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Collapsing Education and Teacher Rights in South Korea:
Exploring Korean Teacher, Student, and Parent Relationships

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Abstract:

South Korea has one of the best education systems, as Korean students tend to excel in multiple academic areas in comparison to the national averages of other countries (WENR, 2018). However, due to the high academic and societal pressures placed on Korean students to succeed in school, South Korean teachers have become increasingly overwhelmed with handling parent and student demands. Due to the updated Korean Child Welfare Act (2014), Korean teachers now face claims of child abuse from parents either for reprimanding students who were initially combative in class, or for denying parents’ request for after school extracurricular services for their child only. As a result, there have been 144 reported cases of teachers dying by suicide in the past decade, and nearly 600 teachers have left the education field in the past year alone (The Korea Herald, 2023). This paper aims to discuss the leading causes towards why S. Korean teachers are facing such adversities and to discuss the potential ways that the Korean education system can change to better support Korean teacher, student, and parent relationships.
Introduction

On July 18th, 2023, a 23-year-old South Korean teacher died by suicide in her classroom (The Straits Times, 2023). The events that led up to the teacher’s death included extensive bullying and pressure from parents of the students who were in the teacher’s classroom (The Straits Times). A few months later, on September 3rd, a 60-year-old teacher was found dead with a suicide note, and his family claims the cause of his death was due to him feeling extremely stressed and depressed after a parent filed a police report. The report was issued against the near retired teacher after a child accidentally got hurt in their physical education class (Kim, 2023). Overall, there has been a reported total of 14 teachers who died by suicide last year in Korea and there has been a total of 144 reported teachers who have died by suicide within the past decade (The Korea Herald, 2023). According to data released by the People Power Party and the National Assembly’s Education Committee, about 600 teachers with an experience of less than five years have left the workforce as of April 2023, which is a nearly two-fold increase from the 303 who left in 2021, with false reports of child abuse claims and complaints made by parents being the top reasons of why teachers left the profession (The Straits Times). Such incidents have caused a social uproar in South Korea recently, as rallies expected to hold up to 300,000 teachers have been organized in order to advocate for better treatment of teachers from parents and students within the classroom (NPR, 2023).

Traditionally, education is highly valued and Korean teachers are highly respected by students and their parents (Kim & Bang, 2017). South Korea is known to have one of the best education systems because Korean students tend to excel in their academic performances in comparison to global education averages, and South Korean teachers play a critical role in why South Korean students are so successful academically (WENR). The increased emphasis on high
academic performance for Korean students in school also comes from the fact that the wage gap between those who go to the top 3 universities in S. Korea (Seoul, Korea, and Yonsei University) and land a job with a good company after graduation is almost 50% higher than those who do not attend the top universities, nor work with a top company (Statistics Korea Wage Employment Income, 2023). Because of this differential pay gap, and the overall social and historical importance of doing well in school in South Korea, Korean teachers face extreme pressures, responsibilities, blame, and criticism for how well their students do in the classroom (Lee, 2023).

With this context considered, this paper aims to address: what has made this sudden value and attitude changes toward teachers in South Korea? What are the social circumstances that force Korean teachers to commit extreme actions in relation to how they are treated in their occupation? How does bullying and emotional abuses from parents and students towards teachers influence the education system in South Korea? What actions and steps could be taken towards resolving these issues? This project will attempt to understand and provide insight to the current phenomenon about S. Korean teachers’ challenges in and outside of their classroom related to their relationship with students and parents.

What Does it Mean to be a Teacher in South Korea?

Background of Korean Education. Teaching in South Korea was once a job that was “envied”, but now the career field is facing a shortage of teachers (Synott, 2001). Historically, teaching in Korea has been a respected occupation, but Korean teachers have always faced challenges due to the economic and social expectations imposed on the education system (Lee, 2023). Once South Korea became an independent country, the Korean government aimed “to produce an industrious, cooperative, and obedient citizen who could function well during rapid
industrialization” and the education system at the time was established in order to produce educated citizens who could fulfill this goal (Jung & Ahn, 2021, p. 1). As such, S. Korean teachers were an important part of this economic advancement of S. Korea, but they had limited control over the curriculum for their classes and often felt restricted by the government designed curriculum. This led to the development of the Korean Teachers Union, also known as Chunkyojo [전교조], for the first time in history in 1986 (Synott).

**The Critical Development of the Korean Teachers Union (KTU).** During the ‘80’s and ‘90’s, the KTU fought for the ability to make changes to the education system and curriculum but was met with extreme opposition from the Korean government officials (Synott). This was because Confucianism ideologies were used during the early establishing of South Korea as a post-war country to promote the necessity of education towards building a thriving, and newly independent, Korean society (Bang, 2020, pp. 103-104). As a result, teachers were seen to be clergymen whose purpose was to solely produce educate citizens that could contribute to the economic prosperity of South Korea in the ways that the government saw fit (Synott). Because of this, South Korean teachers were expected to relinquish their right to demand changes within the Korean education system and were expected to only follow the curriculum guidelines that they were given by the militarized Korean government at the time (Synott). Therefore, the economic development of Korea has historically been put before Korean teachers’ desired ways to teach their classes.

Members of the early KTU also wanted to nullify the notion that teachers were clergymen, so that they could become members of True Education. This was a progressive phrase that empowered teachers to take command over their classroom materials and teaching styles (Synott). However, the Korean government at the time still saw teachers as “servants of
society” and labeled all teachers who joined the union as communists (Synott). After over ten years of struggle, the KTU was legally recognized as a union in 1999, but their areas of reform were limited to wages, teacher working conditions, and teacher welfare- which are not all the areas that they were hoping to have control over (Synott). Notwithstanding, without the struggles the KTU faced during the ‘80’s and ‘90’s, and their advocacy for educational reform during other turbulent educational eras in South Korea, a critical component to the advocacy of current teacher struggles would be missing. This is because the KTU has become a critical figure in the movement behind current teacher adversities and cries for change.

The Development of Current Korean Teacher Adversities

2014 Updated Child Welfare Act and its Consequences. Following the legalization of the KTU, Korean teachers and school districts had more autonomy on the curriculum design. Due to these reforms, restrictions put into place on the Korean education system by past governments have been removed to prioritize not just teacher autonomy, but a student’s happiness in the class. This has occurred due to recent S. Korean student’s PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) scores being severely low, indicating that Korean children are not finding joy within the subjects that they are learning (Jung & Ahn). One attempt to restore and uplift children’s happiness in the classroom has also been by updating the Child Welfare Act in 2014. The Child Welfare act currently states that “no child should be discriminated against based on their socioeconomic, religious, physical, and ethnic aspects”, and should not be subjected to any form of abuse, nor should teachers do anything to infringe upon their basic human rights (Lee 2023, p. 1). To honor this change, teachers have opened themselves to communicate with students and parents by giving the two parties their Kakao (the main messaging app used in South Korea) ID name so they can communicate to the two directly, or by
hosting group messaging chat rooms so that parents and students can communicate any potential concerns (Choi et al., 2018). This has led to Korean parents overstepping boundaries of South Korean teachers’ authority and their human rights.

**Phenomenon of Korean Parents’ Violating Teacher Rights.** While the intentions behind having open communication with students and parents were to ensure that parent and student demands were met, the current challenges with teaching in South Korea come from parents and students abusing this form of communication and from disrespecting teachers’ boundaries and space before, during, and after school hours (Choi et al.). Overprotective parents have been abusing the open-communication that teachers have allowed between the two parties, by contacting the teacher after hours via calls and texts to ensure that their child is doing okay in their classes (Choi et al.). The death of the Seoi-cho teacher inspired the KTU to fight for full investigations of all teacher-suicide deaths that were related to teachers not being able to deal with the constant and demands or abuse of communication outlets from parents and students, and for special laws to protect teachers’ educational activities to be put in place (KBS News, 2023).

Teacher educational activities refers to all the practices that teachers do to control, teach, and manage the classroom—which also includes the way they communicate with both parents and students. Teacher educational activities also includes the management of student behavior and taking control of the classroom when students may get off task or act unfriendly to their peers, which are things that unreasonable and overprotective parents have begun to have a problem with. In recent years, overprotective parents are reprimanding teachers for implementing such practices in their classroom, and the rise of these incidents started in 2014, which matches when the Child Welfare Act was revised (Choi et al.). Such parents have been seen to verbally confront teachers either in-person or via after-school phone calls; and have taken it to the extreme of
falsely reporting teachers to their schools and the Korean government for violating the Child Welfare Act in Korea (Lee, 2023). Overprotective parents use the updated parts of the act to wrongfully convict teachers for reprimanding students who initially were combative in class, either by throwing items at their peers and partaking in other bullying activities, or for denying their request to provide extracurricular educational programs for just their child (Lee). It is important to note that Korean parents are not making these claims because they are dissatisfied with how the teacher is teaching the entire class, but because the teacher in their eyes is not doing enough to support the individual growth of their child academically. In addition to this, most child abuse claims are based off actions that do not necessarily impact the student’s learning during school hours. For example, teachers have been accused of discriminating against students for not smiling enough; or if they have restrained students who were combative in class by throwing items at or physically bullying their peers, teachers have faced with the possibility of being charged for “physically abusing” these students by their parents (Lee).

Unfortunately, these instances happen more commonly than one might expect, and it is something that bothers Korean teachers across the country, whether they’ve personally been subjected to such treatment or not. The Korean Teachers and Education Federation conducted a survey in August 2023 and received nearly 12,000 responses from teachers across the country in just one day (Shin, 2023). The survey results showed that 8,344 (75% of respondents) experienced a violation of their teachers’ rights by parents, while the remaining respondents experienced their rights being violated via their interactions with students. Of those who reported that parents were violating their rights, 6,720 cases (57.8%) were due to parents reporting false child abuse claims or sharing threats or malicious complaints (Shin). Verbal abuse and profanity accounted for 1,346 cases (16.1%) (Shin). Additionally, according to data compiled from
regional Offices of Education (2023), more than 1,200 legal accusations of child abuse were filed against Korean teachers in the past five years. And in a survey conducted by the Korean Teachers and Education Worker’s Union (2022), 93% of teachers said they fear they may be accused of child abuse.

After reading these statistics, a few questions that may arise are: Why are parents resorting to such lengths to reprimand teachers who are only just trying to do their jobs? Why are parents reporting teachers for child abuse?

While there is no easy answer as to why parents are going to such lengths, it can be inferred that the social pressure to succeed in school is a main contributor as to why parents and students mistreat Korean teachers (Bang, 2018). Historically, in South Korea, there has been a social pressure for students to strive for academic success (BBC, 2023). In this homogenous country, academic success or lack thereof is one of the clearest ways that people can be separated from each other. The problem with this is that there are only so many people who can be the best, so what happens to those who surely aren’t? In Korea, the reprimand of not being the very best academically is that not only do students risk the likelihood of not getting into the nation’s top 3 schools, but after that, the wage gap between those who go to the top schools and land a job with a good company after graduation is almost 50% higher than those, and the majority, who do not attend the top universities, nor work with a top company (Statistics Wage Employment Income). This statistic shows that not excelling academically can lead to a substantial decrease wage amounts in S. Korea. As both parents and children want for their child or themselves to be successful, and to have a fruitful life and career, Korean parents try their best to instill academic wellbeing into their child, and the child tries their best to replicate that. However, some parents
and students take it too far, and use the social pressure to do academically well to abuse their power and Korean teachers.

It is also important to note that the child abuse claims against S. Korean teachers are typically for things that do not necessarily involve the child’s education. For example, last year, elementary school teacher Seo Wonbin heard from the police that one of his students’ parents reported him for child abuse (NPR). The parents listed five incidents as the basis of their claim, and one of which was that Seo didn't help their daughter connect to the school Wi-Fi (NPR). Seo denied this along with the other claimed incidents and was soon acquitted due to lack of proof. However, this experience left him fearful of teaching in his classroom, and as a result, Seo has been taking anti-anxiety medication since the incident occurred (NPR).

Seo is not the only teacher who experiences heightened anxiety from dealing with the severity of parent complaints, and what it means to be a teacher in a current Korean society. Many teachers experience other mental health issues in relation to their job. A survey from the Korean Teachers Union from August 2023 shows that 40% of teachers have symptoms of depression, and 16% said they have at least considered suicide (The Straits Times, 2023). These statistics show that the adversities that South Korean teachers either directly or anticipate to face are taking a serious mental toll on many of South Korea’s education leaders.

Method

Methodology: Qualitative Analysis using Inductive Approach to Driving Themes

Because the multitude of abuse and demands that Korean teachers face is an ongoing dilemma, there is no solution that has taken care of the mental and physical stress that Korean teachers are currently facing. However, there are many journals and media texts that discuss the adversities that Korean teachers face with Korean students and parents, and there are a few
journals that propose suggestions on how the mental fatigue experienced by Korean teachers can be alleviated. Thus, this paper will use qualitative analysis to further address and research the ongoing teacher adversities in South Korea and will use themes from media reports and previously published journals as a primary source. With this approach, data collection and analysis from previously published research journals and media reports occurred simultaneously.

**Methodology used for obtaining literary research.** For the literary research that was conducted for this paper, I used EBSCO to find academic journals that were published on the topic of teaching in South Korea. Additionally, as Dr. Hyeyoung Bang, my primary faculty advisor for this project, has published many journals on this field of study and has connections to people who currently live and are witnessing the social issue, I was able to receive scholarly journals that were originally written in Korean. I also used credible news sources, such as KBS News to have accurate reports of the rallies and surveys that were held by the KTU. Other Korean government official websites such as the Ministry of Education were used and cited to accurately understand current policies within Korea. For articles that were in Korean, I used my intermediate Korean skills and credible translation websites such as DeepL to ensure that my understanding of the material was accurate. The dates of all the journals and articles used for this paper are no older than being published in 2001, and all of the data and surveys on Korean teachers’ satisfaction and concerns were conducted and published in 2023. Limitations to this study was that due to time constraints, IRB human research was not conducted. This limits the emotions around the issue to what current South Korean teachers feel and experience, and the proposed research study was in hopes to gain the Korean public’s perspective on the ongoing issue.
Results and Discussions

Korean Parent-Teacher Relationship

Parents’ Involvement with Korean Teachers. Korean parents are highly involved with and want to form a relationship with their child’s educator. This is due to three different factors. The first is having limited information about their child while they are at school. In a qualitative study conducted where five Korean pre-school parents were extensively interviewed, Bang (2018) found that parents often worried about their child’s wellbeing while they were in school and felt “‘left in the dark’” in regard to how their child was doing, so this made them want to talk with their child’s teacher more frequently in order to feel reassured and reaffirmed that their child was adapting well to their school life, and that there were no worries about their pursuit of academia (Bang, 2018).

Korean parents are also concerned with if their child’s teacher has any potential disinterest with their child and believe that if their child’s teacher can provide a comprehensive description of how their child acted throughout their time in school, it proves they care and are meeting the child’s needs. If the teacher is not responsive to this, however, parents often feel like the teacher does not care for their child and does not prioritize the child’s academic success nor their feelings (Kim & Bang). Lastly, contrary to recent efforts in connecting teachers to parents more interpersonally, overprotective parents believe they still have a lack of communication with their child’s teacher. Some teachers believed that the right approach to dealing with anxious or sensitive parents was to say, “‘[your child] did well today’”. However, some parents felt like this simple response showed the teacher did not truly care about their child, with Mrs. E stating:
“Whenever I asked about my son during pick-up time, she [his teacher] replied, ‘He [my son] was fine today.’ Maybe her answer was so indifferent because she doesn’t know much about my child.”

**Unreasonable Parents’ Demands of Korean Teachers.** While the concerns listed above are valid and are things that parents worldwide worry about when sending their children to school, what is not acceptable is how certain parents handle these concerns. Parents that ask unrealistic requests of teachers and are very demanding can be categorized as being **unreasonable**. Unreasonable parents make requests such as for the teacher to make an extracurricular program for their child to attend and to switch their child’s peer group within the class. With these requests, parents are only considering things that will serve their child best in the growth and development of their academia and are not considering the entire group of students. This highlights how competitive and serious it is for students to individually succeed in school, as parents are requiring their teachers to go the extra mile just for one student, and not for the other students in the class. Therefore, the problem is not truly that the teacher is not meeting the requirements to teach the entire class, but they are not meeting the exceeding requirements that unreasonable parents are requiring of them for one or a few students. Overall, unreasonable parents believe that because their teacher is supposed to, historically, uplift their children and academically prepare them to work for the “state”, they can require and ask of the teachers to do anything to get their child to be an eventually successful, working-class adult.

Consequently, it seems that unreasonable parents do not just stop at the teacher level to get what they want. Parents have also gone directly to the director of their child’s school in order to force the teacher to address their child’s specific needs (Bang). Such instances have led to teachers being blindsided by the parents’ request, as they were not aware of the parents’ concern
until they were summoned by the director. While some parents professed that they might take this route in order to save the teacher and themselves the embarrassment of addressing the concern directly and to maintain a healthy parent-teacher relationship, teachers who have experienced this have felt even more humiliated and embarrassed by having the concern brought to their attention by the director—so much so that some teachers feel inclined to quit (Bang). Teachers who found themselves being addressed by their school’s director feel even more pressured to meet the demands of parents, because the director asserts even more pressure on them to do so (NPR, 2023). This is because directors immediately require for the teacher to meet the parent’s demand whether it was unreasonable or not, so that the child and parent can feel satisfied with the school (Lee).

Nonetheless, the above scenario is also supported by the statistics found by the Ministry of Education that were mentioned in an earlier section of this paper. Most of the cause for teachers to leave their profession is because of unreasonable demands that were requested by parents, and these concerns were most likely voiced to the director of the child’s school, or even worse, brought to the Ministry of Education’s attention. And as these are humiliating instances, current day teachers feel like they have no choice but to quit or carry out even more severe actions, such as suicide. Lastly, as the number of Korean teachers who leave their schools is increasing steadily each year, along with industry-starting teacher retention is becoming lower, this shows that dealing with unreasonable parents has increased and added stressors onto S. Korean teachers.

**Korean Student-Teacher Relationships**

*Students Violating Teacher Rights.* While parent complaints and demands are the main source of stress that teachers face, S. Korean teachers also have come forward in recent years to
share their stories with how their students have also bullied or harassed them in and outside of the classroom. Such events have been illustrated by the following incidents listed by Choi et. al (2018):

“In 2015, a video of students in a classroom at Mo High School in Gyeonggi-do, hitting and cursing a teacher standing with a broomstick was broadcast on the [news], which caused a huge social ripple. In May 2016, the sexual assault of a female teacher on the island village of Sinnan in Jeollanam-do, South Korea, shocked the society. This was a case that could have easily been swept under the rug due to the isolated nature of the area and the fact that it was a remote island with little access to outsiders. Shortly thereafter, in August 2016, a high school in Cheorwon, Gangwon-do, South Korea, [a teacher] was attacked by a parent who came to the school and threatened the vice principal with a weapon. Before the shock of these media reports had worn off, another shocking violation of school authority occurred. In Daejeon, a group of 10 males showcased inappropriate sexual behavior towards their female teacher, and as a result, the teacher was ordered to stop teaching the class” (Choi et al., p. 168).

More recent additions to these problems are a reported sixth grade student punching their teacher in front of their class (The Korea Herald, 2023), and a sexual harassment message sent by a teenage boy to his high school teacher (Koreaboo, 2023). It can be theorized that the increase of abuse of teachers by students has been due to the potential loopholes that the updated Child Welfare Act presents to the Korean public, which halts teachers from standing up for themselves after being abused by students, but also, with the fear of being accused of child abuse on very loose claims, this makes a complex situation for where even if the teacher was wronged
by parents and-or students, they are not able to advocate for themselves due to fear of being written up under false child abuse tenses.

**Bullying in Classroom.** In terms of why students are antagonizing teachers, there needs to be more research done, as there is no clear answer to this as well. However, the current student-to-student bullying issue in South Korean schools can and should be considered while discussing this matter. In fact, in a study done with 1,756 middle school students, 40% admitted to participating in bullying of some kind towards their peers (Hong et al., 2013).

In an extensive literary study conducted and led by Hong et al., Korean adolescents’ engagement in bullying can be attributed to multiple factors such as their socioeconomic background, and most notably, their relationship with their parents (Hong et al.). Some Korean students may face authoritative parenting and family conflict at home, and there is an association between those who have experienced intensely negative family environment and an increased risk of bullying, being bullied, and peer violence (Hong et al.). Interestingly, at the time that this literary review was written, the researchers felt as though a major problem with peer bullying in schools was that teachers were not taking enough preventative actions to decrease peer victimization in their classrooms (Hong et al.). They noted that teachers do not regard bullying as a “serious social issue”, and thus do not take steps to decrease peer conflict within their classroom (Hong et al.).

As this article was published nearly 11 years ago, this is a direct contrast to what current South Korean teachers face. It seems that current teachers can see the severity of bullying within their schools, but they are having trouble stopping the issue from occurring in their classes because of the updated Child Welfare Act, and the heightened potential to be accused of child abuse by Korean parents. In fact, one of the main stressors of Teacher A from Seoi Elementary
School is the ‘pencil incident’ (Jang, 2023). This refers to a peer conflict that happened on July 12, 2023, a week before Teacher A died by suicide (Jang). According to the investigation conducted by the Ministry of Education and the Seoul Metropolitan Office, one student within the teacher’s class used a pencil to stab another student’s book bag. The student whose book bag was stabbed tried to stop the perpetrator of the incident and ended up with a bruise on their head as a result of the scuffle (BBC). Once hearing about this incident, parents of Teacher A’s class continuously called Teacher A’s cell phone (Kim & Kang, 2023). Teacher A also struggled with ceasing the actions of this bully and another child who used scissors and screamed to cause disruptions in the class (Jang).

For this incident, Teacher A called the mother of the student to report the issue, and in a statement collected by the Ministry of Education, the mother of child was reported to have said “‘Why [would] he do this at school if he would not do it at home?’, indicating that the mother did not believe their child’s action in school (Jang). Teacher A’s colleague also reported to the Seoul Teachers Union that Teacher A allegedly was told they were not “qualified to be a teacher” after the incident occurred (Kim & Kang). This example shows how even when teachers try to intervene in bullying that occurs in the class, they are not supported by parents nor their school, which increases stress on the teachers. A similar incident happened with Mr. Kim, the 60-year-old teacher who died by suicide on September 3rd of last year (KBS News, 2023). It was reported that while Mr. Kim was away, a student within his physical education class was injured. As a result, the parents of the child filed a police report against Mr. Kim, which his family highlights, was a great stressor to him while he was alive (KBS News). Mr. Kim also listed in his suicide note, that he was severely struggling with the demands and pressure placed on him by parents (KBS News). These incidents show that even when Korean teachers try their best to meet
parent demands and to control peer conflict within the classroom, they are still met with a continuous cycle of immense pressure and questioning from parents.

**How the S. Korean Education System Can Change.** Overall, the relationship between parents, students, and teachers can be improved if the mindset over Korean education is shifted. This is because, as detailed throughout this paper, a lot of mental stress from all three parties is attributed to trying to fit the very high Korean education standards. Trying to meet these high expectations is stressful for all parties involved. Fortunately, recent research of Western educational philosophies proposes a way for parents to break out of the mold of forcing their children to learn overtime while still equally caring for their child’s overall career wellbeing by allowing parents to adopt an ideology that sets more realistic goals for their children (Bang & Kim).

Kim and Bang’s research (2017) showed that there are four different types of parental support towards their children’s education. It should be noted that one party, labeled as study supremacists, earned a middle-class monthly income, and were the parental type who were the most likely to advocate for their child to focus on studying and to provide the monetary means for their child to improve their studies (i.e- attending hagwons which are Korean private study institutions). However, the other three types of parents were seen to have a different perspective towards their child’s educational aspirations. For example, parents who had $4000-$5000 monthly income were autonomy supporters, and those who were less likely to have higher education, had lower monthly wages, and still provided extracurricular resources to their children were labeled as value enthusiasts. Interestingly, there are a lot of similarities between the autonomy supporter and the value enthusiast. Autonomy supporters stated that they would rather
let their children focus on extracurriculars that they enjoy and that build their natural talents, than to force them to study (Kim & Bang). Many of the autonomy supporters had mindsets such as:

“‘Kids know what they like and what they are good at. If parents force them to do something they don’t like, they will not take responsibility’”, and “‘Choosing a job is a lifetime commitment. Children should choose what they enjoy’” (Kim & Bang).

Likewise, value enthusiasts were found to focus more on the development of their child’s character instead of their study habits, but still worried about their child’s future employment opportunities and wished for them to have a stable career. Value enthusiasts were also found to have comments such as:

“‘Even if we are poor, we didn’t raise kids with a poor mind. We have never forced our kids to get good grades. Conversation and communication are more important’. ‘Character and value education is more important than a good grade’. ‘Children should enjoy their school years, which will last forever in their lives’” (Kim & Bang).

The last type of parent that was considered was the apologetic supporters. These were parents who, just like value enthusiasts, belonged to a low SES (socioeconomic status), but unlike value enthusiasts they were not able to monetarily support their child’s academics nor enjoyed endeavors. The lack of ability to fund their child’s interest and academic career heavily weighs on this set of parents, but they still want their child to be successful and have a career that was stable and met realistic expectations. These parents acknowledge that because they do not have the means to put their children in hagwon environments, their child might face barriers to their striving of academic success, but they still want their child to be happy and a respected member of society. Apologetic supports were found to comment:
“Due to the high expense, I want my kids to go to a reasonably priced national university’. ‘Both parents’ economic ability and their educational enthusiasm together are important factors that influence kids’ success nowadays. It’s hard to move up from lower SES’”.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that both autonomy and value enthusiasts were prescribed to identify the cooling-out approach, which is a perspective where one lowers their expectations in order to set realistic goals based on a person’s demographic (Kim & Bang). These two sets of parents tended to prioritize their child’s talents, happiness, and character rather than worry about their test scores. Apologetic supporters were seen to embody the cooling-down approach- a technique refers to redefining one’s value of self (Kim & Bang). Furthermore, while these three sets of parents fell under different approaches to education, it is important to note that these sets of parents still demonstrated that they cared about their child’s career wellbeing and their status in society, just as much as study supremacists. Therefore, these results show that it is possible for Korean parents to have different approaches to their educational aspirations for their children, and perhaps, more research can be done to support that the Korean children of cooling-down and cooling-out enthusiasts are still reputable and important members of Korean societies, as study supremacists motivation for using overheating techniques to encourage their child to study is due to their worry that their child will not be successful or a confident individual without doing well in school, especially before college.

In addition to altering the perspective on the value of education, there needs to be more regulations on communication between parents, students, and teachers, especially during after-school hours. This is because while communication between parents-and-teachers and students-and-teachers seem to be appreciated and important to building a trusting relationship between parents and teachers, overprotective and unreasonable parent’s abuse of this has contributed a
great amount to the distress of teachers. Therefore, perhaps instead of the ability to connect to teacher’s being entirely revoked, more laws should be passed to support the regulation and management of chat and calling services in order to preserve the Korean teacher’s mental stability and endurance with dealing with parental and student concerns.

It is also important to ensure that while children’s human rights are upheld within the classroom, reform of teacher’s rights should be a priority as well, and there should be a balance between upholding both teacher rights and student rights within the classroom. In the past, it has been thought that if student rights are maintained, then teacher’s rights are lessened and vice versa; yet recent studies show that when students were treated with more autonomy in the classroom, they have had more respect for their teachers (Choi et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important for both the human rights of teachers and students to be upheld and respected by all members of Korean society, so that both parties can found a teacher-student relationship that allows for the teachers to feel motivated to pour into their students so they can become independent leaders of the future.

There is also a growing interest in the development and the attendance of Korean alternative schools programs which provide Korean students with opportunities to explore and develop their creativity by giving students the chance to job shadow, participate in local community meetings, and develop life skills that will be beneficial to their chosen job field (Haja Center, 2024). Utilization of these programs allow for more creative and freeing lesson plans, which may also function relieve teachers from the modern educational standards and expectations. Currently, there are about 1,800 alternative program centers throughout Korea, and this is due to a plan that the Korean Ministry of Education has begun to implement to get ahead of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Ministry of Education, 2024). The Fourth Industrial
Revolution is said to bring about critical thinking, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and creativity, thus being a high achieving student is no longer enough to make a candidate for a job to stick out (Lee et al., 2023). Therefore, the Korean Ministry of Education has introduced the ‘2nd Basic Plan of Education 2020-2024’ to Korean society, in hopes to increase children’s playtime so that it can be on the same level of their time spent with academia (Lee et al.). This is because, as observed by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry Research, the top 100 companies in Korea look for creativity as a top requirement for contenders, which is not something that is currently taught within most Korean schools (Ministry of Education, 2010). This shows that the current obsession with driving students and teachers to high standards for the betterment of Korean youth so that they can get a job is no longer the battle to face, and there is a need to adapt more creative and freeing lesson plans, which may also function to relieve teachers from the historically high-standard academic curriculums and expectations.

Nonetheless, while it is encouraging to see that the Korean Ministry of Education has been striving to acknowledge the lack of playtime and creativity within the Korean school system and the pressures that students, parents, and teachers face, these proposed changes need to happen at a faster rate in order to match the exceeding growth of teacher dissatisfaction and suicide rates. If all or most public schools implemented more efforts towards lessening the presumed beliefs around academia and showed proof that Korean citizens who learned from a more creative and critical thinking program are still successful and confident members of society, then the public perception about academia may change; and this may help to alleviate some of the stress that teachers face. Therefore, in order to decrease the growing epidemic of teacher suicides, these government proposed reforms should continue to be implemented as soon as possible.
Conclusion

The relationships between South Korean teachers, students, and parents are influenced by the historical, political, and social aspects that has risen with the growth of S. Korea’s education system post-Korean war (Choi et al; Lee; Synott). The high academic and societal pressures placed on Korean students to succeed in school is a modern-day struggle, and S. Korean teachers have become increasingly overwhelmed with handling parent and student demands due to an update of the Korean Child Welfare Act in 2014 (Lee). In the years after this act was updated, Korean teachers have increasingly faced claims of child abuse from parents either for reprimanding students who were initially combative in class, or for denying parents’ request for after school extracurricular services for their child only (Bang). S. Korean teachers also deal with overprotective or unreasonable parents who abuse the open-communication that teachers have in place by continuously contacting teachers after-school hours through calls or texts (Choi et al.).

It is because teachers are overwhelmed with meeting student and teacher demand that there has been a total of 144 reported teachers who have died by suicide within the past decade (The Korea Herald). Statistical data collected by the Ministry of Education shows that 93% of S. Korean teachers fear being accused of child abuse, which shows that this is a prevalent issue in S. Korean society (Korean Teachers and Education Worker’s Union, 2022). Regulation of a parent’s ability to report a teacher of child abuse; regulation of open communication between teachers, parents, and students; different parental approaches to a student’s educational goals; and the implementation of educational plans to increase creativity within the classroom are plausible solutions that can help to alleviate the adversities that South Korean teachers currently face.
**Future Implications and Research**

TEDxBGSU. In order to share the literary research that I have collected, I presented at the TEDxBGSU event held on March 21st, 2024. My goal with partaking in this event was to share my knowledge of the ongoing issue in Korea with BGSU faculty and students, along with other community and public members who attended the event either in person or watched online. I prepared to speak at this event by engaging in intensive literary research beginning in the Fall of 2023. I also met with multiple advisors, all of whom are experts in either Korean or Asian Studies, in order to ensure that my research process was scholarly and academically founded. In addition to this, I collaborated with BGSU’s Ray Marvin Center to ensure that my talk was appropriate for the occasion. Becoming a TEDx speaker further ignited my passion towards sharing the research that this paper is rooted in to the local communities that I am apart of. I plan to continue to share my knowledge on the topic of S. Korean teacher, student, and parent relationships by continuing to share my paper and TED Talk with the local and global public, and by continuing to have conversations with BGSU faculty, student, and community members that are interested in this topic. If I ever have the chance to conduct further research on this issue, I would continue to explore the historical, social, and political aspects of the education system in S. Korea.
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