have quit this job since... the welfare ... or benefits to be as a teacher ... It is not that good. But, because I'm a girl, it's good to be a teacher because three years of parental leave is guaranteed, there is no career break when I return to work, and those things are guaranteed to raise... children. A guaranteed nursing time when my child is young... like one hour. I think it is a good job for a woman to work because of this institutional support. You know... best wife figure in Korea. Haha. And I get a lot of jealousy around me. Teachers are very happy to play well with students and when I meet other teachers. We understand

each other so I feel happy to meet them. However, if I meet up with my friends from regular occupation like just going to company... I will be very spared. I don't talk so much... I guess... being a teacher is like an envious job that everybody wants?

*What makes you think like that?*

Even this time.. during this corona. Even though regular companies worked from home, I told them that I am also working from home. Then they are like... "You don't have so many things to do, isn't it?" Also, when I told them but I cannot have days off, or annual leave like you do. They reply to me like "But you have school vacation! Much longer!" These kinds of prejudice... because they don't know how it is to be a teacher... because they have never worked as a teacher. They think we don't do anything during this.... All corona situation. I actually feel busier these days than normal school days. But I think people don't really understand.

The above dialogues articulate the policy impacts on increasing demands about a specific and also partly new teachers' professionalism. First, the deficient of infrastructure to implement the policy somewhat increased teachers' professionalism related to collaboration. Teachers exchange information and support each other to overcome the crisis to sustain high standards of teaching. Also, a different way of teaching contributed to realize the meaning of being a teacher and regain the competence of being knowledgeable. Secondly, as teachers' professional development is encouraged by the government, it contributed to adapt new teaching methods and stimulated to improve competency. Lastly, teacher's special working environment under the law provoked jealousy from the people and increased status-related professionalism as a desired profession.

### **5.1.3 Passion in teaching**

From reading the interviews I got the impression from Robert and Lisa that they were thinking of leaving their teacher positions or choosing another occupation if they could return to the past. This was because several times, during our conversations, they showed a frustration of the current teaching environment. However, Robert, Lisa and Tom appear to stay on as teachers, not because of the extrinsic motivation, but for intrinsic motivation. I suppose all the complaints were based on the affection of their profession; wish it to be developed in a better condition to work, so they could enjoy their profession/professionalism.

[Dialogue with Robert from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*What is the driving force for you to be as a teacher?*

Umm...I just wanted to teach Korean... So, I became a teacher. I think teaching is fun. It's really fun to teach in the classroom. I like that students understand what I'm teaching and asking questions, and the they are acquiring new knowledge through me.

*If you have a chance to go back to the time, would you like to be a teacher?*

Actually... I have never thought about that .. but yes.. I would like to be a teacher again. I really like teaching Korean, and I have never thought about another job but teaching.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*If you have a chance to go back to the time, would you like to be a teacher?*

Yes. I think so. Once, there were times when I thought of my job as a teacher as a means of living, and sometimes I went into the bathroom and cried... But, once a student told me that she wants to be a teacher because of me... So, that makes me work harder. So... Even if I have a chance to go back to the time, I think I will be a teacher again. My major is teaching English, and my dream has always been this, so I haven't really thought of any other job. It has always been something related to English and teaching students.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*If you can choose another job, what would you like to be?*

I think... I would like to be a teacher. I am proud of what I am doing... and... I like learning new things, and I like children. I feel like I am fulfilled when I see the students' progress. Haha. I think it is my nature.

The above quotes developed a discourse of participants' identity as a teacher. Robert addresses that he likes teaching and likes to observe students gaining new knowledge through him. Lisa admitted that even though students discouraged her to reconsider the profession, students' appreciation or a warm word toward her efforts revitalize her passion for being a teacher. Tom also added that he likes learning new knowledge and feeling fulfilled through observing students' progress.

Here, Amber shows both 'being professional' and 'behaving professional.' She was 'being professional' by demonstrating interpersonal skills to instill students' feelings of trust, such as occasionally talking and observing. Furthermore, she was 'behaving professionally' by showing the ability to create and maintain an appropriate relationship with students. She knew how to approach the students and to their needs.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*Have you ever felt that students are acting ruder since you are a female teacher? Or met any troublesome students?*

Well.. it did not happen to me, actually. In my class, one of the students did to another female teacher, not to me. So, I scolded him a lot in front of the female teacher. Umm... As I wrote before in the first interview, it is important to build the relationship between the students. I am also a young female teacher, but they have never done any violence or swearing in front of me. Students discriminate or distinguish teachers from other teachers because they are still young. So, I believe teacher's competence and capacity are important.

*What is the best way to make a good relationship with the students?*

Definitely, counseling is the most important. However, if you ask the students to leave behind to do the counseling, then they might not like it. Nobody really likes to leave behind alone with the teacher. So, it is important to ask, talk to them, and observe them occasionally during break time. It is bothering, actually....I think I am the only one doing this in my school haha... Indeed, it drains so much energy... and getting so much stress too...but I think it is my nature. Haha. I cannot just neglect them. I want to help them and build a good rapport.

Amber denies the social image of 'weak young female' teachers who are often depicted as in a vulnerable position to guide the students. She strongly believes teachers' professionalism matters the most to teach, not by gender.

In this section, I have described teachers' passion for their profession. Robert, Lisa, and Tom chose to become a teacher again by intrinsic motivation. They have never thought about another occupation in their lives and they truly cared about their profession and students. Even though Amber did not choose to become a teacher again, she showed her passion in her daily work life. She constantly approached students to find out their needs and built a good relationship with them even though it caused emotional/physical stress. Moreover, she believes teacher's gender does not affect students' misbehaviors as long as the teacher knows how to build a good rapport with students.

## 5.2 De-professionalism

Historically, Korea society has had great respect for teachers. There is even a famous proverb so-called 'Don't even step on the shadow of your teacher' in the past. However, during the interviews it became clear that all teachers see a fall of teaching authority and respect these days. Below this so call de-professionalism is described and analyzed.

### 5.2.1 The fall of teachers' authority and respect

All teachers stated that the fall of teachers' authority and respect from parents, students, and media. Robert, for example, shows his helpless feeling that parents blame everything on teachers even though their child caused the trouble.

[Excerpt from Robert's first interview]

As school violence became more serious, the School Violence Act was arranged, and teachers have to deal with school violence. This law has resulted in too much work for the teachers in charge. Teachers have to investigate uncooperative students, even if we are not a policeman. In addition, the school violence committee should be held in accordance with the law; however, the procedure is too complicated to hold the School Violence Committee. Moreover, even if School Violence Committee decided to punish the perpetrator, in many cases, the perpetrator's parents would not accept the decision and sue the school or teachers who are related to the incident/decision.

[Dialogue with Robert from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*From the first interview, I was not quite sure about why there will be a lawsuit against a teacher if there was school violence occurred and the penalty was decided by the Organization of Autonomous Committees<sup>9</sup>. Why did parents use it against the teacher?*

Usually... weird thing is .... Assailants file a lawsuit more often than victims because assailants don't agree with the decision from the Organization of Autonomous Committees. For example, if the assailants thought the penalty or punishment was too harsh, then they sue a teacher who was in charge of the school violence, claiming that the teacher didn't do the job properly. The teacher should have had certain procedures, but the teacher didn't, so the decision should be invalid. They say like that.

*Then which teacher will be in charge of the school violence? Homeroom teacher will be in charge of the school violence if the violence happened in his/her classroom?*

There is a teacher who is in charge of school violence. School violence is also one of the tasks in the school so that teacher will be in charge mostly but if the parents want to go further... Then they will sue homeroom teachers as well... like claiming that homeroom teachers did not take care of my child properly, so that is why my child did this to his/her friends.

The above dialogues describe how teachers' decisions valued little among parents regarding school violence incidents. Also, it shows another teachers' role as an investigator of the incident.

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<sup>9</sup> \*Article 13 (Organization of Autonomous Committees)

An autonomous committee shall be comprised of at least five to up to ten members, including one chairperson; a majority of the total members shall be commissioned from among representatives of parents directly elected at a parents conference, as prescribed by Presidential Decree: Provided, That if it is impracticable to elect representatives of parents at a parents conference due to any extenuating circumstance, representatives of parents may be elected at a conference consisting of representatives of every class. <Amended by Act No. 10642, May 19, 2011>

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Amber shows her emotion (anger) by her high-pitched voice and fast paced speech when she was telling me about an incident with a parent. She explains that parents' attitudes toward teachers have changed compare to the past when she was a student. Also, she implies that current young teachers are more professional than senior teachers.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*Have you ever met any aggressive parents?*

Last year.. I was with my parents to have dinner. And, there was a boy who was suspended. During the suspension period, there were assignments to do. Because he cannot just stay at home doing nothing. Suddenly, his father called me and shouting, "I am feeling fu\*\*ing shitty!" I was like... It was ridiculous. I replied, "Excuse me?" [...]

Parents' minds had also changed a lot compared to when I was young. When I was young, no matter how much I told my mom that the teacher treated me unfairly, she always said, "Teacher always has a reason to do to you. You might have done something wrong". Now, there is no respect for the teacher. Not anymore. And...I think teachers are now (young teachers)...They are much more capable and worthy of getting respect, unlike old teachers.

From the dialogue with Amber, I read Amber feels nostalgia for the old school setting and unfair to be treated disrespectfully by the parents/students, as young teachers went through extremely competitive CSAT and teacher recruitment exam.

Lisa implies her age and appearance might have affected her parents' attitude toward her. This can also be connected negative side of Confucianism value in Korea because the respect for the elderly is still present, and age plays a significant role in the process of communication.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*Do you often get in touch with them (parents) after work?*

There was one parent, who likes to drink, called me after 23.00 when he was drunk.

*Why did he call you late at night?*

Haha. I don't know because I didn't answer. I heard he called to another scary male teacher as well when the male teacher became a homeroom teacher for his son. So, it was not only me that he got drunk and called to teachers. By that time, when I was a homeroom teacher for his son... I was young, like 26 years old, and I looked even younger. haha... So, I think the parents took me for a pushover? or just looked down on me...

The discourses regarding diminishing respect from parents are articulated among young teachers. They felt more than Tom regarding the fact that teachers have lost the respect from the parents compare to the past. Tom did not describe any incident related to aggressive parents. It can be explained as the effect of Confucianism since all young teachers are younger than the parents and age matters greatly in society. They describe parents these days do not consider teacher's opinions/positions seriously and this influenced teachers' emotions (anger, helpless).

Teachers in the study also blamed the current education policy mainly for the reason of losing teachers' authority over the students. I will present the discourses regarding education policy in the 'Policy impact' theme. Here, I will present the conversations that teachers did not mention the education policy specifically, yet two themes are relevant.

Lisa showed helpless emotion, and she had many hesitant moments during the interview because of the sensitive topic. Indeed, she double-checked the confidentiality, so I assured her once again and comforted her to continue her story. The most surprising aspect from Lisa's discourse is that school is

not a place to study anymore, but a place for social gatherings. It might be attributed to her school location; still, it is something that people could not even imagine in the past. The dialogues below show, unlike Robert's concern on female teachers' vulnerable position to control the class, Lisa believes the physical disability of her leg makes her difficult to control the class. She describes how students mocked on the impairment of her leg. Still, she strived to work on building a good relationship with the students and wish students to recognize her sincerity. However, she expressed her emotional exhaustion toward the profession and even regretted becoming a teacher.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

Not as a female teacher, but as I have a bit uncomfortable leg... There are students who imitate me because I am limping... When I was a newbie, some boys were imitating my limping while they were crossing the street at a crosswalk.... I think I had a hard time because I am slightly handicapped, not because I am a female. It takes time for students to realize my sincerity and strength, which I try to teach them with all my heart. So, it is always hard the first couple of months when the new year start.

*How do you deal with the students who are sleeping in the classroom?*

I felt like I am delinquent in my duties if I do not wake them up, so I used to wake them up. I saw the news that a teacher was physically attacked after waking up a student, so I do feel... now afraid and scared to wake them up... However, if I just let them sleep, then starting with that, a lot of other rules will be falling apart. I think my lecture is not so boring....so students don't really sleep in my class, but they are just too loud... I just have concerns that students are talking too much in my class. Sleeping students were usually infamous of being a lassitude among all the teachers, so except those students, I did not have so many sleeping students in my class. [...]

*What can't I imagine? (The previous conversation, she said I could not imagine what is happening in the school these days) Can you explain more?*

Nowadays, students treat teachers like nobody... no respect... When I was a student like my age group, there were many students who wanted to go to a science high school or foreign language high school, so my friends and I studied hard. I think I lived in a different era. I heard somewhere that there was a question to students asking, 'what is a classroom to you?'. Some students answered exemplarily like 'where I study' or 'where I learn', but there was a student who answered like 'across the hallway', because the hallway is a place to play for him and the classroom is also the same playing place just situated across the hallway. When I was a student, we focused more on the study. We came to school to study at that time. Unfortunately, now, students come to school to meet friends and eat school lunch. There are some students who don't come to the school if the school lunch menu is bad. The students from last year.... They were not a student... they were just juvenile... They didn't even bring a bag to the school and they put on makeup during the class. I asked, "what are you doing?" then they answered like "This is a pencil" and writing on the notebooks. I was tired of arguing with them, so I just ignored... eye pencil...huh.. I think the school where I worked last year was located in a poorer area, so children didn't take good care from the parents. Maybe that was the reason why there were so many troubles with the students... If I knew this, I would have worked differently than a teacher. I wouldn't be a teacher.

Above dialogues, Lisa describes how the school setting has changes compare to the past. Considering her age, the school setting has changed drastically past 10-12 years. In the classroom, students were talking, sleeping, putting on make-up and etc., She felt tired of arguing with them to study, so she chose to neglect those behaviors. Lisa connects poor neighborhoods and a list of students' misbehaviors in her language. She makes clear that poor children could not get proper nurturing and advice from their parents and it increased burdens for her even led to neglect those students instead of taking a role to give proper advice. This shows the meaning of school and teacher are at stake, and it can cause serious education crisis in the future.



[Excerpt from Lisa's text messages]

What he (the superintendent of education) said is ridiculous. People are criticizing us (teachers) even more now that we don't deserve to get a salary. And, the online school is just a political show to get a vote because the election will be held next week. [...] All of a sudden, the government is saying, 'We believe teachers' competence.' The government should have prepared and given the guideline from the first COVID-19 outbreak.

The mass media is relevant in the production of public agenda and policy intentions and it portrayed negative images of teachers. It led to discouraging teachers and Lisa described as teachers were scapegoated to change the people's attention from the government to win the upcoming election. Robert expressed the hardship of being a teacher in Korea. Further, it can lead to devaluing the teaching profession in society, which can give rise to teacher crisis in the future.

## 5.2.2 Changing the role of teachers

Teachers argued their role has been changed, and their primary job, teaching, has been pushed out of the priority. Lisa assumes the reason for failing to get respect from students and parents is that tutoring took over the professional aspect of being knowledgeable and using teaching skills to students.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*Do you think there's a difference between being a teacher in the past and the present?*

I think students treated teachers as a teacher in the past... more respect... both students and parents respected teacher more, but now it is not... Over time, more students and parents rely on Internet lectures, cramming schools, and so on. That's why it is different now. I think .... I think they believe private institute instructors have a better ability than school teachers. I think there are a lot of things are happening in schools nowadays that you can't imagine.

Robert and Amber both indicate that they do not get pressure regarding students' academic performances, and they seem the criticism regarding poor academic performances belongs to the private tutoring area. Robert comments again that parents do not agree with teachers' decisions. Amber describes the conversations between teachers and parents are mostly related to the students' behavior, not the academic performance matters.

[Dialogue with Robert from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*Have you ever been stressed about students' academic reports/results?*

Umm... not really.

*How about during the exam period?*

Well... Not really. Just some parents call and complain about the test scores, especially about performance assessment. Saying like "I don't understand why my son got this score?" or "Your test question had an error, so that question should be fixed."

*Have they ever blamed you that you didn't teach Korean to their son/daughter properly?*

Umm.. No.. I think that's more to go to cramming school teachers. I think... because parents are paying to those people ...

[Dialogue with Amber from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*When you were in charge of a homeroom teacher, did you get any contacts from the parents after school?*

It often happens in our school.

*In what matter? Was it related to their academic study?*

No, it was more like... not because of the students' academic performances. It was more like... the relationship or problems? Between the friends.

*Do you get stressed when students do not show good academic performances?*

No.. not really. My subject is not very important. You know... It's not a major subject like Korean, English, Math or Science.

*Even when you were a homeroom teacher, no parents contact you for the concern of the academic performances?*

Oh well... these days, parents do not do that... I think parents talk more to the private tutoring teacher, especially regarding academic performances, since they are paying for that.

Unlike other teachers, Tom replies parents rarely contact him after working hours. He implies there was a closer relationship between parents and teachers in the past, but it had disappeared. He sounded that he prefers the past way of having a bond. This could also be implicated that teacher-parents worked together as a partnership to take care of the student/child before, but not anymore. Tom assumes that raising of individualism value might attributed the changes of relationship between the parents and the teachers.

[Discourse with Tom from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

Umm.. Not really. It was more often before, but these days parents don't really care about their child's school life. Before like 20 years ago, it was common to have dinner together with the parents to build up a bond to take care the child well together like talking about their school life, academic scores...

*What makes the difference from the past and now?*

I think... people these days prefer to have their privacy or individualism. Actually, I think parents don't like to get a call from me because it is usually for the bad news. Haha.

*What kind of bad news?*

Usually, when the child has troubles such as a fight with other friends, smoking and.. something like that.

The dialogues above develop a discourse that teachers' primary role -teaching- is replaced by the tutoring sector. Teachers also implied that they do not get pressure regarding students' academic performances. The bond between teachers and parents broke apart and teachers' profession degraded into delivering more students' behavior performances at the school than academic performances.

### **5.2.3 Policy Impact on (de-)professionalism**

Education policy has affected greatly to teachers' lives. Here I articulated only regarding certain education policies such as Students' Human Rights Ordinance, and Free semester, and teachers' reaction to frequent government's education policy changes.

#### **Students' Human Rights Ordinance (SHRO)**

The purpose of SHRO is to guarantee the dignity, values, freedoms, and rights of human beings that would fulfill the students' human rights during the course of school education. Gyeonggi Province Office of Education was the first office to start the SHRO in 2011. The enactment is included with Right against Discrimination, Freedom from Violence and Danger, Right to Education, Confidentiality, and Freedom to Enjoy Privacy and Rights to Access Information, Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and Freedom of Expression, and Guarantee of Rights for Minority Students. Within the policy, the most controversial part was the Right to Education. Under the Right to Education, an article named 'Right to

rest' is covered as students have the right to take appropriate rest and be free of excessive study load to form and develop a healthy and unique self. As students and teachers interpreted the enactment differently through their lenses, SHRO became one of the schooling issues.

Currently, SHRO is not enacted throughout the nation, and under the local offices of education, the detailed article is enacted differently. For instance, Robert and Amber are from the same Metropolitan; therefore, they share the same enactment, such as abolishing reward and penalty points. Lisa's area, however, has reward and penalty points for the students' behavior management. Tom's region did not implement the policy.

Robert sounded helpless regarding the SHRO during the interview. He implies that as a young, male (strong) teacher, students do not act too violently to him, but he concerns about the young female teachers. However, Amber and Lisa were not concerned about being a female teacher; Amber believed teachers' capacity to control the situation matter the most. Here, he describes helpless situation in the class because of SHRO.

[Dialogue with Robert from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

Because many of children...they already gave up studying. (*sigh*) Actually... umm... I think the most difficult part of being a teacher is in the Metropolitan area because of SHRO. It makes it even more difficult to teach in the class. Teachers cannot do anything even though students are talking, sleeping, interrupting the class, and even being rude to a teacher... Teachers cannot do anything... *I cannot imagine. How are they being rude? Do they even swear to teachers?*

Well... actually, swearing is not a big deal. (*chuckles*) Normally, students swear then say "oh! I wasn't talking to you" then I cannot do anything or say something... Usually, students use coarse language frequently in their lives, such as shi\* and fu\*\* ... Some students even hit teachers.

*Have you ever experienced before?*

The funny thing is that... students are mean and clever. I am a quite young and male teacher, so they don't do that to me so much. But, they swear a lot to the female teachers. So, female teachers got harassed more by the students. It is not common that male teachers might get hit by the students, but female teachers get hit by the students sometimes...

Amber spoke in a fierce tone while she was explaining the story. She also stated that the education policy was against her education value to implement. Nevertheless, the policy still affected her by limiting her action, and she even felt doubt about her profession. I had to admit that my cultural norms or values affected interpretation. When I first heard Amber's story regarding giving punishment by running/walking around the playground, I totally understood her situation. I did not think it was a harsh or wrong way to teach collaboration. I suppose this perspective was strongly affected by my cultural background and experience that I have also grown up with physical punishment. In the beginning, I interpreted her action as a passion for her profession since she kept her value and stance regardless of the possibility that she will get sued. However, I reconsidered myself, 'what would be an alternative way to teach without giving punishment?', 'how would it be interpreted in Western researchers' eyes? I realized again that my experience and values greatly influenced interpreting and analyzing data, and I might be too biased to teachers' positions.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*You mentioned smoking students in the class from the first interview, is it impossible to stop them?*

Well...I do stop them if it happens in my class...Actually... I always have been proud of being a teacher... But last year, it was the first time that I wanted to give up on guiding students like other old teachers. There was one student in my class who was treated distantly by other friends, so I asked all students to stay in the school in order to cooperate/harmonize. Since they were talking

badly to their friends, I told them to go around the playfield. [...] However, my intention was to encourage them to help/consider/take care of each other, so I screamed at them saying, “Can’t you see your friends who are far more behind you? Don’t you understand why you are here? You are staying here because you should learn how to take care of other friends, so nobody will fall behind. Go around the playfield until you all work together!” [...] It seemed like finally, they are cooperating with each other. Then the vice-principal saw when he was about to go home. He told me that it is illegal to leave students to give detention after school. He said, “What happens if one of their parents would complain about this? Send them home right now,” I replied like “This is my class, and if the parents will complain, it is my responsibility to handle the situation. They need to learn how to work together and help each other, not bullying other friends, and that is my duty to teach them the lesson. I am their teacher, so I will take all the responsibility and consequences” Still, he kept saying this is illegal, and the school can be in trouble, so I had to let the students go home. The Vice-principal was standing next to me until everybody actually left the playfield. That was the first time I felt doubt about my career. I know corporal punishment, like hitting students in a crazy way, is bad, but I believe there should be a certain level of punishment that is acceptable... I don’t know whether it is because I grew up with corporal punishment... But now, even the slight spanking, leave at school, and not even filling the paper is considered to be corporal punishments. Rewards and penalty system is also abolished... Actually I am in doubt about the Education Office’s decision, and I wonder how to control/instruct students without all those things and what will be the alternatives to instruct the students. Anyway, I ignore all the details and just teach students in my way. If you follow all the small rules, then you cannot teach them. I think other teachers also disdain all the details.

From the above dialogue, I read Amber's concerns about instructing students and she could not find a better way to teach them without punishment. As physical punishments were prevailed under the name of ‘rod of love’ in the past, it might have affected her belief of the way of control students’ behaviors. She implies that her right as a teacher’s autonomy to guide the class/students diminished by the law and authority, which lead to questioning her decision to become a teacher.

Lisa showed her regret and futility toward her profession during the interview because she could not control students’ behavior with current education policies. However, when I asked directly regarding SHRO, she believes that the policy’s intention was wholesome to respect students, unlike the past. She acknowledged the good intention of the law, but she implied that she was not satisfied with the current policy as it hindered teacher’s authority.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*Is it okay to ask why you went on sick leave?*

Umm...I worked in another school last year and the year before... I met really good students ... two years ago. So, I was really happy. Then, I met students who have bad attitudes last year. Other teachers also had a difficult time with them. There is no way to regulate those students with current educational way. They were really, really naughty... so I got a lot of stress and scratched my head over my career at that time, like what should I do... I only learned how to teach, so I cannot just change my occupation easily... I was distressed with my career.

*Do you feel differently before and after SHRO?*

I became a teacher in 2013, so I am not sure about the differences because the law acted in 2011... However, if I compare the time when I was a student, I grew up with corporal punishment. Now it is against the law to give corporal punishment but giving penalty points instead. There is one downside to quantifying students’ behavior and showing it as a score ... I still think it’s better now than before. As students can be protected from the SHRO, teachers cannot force them to do something.... So, I think it is good to have it in the sense of respecting students.

Tom also believes the law has a good intention, yet it has several flaws devaluing the meaning of the school. He was worried that public school might function as a place to sleep and rest, and private tutoring/cram school might replace the learning place.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*What do you think about SHRO?*

Hmm... Well... I think it is good to enhance the students' rights, but I think it is too extreme. Luckily? my area does not have that rule. Also, we still did not adopt the equalization policy, so... I think parents and students still show some respect to the teachers.

*What is too extreme?*

The right to rest thing... I was like, What? So, students have the right to sleep during the class and study after school in the cramming academy? Then, what is the meaning of the school? Of course, students' rights are important, but that went too far.

### **Free semester**

Robert complains that the policy not only increased documentation, but also lowered students' basic academic knowledge. He believes twelve-year-old students are too young to decide their career path and the policy forces students with the slogan that 'you must have a dream.'

[Dialogue with Robert from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*Did your school start 'Free semester'?*

Yes. Most of city and provinces are doing now. It's been more expanded.

*What do you think about it?*

Well.. Actually I am against this 'Free semester'.

*Why?*

First of all, the Free semester does not have any exams. Students don't take exams in the name of doing activities to increase students' dreams and talents. But, since they don't take any exams, they don't know what their level is... and there are actually positive sides too... such as giving them the motivation to study.

You know, a Free semester is basically like seeking students' career exploration. But I think it is too much for the kids who are only twelve years old. I feel like the policy is forcing them to have a dream....For the truth, children's dreams can be changed like here and there.

*Instead of taking exams what do teachers do?*

More work to do, actually. Since they don't take exams, there will be no scores in numbers. Instead, I have to write individuals' observations of ... how they were doing with the career exploration activities, which is much heavier to observe and write dozens of kids.

Amber took national teacher recruitment exams two years in a row to change the region to work because her region has more innovative education policies than others. She prefers the old way of school settings, so she would like to retake the exam this year. She believes 'Free semester' contributed to lower students' basic knowledge and interests in studying.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*In what way do you feel it is different between your region and another region?*

Well.. like.. My region is advertising as an Educational innovation.. So Education Office...they are like "Don't take the paper-pencil test, eliminate the mid-term exam, and expand performance evaluation to more than 60% You can see that students' basic knowledge is getting lower and the kids don't have to study... so who will study? Especially for middle school students. So, from the teachers' perspective, it drives them crazy in the class. However, in other regions, it depends on

the school's choice to do the 'Free semester'. So, I took exams two years in a row to change the region to work.

### **Focus on administration work**

Robert showed the frustration of dealing with a load of documentation from the beginning of the interview. He described there was too much documentation because of the COVID-19 and he thought that documentation was not worth spending time. He expected there should be an appropriate reason or result that it was worth doing the documentation. He complained about discursive government policy, which increased the burden on teacher's shoulders.

[Excerpt from Robert's first interview]

I believe the teacher's most important task is teaching, giving the proper knowledge regarding the subject. But, I don't have time to prepare for the class at the school. It is also important for teachers to give proper students guidance and discipline them, but there are so many administrative tasks that make me difficult to focus on students and classes.

[Dialogue with Robert from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

Well... There are too many... I think there are too many useless official documents. Since neither the Ministry of Education nor the Office of Education has ever tried to open school online... At first, when they announced to the media, we (teachers) need to do it by ourselves. Like this and then... So much useless documentation... like investigating things.

*About what?*

Like how many smart devices in each students' home, but you know? What makes me feel ridiculous is that... If you researched about it, you need to have a plan of how you are going to do it. Like how do you distribute it to the kids, rent it out? How to rent it? [...]The Ministry of Education is not yet organized... There are just a lot of things telling us to do by ourselves.

From the conversation with Amber, I could understand why teachers kept telling me that there is too much documentation to do. I found out that the procedures for each of the school events were too complicated. Another interesting finding was that she did not spend her spare time to develop/prepare her class, but she spent it on documentation.

[Dialogue with Amber from the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview]

*You mentioned you will work on something whenever you have spare time. What kind of work do you do in the school?*

I make draft or documentation.

*What kind of draft are you talking about?*

For example, we plan to go on a field trip, and I need to write the draft... like documentation, to get approval from the principal and vice-principal. This draft should include all the detailed information such as bus fee, date, purpose like that. Also, when I have to hire an outside instructor for the school vacation, I have to write a recruitment plan. When I hired someone, then I also have to write a report about who is hired and why. There should be School steering committees <sup>11</sup>to be held during the semesters. So...there is a lot of administration to do.

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<sup>11</sup> School Steering Committees

School should be managed more democratically and independently than any other sector. Therefore, President Kim established a School Steering Committee, a self-governing body, in every school. Parents, teachers, and local leaders participated, discussed, and decided on matters related to the management of the school, such as the principal's recommendation for college applications, the management of school athletic teams, the election of superintendents, and school board members, and school lunches. This school steering committee served as the essence of the educational self-government.

From the discourse with Tom, I could see he was having a few role conflicts as he believes a teacher should focus on teaching and student, yet he had loads of documentation to do. I suppose doing documentation is a visible outcome and has a deadline to complete the task whereas preparing for class and taking care of students (no deadline or visible outcome) are pushed back on the priority list.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 2nd interview]

*How's your work these days?*

There are a lot of messages coming through the teachers' messenger. A lot of things that I need to survey. Sometimes... I feel confused about what's my priority to handle the situation. As we are in a national crisis... it is a special situation, and there are a lot of students who need help and attention to take care of. However, I am just so busy with documentation, whether it is helpful or not.

### **Not adapting the new teaching method**

When I asked about teacher's teaching methods using in the class. Lisa describes that there is a trend in the way of teaching that is recommended by the government. Hence, she chose not to follow the policy, but cling to her original teaching method. Tom implies that since his region does not have the equalization policy, his school culture tends to focus on students' academic performance to prepare for high school entrance. Thus, he has seen few from the demonstration class, but not in the regular class.

[Dialogue with Lisa from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

STEAM education<sup>12</sup> was popular in the past, but now I've just seen one or two class linking home economics and art courses. But English... um... I saw one who did the collaboration with art.

*Isn't it recommended teaching method these days?*

I think there's a trend... like each government likes to push... And then disappeared and changed again... So, I don't really follow the government guidelines. I just keep doing the same way I used to do.

[Dialogue with Tom from the 3rd interview]

*Have you ever tried STEAM education?*

No. It is not really connected to my subject.

*Have you ever seen some teachers doing it in your school?*

I have seen a few in the demonstration class.. but not in a regular class.

*Isn't it the government's recommendation teaching method?*

Well...It is difficult to adapt it to our region since we have to keep up with the class to prepare for a test.

## **5.2.4 Conflicts within the teacher profession today**

The results of this study show conflicts between Confucianism values and modern values, but also conflicts about what is expected in terms of quality and method. On the one hand, Confucianism values include filial duty, respect for the aged, loyalty, and mutual assistance and cooperation; on the other hand, modern values contain individualism, multiculturalism, capitalism, and globalization. Here, I only described the conflicts between the teachers (junior and senior). However, I suppose teachers' frustration

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<sup>12</sup> STEAM education emphasizes the convergence and integration across science, technology, engineering, mathematics disciplines in order to encourage students' self-directed learning and connect contents to the students' learning experiences (Hyunju Park et al., 2016).

toward students' misbehavior partly sprang from Confucianism because the long history of the teachers' status as 'father=king=teacher' has been challenged.

One interesting part was that when I asked whether they think the workload was distributed fairly, all three young teachers pointed out "the better you work, the more work you will have," but it does not mean you will get a pleasing result in the teachers' evaluation. Robert implies that unfair work distribution was caused by the senior teachers since most decisions were swayed by them, so he complained that he had more work to do because he is the youngest teacher in the school. Despite all his hard work, he argued that he could not get a good grade from the teachers' evaluation since all the high points taken by the senior teachers. He was wondering whether this kind of unfair work distribution/evaluation only exists in Korea.

[Dialogue with Robert from 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

Actually... it's best if the division of work is done rationally... It is best to organize the division of work in a more efficient and rational way in the teachers' meetings by the Head of the department or personnel committees. But, it is not.

*I don't follow it properly. Can you give me some examples?*

There are some people who have no work to do. That's a bit irrational. For example, there is an advisory committee. And from there, they decide that whom to put in that position or whom to give this task. Those kinds of things. I think it should be done democratically and discussed seriously. But usually, one person like principal or vice-principal decide whatever he wants to do. These things are a bit irrational and unfair.

*Do you think one teacher can get assigned too much work?*

Yes. If the workload distribution had been done in a rational way, it would not end like... one person has to sacrifice. But, since it is distributed in a weird way, it is inevitable to end like that. If they had done the division of work in a rational way, it would not have led to some people, but since it made the division of work weird, it became a structure in which one had to sacrifice.

*But maybe that person will get a good performance-based evaluation and get more salary?*

Not really, that also ranks S, A, and B based on the teacher's evaluation. And that also depends on what categories/things will be evaluated. For example, even though I worked much more on something... If that thing not on the list to be evaluated, then I won't get any compensation.

*Is it possible to happen?*

I talked a bit more extreme, but yes, it can happen. Every school has different evaluation criteria.

*I thought all evaluation criteria is same in every school.*

I don't know if this happens only in Korea, but somehow it varies from school to school... Of course, there are recommended criteria stipulated by the law are the same, but there are a lot more things at the discretion of the principal. Most of those things are different. [...] School is like that. It's a strange structure that the better you work, the more work you do. Also, the management... they just give work to people who don't complain so much, especially like me—youngest one in the school.

*Who will evaluate your work?*

Supervisors like... principal or vice-principal. If I complain too much to them, then I might not get a good evaluation. It's a relative evaluation, so they rank all the teachers by scores.

*You said last time that the metropolitan area's working environment is fairer. Doesn't it apply to teachers' evaluation?*

Well... It is designed to get more benefits to the senior teachers, especially those who work as a Headteacher.

*You mean it is possible to get better rank even if the Head teacher's workload is less than yours?*

Yes.

Throughout the interview, I believed Amber is a passionate teacher with professional skills and proud of her job. However, she implies that senior teachers did not show exemplary conduct to encourage her to work hard but rather discouraging her. When I heard she stopped trying to develop her teaching career because of the unfair evaluation, I thought, 'What a loss of such a great teacher.' It will be unfortunate to lose a competent teacher because of inadequate compensation for the hard work. She also describes the same evaluation problem as Robert's explained. Ironically, Amber explains that all other young teachers have connived with unfair work distribution/evaluation because they also want to be treated the same as the senior teachers when they became a senior teacher. However, she was worried that as society is changing rapidly, she might not get treated the same as the current senior teachers.

[Dialogue with Amber from 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*In the last interview, you said that you felt despondency and wanted to give up a little bit like senior teachers. Do you think senior teachers seem a little bit indifferent to students and gave up on teaching?*

Yes, I can see that a lot. Hahaha. I am not sure whether it happens in the schools where I was in, but I've been to three schools, and all three schools were the same.

*In what way? Teaching? Or instructing the students?*

At the level of guidance, as well as the teaching in the class. Since they've as a teacher for a long time, they just use the same material all the time, not improving. They toss all the hard and complicated work to the newbies, and they only do the comfortable task... like relatively no tasks to do.

*So, you don't think your workload is fairly distributed?*

No. I think there is no single school is doing like that. I don't know whether it is only applied to Korean society. There is a famous saying 'Do not work fast.' If you work fast and good at your work, you will get more work. The more you work better, the more work you have to handle. On the other hand, the worse you do, the more comfortable your body you will feel.

*But, if you work well, you will get better evaluation, right?*

No. There are S, A, and B grades for performance grades, but older people take S grade, which is the highest grades. But the young teachers don't say anything after seeing it, because they think like 'I'll get an S when I get older, as it happened to the old teachers when they were young'. So.. those kinds of thoughts ... are the reasons that I can endure. [...] When I did a lot of things in that year... like I worked so much, but ... still I got B grade! So, in the next year, I knew that I would receive B no matter what I do, so I didn't take training, and I didn't work so much. This year too... I didn't take any training course, then I got B grade. I knew that I would get B grade anyway, whether I take a training course or not, then why should I do it? I wouldn't feel upset about the unfairness if I don't try. I think that...these kinds of things deskilled my professional development... No progress.

*You sound a bit upset... as Korean society is changing rapidly. Do you think you can finally get S grades when you become a senior teacher?*

Actually... That's another thing that... we were talking about each other among young teachers. These days... there are more and more young people who have strong opinions. It is not the same as our generation. For us...when senior told us to do, then just fu\*\*ing do it... You know? We actually worry that the junior teachers would not follow the things as we did before. Haha.

Lisa did not mention senior teachers, but she implied as 'member of people who evaluate teachers should change'. I interpreted her comment as when senior teachers are retired, and then there can be a chance to change in the teachers' evaluation system since the members are mostly consisted of senior teachers. She also pointed out that there are teachers working hard in their position without hoping for a reward, such as counseling and organizing the class.

[Discourse with Lisa from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

*Do you think your workload is fairly distributed?*

No. I don't think so.

*Why is it so?*

Well.. There is a famous saying. The better you work, the more work you will have.

*But you have teachers' evaluation system. Don't you get some compensation from there? Like evaluated fairly?*

It doesn't have to be related to your work performance... It depends on whether you are a homeroom teacher or Headteacher of some subject... There are many people who work really hard behind.. like something that doesn't show obviously or not in the criteria to evaluate... such as student counseling or...something like that.

*Do you have any idea to improve this grading system?*

Umm... I think the member of people who evaluate teachers should change... I mean, if they want to evaluate, then the procedure should be transparent so that everybody can understand the decision.

Unlike other teachers, Tom believes the workload was fairly distributed as well as the teacher's evaluation. I wish that I could have more senior teachers to interview so that I could compare the different perspectives between senior and junior teachers.

[Discourse with Tom from the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview]

Well... I think it is fair.

*How about the teachers' evaluation?*

I believe the procedure is fair enough.

From reading the interviews, I found out the hierarchy working environment prevails in the school culture, which discourages young teachers to work professionally and deskills their teaching careers. At the same time, young teachers wish to be treated the same when they became a senior teacher, hence they connived such an unfair workload distribution and evaluation. However, as a famous proverb saying, 'Stagnant water is bound to corrupt', teachers' working environment should be changed into a performance-based system than a seniority-based system. Otherwise, it will even increase more losing professional and competent teachers in the near future.

## Chapter 6 Discussion

Early on in this study it became clear that it is comparatively easy to find factual material documenting the structures and regulations of the international education system concerning class size, license laws, pay scales, and other information. There is still uncertainty, however, whether information reported in international research corresponds to the reality without the voice from the teachers. The reality is not always corroborated by the latest statistics or government reports. Therefore, in my study, I see this occasional difference as an important part of what I strive to accomplish when I explore the gap between mandate and practice or between what statistics or policies indicate and what teachers experience and how their professionalism acted in the Korean context.

This section is divided into three parts of changes that influence teachers' daily interactions. As the nature of changing times, society is also changing as a 'continuing process' with the people through 'noting' and 'interpreting' features of situations (Blumer, 1969), which also influence on changing teachers' work and lives. Based on the findings, I divided it into three parts of changes that greatly affect teachers' work and lives; teachers' professionalism, traditional values (Confucianism), and policies. Although I divided it into three parts, all these changes are correlated with each other.

### 6.1 Changing times, changing teachers' professionalism

As I stated in the literature review, because of the characteristic of the varying definitions of professionalism in a different context, the meaning of professionalism can be conceptualized person by person on the basis of their belief, experiences, and situation (Hargreaves, 2000). Some teachers might interpret teachers' professionalism as a teachers' competence in delivering the knowledge, some teachers might be more focused on playing teachers' authority, and some teachers might see it as a desired profession with high status, salary and conditions.

Considering Korean teachers' professionalism with regard to status-related, salary, conditions (e.g., reducing class size, the welfare system, and encouraging teacher development training) has been improved past few decades. Even though mass media and people criticize the teaching profession, the attractiveness of the profession is closely linked to the legal status and job security of teachers (Sang Hoon Bae, 2006), and is still valued in society (OECD, 2016, 2020b). However, all teachers pointed out that the school is not the same as it used to be, and teachers' authority is going down greatly these days. They blamed mostly the government and the mass media portraying negative images of teachers, and a possible assumption was due to the teaching role was handed over to the private tutoring sector.

Even though private tutoring prevailed in Korea from the 1950s, teachers and parents maintained close relationships, especially in rural areas, where it was not easy to receive tutoring. However, as cramming school/tutoring has become institutionalized and symbolized to pursue higher status or maintain the present one by entering a top university in Korean society, engaging in the private cram school/tutoring is not simply an individual's choice (Kwon, Kristjánsson, & Walker, 2017). Another attribution is that as the technology has developed, students can take private tutoring lessons through the Internet without restricting time and space. Consequently, school is no longer situated as a place for learning but rather a social club.

Hargreaves (2000) argued that as time passed, the meaning of professionalism expanded, and the teachers' responsibilities are becoming more extensive as well as their roles are becoming more diffuse. Teachers were not just acting as delivering knowledge to students, but also were acting as a document handler, a counselor, a police officer, and a janitor. Ironically, Korean teachers are more occupied with non-teaching roles and responsibilities than with teaching. Teachers were investigating the school

violence to find out victims and assailants as a police officer, worrying about being sued, dealing with numerous documentations, giving career counseling, and patrolling around the school to prevent the violence and keeping the ordinance. Unlike other international studies showing great demand for teachers regarding students' academic performances (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Hardy & Lewis, 2017; van Den Berg, 2002; Villegas-Reimers, 2003), Korean teachers seemed that they were not stressed with the students' academic performances. In fact, they conceded that the private tutors should take responsibility for students' performances since parents paid them for it. Consequently, teachers indicated the confusion of their role as a teacher and arose a question 'What is the priority thing to do? – Taking care of students? Dealing with documentation? Teaching?'

## **6.2 Changing times, changing values of Confucianism**

Despite the rapid changes in Korean society, Confucianism is deep-rooted in Korean culture, and Tu and Du (1996) depicted Korea as the most Confucian part of the world. Given the fact that Korea has gone through dynamic changes in society (colonization, the Korean war, military dictatorship, and economic crisis) within less than 100 years, the Korean government has been obliged to address Confucian values to stress unification and solidarity in order to construct on ethnic homogeneity serves as the basis of the Korean identity (So et al., 2012). Although the influence of globalization broke down gradually the system of extended families and the structures of rural societies, both age and competence play an important role in the process of communication (formal/informal language); the respect for the elderly is still present (Śleziak, 2013). As people were taught respect for the elderly since childhood, the value is not suppressed, forgotten, or disregarded in the process of modernization (ibid).

However, more than two decades of being influenced by globalization have changed Korean society greatly in many ways. Advances in technology and broader and faster distribution of information are placing old ideological certainties in disrepute as people realize there are other ways of living (Hargreaves, 1994). People are more exposed to and experienced Western values, such as individualism, gender equality, flat culture, performance-based, multiculturalism, and student-centered. Accordingly, due to the coexistence of the local and the global, individuals and community, and homogeneity and heterogeneity, Koreans encounter identity confusion (So et al., 2012). This confusion has most probably caused some of the conflicts illustrated in the results of this study, e.g. between the two different value systems: the old and the modern. The changes in traditional values caused conflicts not only between young teachers and senior teachers but also between students and teachers.

Especially young teachers complained regarding unfair workload and evaluation system. Korea has three different teacher evaluation systems: teacher performance rating for promotion, teacher performance-based pay system, and teacher evaluation for professional development. In 2001, the government applied the performance-based pay system to encourage a performance-based work environment instead of the seniority-based personnel management system so that teachers would have constructive competition through professional development and ultimately to regain public trust in the education system (Choi & Park, 2016). Principals, vice-principals, and Headteachers are the main evaluators for all three systems, and none of the three systems have consistent, clear rubrics for fair, accurate, and reliable assessment in terms of evaluation standards since all three systems use a checklist as the main evaluation instrument for each criterion (ibid).

Even though the government implemented the systems to encourage teachers to get rewarded commensurately for their performances, the policy has not been enacted as it planned because the key policy actors are seniors. As a result, young teachers chose not to work hard or efficiently, which attributed to deskilling the teachers' professionalism. Although they were longing for them to become a senior teacher and get the same treatment, they were also aware that would not happen in the same way

as they have been through in the future, since society is rapidly changing with new values. M. J. Kim and Lee (2018) revealed that Korean teachers with high educational attainment and high academic achievement are lost their competent once they start their career from the start. They assumed that teachers might have poor education courses in the university of the teaching department, inappropriate teacher qualification exam, or vertical control-oriented culture of the schools that do not encourage teachers to learn from other teachers or collaborate. However, I believe Confucianism's value of working environment also contributed to discourage teachers' professionalism.

Young teachers implied senior teachers as 'idle,' 'deskilled,' 'routinized,' 'tossing work to youngers' However, the senior teacher I have interviewed had the longest teaching hours among the other teachers even after thirty-four years of experience and was designated as a model teacher from the Office of Education in his region. Moreover, he showed his passion and pride in his profession during the interview, and he believed the workload is fairly distributed in his school. A possible explanation for this might be that the characteristics of the region kept his passion for teaching. His region was not influenced by those policies (SHRO, equalization policy, and free semester) that young teachers were mostly complained about, and he indicated that his parents and students show respect to teachers in his region. Thus, his daily interaction with parents, students, and colleagues would be different from other teachers.

Another significant aspect of value conflicts that I have noticed was between students and teachers. Confucianism's value as the father-teacher-king chain of positions has been challenged over time. Current teachers have grown up with the culture of reverence for teachers and have repeatedly heard 'not questioning the teachers' words' and 'don't even step on teacher's shadow.' However, the traditional value has been falling apart, and SHRO fueled the process. Teachers often employed the term 'control' students' behavior, and they showed helpless feeling since they could not 'control' students as they used to be controlled when they were a student. Especially, Lisa showed uncomfortable feelings and took students' retorting offensively since she did not expect to experience students' misbehaviors. It even predisposed her to reconsider her career. Tom accepted students' misbehaviors as a different generation's behavior as students were more exposed to Western values, but he tries to keep a distance from the students to protect his feeling. Amber believed if teachers kept trying to build a rapport with students and treated them fairly, students would not do extreme things to the teachers, yet she believed there should be a certain punishment to control them. Robert did not seem to be offended by the students' behaviors, but rather helpless. He wished that there should be a proper means to control students. Each teacher reacted differently regarding students' misconduct, yet all teachers were having a nostalgia when teachers were favored by the public/parents/students with respect and having full authority to control the class.

### **6.3 Changing times, changing policies**

The Korean government has strived to meet the demands of the public by changing policies to build more favorable public education than private tutoring/cram schools (J. W. Kim, 2004; So & Kang, 2014; So et al., 2012). However, most of the policies are 'all spin and no substance' and have failed to introduce fundamental changes to gain the trust of public education from the public as well as enhancing teachers' working environment (So, 2020).

By the law, Korean teachers have Welfare System designed to promote teachers' welfare. For instance, sick leave covers general sick leave and official sick leave; as long as 60 days is given for the former and 180 days a year for the latter. Special holidays include weddings or funerals, maternity leave, women's health vacations (menstruation or pregnancy), award holidays, and long service holidays (E. Kim & Han, 2002). However, as Korean schools do not offer a substitute teacher pool, it is not easy to find a teacher to cover a class for a day. If it is a long-term leave such as parental leave or stress leave

for two-three months, the school can post a job opening for a temporary teacher who possesses a teaching license. As students have the right to take appropriate education, there should be no missing class, and if there is, then students should receive a supplementary lesson. Hence, teachers stood firm until the end of their teaching hours then leave early for the hospital or rest. Even though female teachers can take one day off under the women's health vacation during menstruation, the law stays as 'all spin and no substance.'

Another significant aspect of the policy is administration/documentation. According to OECD (2014b), Korean teachers report spending twice as much time on general administrative work as the TALIS average and continuously in the 2018 report (OECD, 2020b). The government was also aware of it, and administrative assistant and computer assistants were being assigned in each school in 2001 (E. Kim & Han, 2002). However, there is no study proving that it reduced teachers' administrative work, which teachers often described as 'administrative chore.' From the discourses, teachers seemed to be occupied with the documentation more than the work related to teaching. Their most priority job to handle was the documentation since it had the due dates to complete. Teachers expressed that they sometimes feel the confusion of their role of being a teacher since they work more on non-related teaching tasks.

Moving on now to consider the frequent changes of educational policies in Korea. The national curriculum has been constantly revised to eradicate the evils of a college-entrance-exam-focused school education system (So, 2020) as well as to respond to people's demands, especially regarding PISA results. For instance, Korean students placed low levels of motivation, self-esteem, and enjoyment of constantly learning from PISA results (Co-operation & Development, 2010; Schleicher, 2007) as well as students' low-satisfaction of their life (OECD, 2019), the governments implemented the policy to increase students' life satisfactory by STEAM education, SHRO, and Free semester. However, as the CSAT still dominates the school education system, STEAM education was not enacted in actual school settings properly, especially in secondary schools (Hyunju Park et al., 2016). In fact, none of the interviewees adopted the lessons in their class, and Lisa stated that she sticks to her original teaching method since there is a trend of the new way of teaching that the government was promoting in each government; no need to put effort to following the trend every time.

Moreover, when the government confronted massive criticisms regarding delaying the school open due to the COVID-19, the government decided to open the school online without preparing the infrastructure. Teachers manifested discomfort feelings, and they thought the government shifted the responsibility to teachers. Lisa even suspected rushing online school was to gain more votes from the people. Unlike the media depicted teachers as a 'easy money maker', teachers had to deal with continuous meetings, endless documentation, and learning new platforms to teach. Nevertheless, each teacher did their best to overcome the pandemic situation in their position. For instance, Tom tried to take care of students who are in a vulnerable situation by contacting them frequently. Amber prepared online classes and taught other senior teachers to use the new platforms. Ironically different school settings attributed to regain teachers' professionalism and meaning of being a teacher- collaboration and students' positive comments regarding the online class. Lisa realized her capacity regarding teaching skills that she was doubt about it before as students did not concentrate on her off-line class. In the end, teachers showed their confidence to overcome the crisis and handled the situation professionally.

The results also show that some of the teachers appealed that it is difficult to control the class and the students with current policy (SHRO) and expressed emotional burden. Even though, for example, Lisa stated that it is better than the past in the sense of respecting students, she showed many emotional moments concerning students' ungracious behavior. Moreover, she stated one downside of SHRO was control students' behavior by giving penalty points as it quantifies students' behaviors by number, but she used penalty points to regulate students' behaviors. Amber and Roberts's area has forbidden to use any kind of punishment, including penalty points, so Robert especially expressed helpless emotions to

deal with students. On the other hand, Amber did not pay attention to all the detailed rules, and she pertained to punishment when she believed it is necessary, but the policy still affected her action by narrowing the range of response. Even though they instructed students their way and tried to adjust to the new school culture, they still appealed to emotional distress.

In fact, J. E. Kim (2016) reported the mental health of Korean teachers had been challenged because of the shift to consumer-centered education that has contributed to the violation of teachers' authority from the parents and students, such as assault, physical/verbal violence, and class disturbance. In her research, leave of absence or dismissal due to mental disease accounted for 67 in 2011, and the number increased about double in 2012 (112 teachers) as well as the number of suicides of Korean teachers (17 in 2010 and 31 in 2011). Considering the fact that SHRO has been implemented since 2010, I believe the drastically increased number is not coincident. As I have stated before, Korean teachers face a whole new school culture that they have never experienced before. Teachers believed deeply that there should be some kind of rules to control as a matter of visible, formal regulation and management for the benefits of the school environment. Teachers have not figured out yet other means than punishment to control students' misbehaviors.

In conclusion, this study has shown that even though it is important that the government takes account of the demands from the public and make an effort to change the education system, the consequences of the continuous reforms over the last decade has been a weakening the function of the school and teachers' professionalism. This has, in turn, resulted in a decrease in motivation, the health of teachers and also teaching quality which impacts negatively on the lives of students and their future.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

The present study investigated and described Korean lower-secondary school teachers' workload and lives. The start of this study was a questioning mind after reading articles regarding Korean education in international papers since, as a native Korean, I found the gaps between the factual material documenting and the real school settings. Thus, this study was undertaken to attempt to bridge the gap between the statistics or policies and real-life experienced by teachers.

Historically, the teaching profession in eastern Asian countries is often considered a prestigious and desirable occupation with great respect in a socially and cultural context (R. M. Cohen, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Viadero, 2010). However, Korea is struggling with rapid and constant changes in society, and it leads to conflicts between traditional values and modern values related to teachers' work and lives. The work is never finished in teaching, and more can always be done, things can always be improved, so teachers' lives are hectic.

The findings of the study revealed that meaning being a teacher in Korea does not act the same as it used to be, and the causes of changes are deeply related to policies and globalization. Frequent changes in policies and globalization's effects diminished teachers' professionalism regarding delivering specialized knowledge and skills, devaluing the teaching profession, adhering to the original teaching method, and discouraging teachers' professional development.

Unlike the mass media portraying teachers as a 'easy money maker', it was observed that teachers put a lot of effort to accomplish their job as a teacher and continued to work without resting, regardless of how sick they were. Teachers were showing signs of distress because of the rapid changes in school settings which is contradicted to teachers' 'me' aspect of being a teacher. They have never experienced the school settings with new global values and new policies, so they were in the process of transition.

This study has also shown that how teachers overcome the pandemic situation professionally. Even though teachers were not satisfied with the situation the government shifted the blame on teachers and teachers believed that they spent too much time on meaningless and purposeless documentation, they gave of themselves to cope with the crisis together.

Despite all the complaints of the negative sides of teaching position described by the teachers, most of the teachers chose to become a teacher again even if they went back to the times. This may demonstrate that all the complaints were based on the affection of their profession, wanting it to be built to work in a better condition, so they could appreciate their profession/professionalism.

Therefore, the result of this study indicates that the contemporary Korean secondary school teachers are confronted with changing directives and conceptions toward the teaching profession in Korean society, but still, they are trying to adapt to it and construct meanings of their profession from work. Each teacher perceived the situation similarly or differently depends on his/her personal experiences and the social, cultural, and institutional environment where they work on a daily basis. In order to understand teachers' unique working environment, as Mead argued, people need to "communicate and act with others in mind, to try to assess and understand others and the reasons for their behavior [...] to engage in the minded process of role-taking (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003, p. 107)" Thus, I believe this study will help to understand the teacher's distinct working environment and possible to benefit future education policies to develop school setting and teachers' workload and lives.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the empirical nature of the study, I believe this research has contributed knowledge to qualitative discourse about contemporary lower-secondary Korean teachers' workload and lives. Therefore, based on the findings of this paper, I recommend that educational policymakers and implementors of educational policies should involve teachers with the education reform directions. As teachers are the key actors to enact the policy, teachers' opinions should not be neglected. Moreover, education reforms/policies have been a piecemeal process of fixing problems in Korea without careful consideration or a long-term plan of reflection. Thus, educational policymakers and educational policy implementers should regularly have a round table discussion and review of current policies and their implementation to decide how best to bridge the difference between the interpretation of policies and the process of enactment.

Another recommendation is regarding future research. Because of the limitations of the study, senior teachers' voices and the teachers' workload and lives other than the Metropolitan areas were insufficient. Thus, further research could investigate with a bigger sample in different areas, using mixed methods to find out more about the relationship between the traditional values and policy impact on teachers' working environments.

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## <Appendix 1> Informed consent and Right to withdraw



### Lower Secondary Teachers' Workload and Lives in South Korea

-Focus on teachers' experiences and perceptions

#### Who is conducting this research?

Master student: Hyeryung Jang

Ph: +46 793\*\*\*

Department of Education and Special Education    hyeryu\*\*\*\_or\_gus \*\*\*

Supervisor: Professor Petra Angervall    petra.\*\*\*\*

연구소 및 연구원 연락처: 장혜령, 석사과정, 예테보리대

휴대폰 번호: +46 \*\*\*\*

Kakaotalk ID: \*\*\*\*

이메일 주소: hyeryu\*\*\*\*\*

연구지도교수: Professor Petra Angervall    이메일주소: [pe\\*\\*\\*\\*](mailto:pe****)

안녕하십니까, 여러가지 바쁜 업무 가운데 귀중한 시간을 내주셔서 감사합니다.

저는 교사가 교육현장에서 겪는 스트레스와 업무실태를 주제로 논문연구를 하고 있습니다. 시대가 변하면서 교사라는 직업의 업무적 부담감은 커지고 정신적·육체적 스트레스 호소도 증가하고 있지만 아직 대중들은 구체적인 교사들의 삶과 업무량·스트레스에 대한 이해도가 부족하며, 국내외 질적연구자료도 현저히 부족하여 이 연구를 시작하게 되었습니다. 이 연구를 통해 선생님들께서 겪었던 업무적 스트레스와 그와 관련된 일화에 대해서 선생님들의 견해를 솔직하고 구체적으로 답변해주신다면 본 연구에 더욱 도움이 될 것 입니다.

설문에 응해주신 선생님들의 성의 있고 솔직한 답변은 본 연구의 소중한 자료로 쓰일 것이며, 설문결과 내용은 연구목적 이외에는 절대로 사용되지 않습니다.

시간 내주셔서 감사한 마음을 작게나마 보답하고자 연구가 끝난 후 2만원 상당의 기프트콘을 선물로 드립니다.

2020. 3 월

스웨덴 예테보리 대학교 교육대학원 국제교육연구학 석사과정 장혜령 드림

## Consent form: Teachers

I have read the information letter and discussed any concerns about the research project with Hyeryung Jang. I understand that the project is to raise Korean teachers' voice regarding their workload and struggling.

I agree to respond to be involved in a recorded interview about activities and my perspectives about workload and stress. I may also complete a survey.

I agree and aware that:

The interview transcript will not be shared with others. It will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

I can withdraw from the study at any time.

I can contact Hyeryung Jang any time about the project.

I can receive a copy of the findings of the study by emailing Hyeryung Jang at gus\*\*\*\*@student.gu.se or hyeryu\*\*\*\*@n\*\*ver.com

I understand that conclusions of my participation will be published in a report and I agree to this.

귀하는 이 연구에 동의하고 다음과 같은 사항을 인지하고 있습니다.

인터뷰 내용은 연구목적 이외의 사람들과 공유하지 않을 것이며 인터뷰 내용은 디지털로 기록될 것입니다.

이 연구를 위해 귀하가 제공한 모든 정보가 기밀로 취급 될 것입니다.

이 연구보고서에서는 귀하의 신원은 익명으로 유지될 것이며, 귀하의 개인정보와 관련된 인터뷰 세부사항을 변경하여 귀하의 신원이나 귀하께서 언급하시는 사람들의 익명성을 보장할 것입니다.

귀하는 본 연구를 언제든지 그만둘 수 있으며, 연구와 관련하여 장혜령연구원과 언제든지 연락을 할 수 있습니다.

귀하는 연구결과에 관한 복사본을 원한다면 이메일을 통해 받을 수 있습니다.

귀하의 본 연구참여 결과와 내용은 연구논문에 기재될 것입니다.

위의 모든 사항에 동의하신다면 아래에 서명부탁드립니다.

Name 성함: \_\_\_\_\_ Date 날짜: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature 서명: \_\_\_\_\_

## <Appendix 2> Questionnaires to teachers in the first interview

선생님 교과과목/ 학교위치 (도시이름) / 교직경력/ 계약직 또는 정규직 여부/ 공립학교 또는 사립학교 여부/ 현재 또는 과거 담임여부를 알려주세요.

Teaching subject/Location of the school/Teaching career/Permanent or Temporary contracted/ Public or Private school/ current or past of being homeroom teacher

- 1) 선생님 보통 하루 일과가 어떻게 되나요? 일주일 수업시수와 수업이 없을 때 시간을 어떻게 보내시는지 궁금합니다.

How is your daily look like? How many hours do you teach and how do you spend your time when you do not have a class to teach?

- 2) 선생님 학급당 학생수가 몇 명 정도 되나요? 수업 분위기가 어떠한지, 수업진행 어려움 또는 수월한 것에 대한 선생님의 자유로운 견해 부탁드립니다.

How many students in your class? How is the atmosphere while you are teaching?

- 3) 하루동안 쉬는시간 및 점심시간에 충분한 휴식을 취할 수 있습니까? 쉬는시간과 점심시간에 주로 어떻게 시간을 보내시나요?

How do you spend your time during the recess and lunch time? Can you take enough rest during those time?

- 4) 아래 항목 중 업무에 포함되는 사항이 있으시면 O, 아니면 X 표시해주세요.

Please check the section, if it is included in your workload.

선생님 업무사항	체크 (O, X)
개인 수업 준비 및 계획 Individual planning or preparing lessons	
교과 교사회의 및 교무회의 Teamwork and dialogue with colleagues	
학생 숙제검사 및 시험 채점 Marking/correcting student work	
쉬는시간 중 학생지도 및 감독 Supervising students during breaks	

개별 학생 상담 또는 지도 Providing counselling and guidance to students	
학교경영참여 (예시, 교내교칙수립, 업무분담, 인사관련 등 의견반영여부) Participating in school management	
일반 문서작성 및 행정업무 관련 회의 General administrative communication and paperwork	
학부모 또는 학생 담당 보호자와 상담 및 협력 Communication and co-operating with parents or guardians	
방과 후 추가학습활동 또는 동아리 참여 및 지도 Engaging in extracurricular activities after school	
교직직무발전을 위한 관련활동 (ex. 연수참여) Professional development activities	

- 5) 선생님 보통 여름방학 또는 겨울방학 기간동안 어떠한 업무를 하는지 휴일은 몇일 정도 인지 알려주세요.

What do you do when the summer and winter vacation start in the school?

- 6) 위의 질문들 중 추가적인 견해를 보충하시고 싶으시거나 궁금한 점이 있으시면 말씀해주세요.

Do you have anything you want to add your opinion or questions?