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Title: Accepting and Accommodating Multicultural Families in Korea: Assessment of Public Policies and Educational System

Abstract:

Korea has recently been described as a multicultural society by its media. As of 2010, the population of other ethnic groups within Korea is estimated to be more than 1.1 million, accounting for nearly 2.3 percent of registered Korean residents. Such exponential growth in the foreign population is radically changing the Korean social demographic. For over 5,000 years, Korea has maintained an ethnocentric, “pure-blood” tradition but is currently undergoing a transformation into a “mixed-blood,” multicultural society. For example, the number of migrant workers alone in Korea is predicted to reach five million by 2030. One urgent need in preparing for this significant social change is to develop an educational system that will better accommodate a multicultural population.

Currently, the concept of multicultural education in Korea is based on the principle of mutual equality but not on the idea of learning about other cultures or accepting minorities. In order to better understand the situation facing multicultural families in Korea and to gauge the efficacy of current policy recommendations, this paper examines the background of the multicultural families situated in Korea, assesses the available support services for these families, and evaluates the current public education system and services accommodating multicultural students.

Several significant findings are discussed in the following paper. First, and perhaps most critical, is the need for a clearer concept of multicultural education to be incorporated into all public policies addressing families, one that acknowledges the uniqueness of various cultures while helping multicultural families adapt to Korean society rather than forcing them to assimilate into the cultural majority. Second, multicultural education should not only be targeted to minorities but should also be incorporated at large into mainstream public education in Korea in order to encourage acceptance of diversity. Third, teachers and school administrators must be trained to accommodate and embrace a diverse student population, since the perspectives – communicated both verbally and non-verbally – of teachers and school administrators can profoundly influence students, and thus the success or failure of novel diversity initiatives. A final important recommendation is that strategic, broad-reaching programs must be developed that emphasize the advantages of multicultural families and education in creating a stronger Korea.