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# Investigating Adult Education for Immigrants in South Korea

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**Abstract:** This session (a) describes current practices in adult education for immigrants in South Korea and (b) seeks to collaboratively develop a research agenda for those interested in investigating the role of adult education research in supporting the individual and societal adaptations necessary for supporting multiculturalism in a society once characterized by homogeneity of cultural and strong social cohesion.

## Background: Immigrants in South Korea

The Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) is a country that has recently experienced rapid changes in demographics due to immigrant populations. There are approximately 1.5 million foreigners residing in South Korea as of 2013 and this number is nearly 3% of the South Korean population. Among these newcomers, with respect to size, residential periods, and citizenship issues, the populations that draw the South Korean government's attention are mainly marriage-immigrants and foreign workers.

A majority of the immigrant population are foreign workers, in particular non-professional workers. There were 479,426 foreigners working in South Korea and holding non-professional working visas and 99% of them were from Asian countries: China (Korean-Chinese, 45.6%), Vietnam (11.8%), Indonesia (5.9%), Uzbekistan (5.1%), China (Chinese, 4.2%), Cambodia (4.0%), Sri Lanka (3.9%), Thailand (3.9%), the Philippines (3.8%), and Nepal (3.3%). Because the government has treated them as temporary workers, the government has paid less attention to building a supportive system for them, such as Korean language programs and social integration programs.

The next largest increasing foreign population is marriage-immigrants, particularly marriage-immigrant women from Asian countries. International marriages between Asian women and Korean men increased dramatically during the 1990s, largely at the instigation of the Unification Church, also known as the Moonies. At that time, more marriage-immigrants were from Japan and the Philippines, countries where the Unification Church had influence. Then, in the 2000s, local governments in rural areas, which faced a significant decrease in younger populations and had many unmarried bachelors, began building networks with international marriage agencies and encouraged marriages with "mail-order brides", resulting in many Chinese and Vietnamese wives. Since 2002, the number of marriage-immigrants had increased by more than 28% each year until 2007. International marriages comprise 11% of the total number of marriages in South Korea.

## Korea Immigration and Integration Program

The Korean government introduced an adult education program for immigrants, named *Korea Immigration and Integration Program* (KIIP), in order to respond to the needs for more systemic approaches to foreigners and immigration. The program intends to elevate immigrants' Korean language abilities and to provide a better understanding of Korean society; as a result, it

is hoped that immigrants will be more smoothly integrated into Korean society. The program is not mandatory for all immigrants; however, given the benefits of the completion of the program (e.g., exemption of a naturalization written test and an interview when they apply for naturalization), many immigrants choose to participate. The program consists of five Korean language levels and, at the final level, a course in *Understanding Korean Society*. The government also established a credentialing program in multiculturalism for instructors; those who intend to teach the final level course at KIIP must complete this accreditation program or meet alternative eligibility requirements in addition to their Korean Teaching Certificate that is required to teach any levels of Korean language courses at KIIP, and they must be registered as multicultural instructors with the Korea Immigration Service.

### **Korean Contexts Related to Immigrants**

South Korea is traditionally regarded as ethnically homogeneous by Koreans. In other words, Korean nationality and Korean ethnicity are regarded as uniform and blood-based ethnic national identity. Korean ethnic nationalism or collective oneness has been considered a significant factor in the development of modern Korean society. Although racial homogeneity may no longer be true in South Korea due to increasing numbers of immigrants and foreigners, the majority of Koreans' beliefs and social norms have not yet been transformed accordingly.

### **Adult Education Research and Immigrant Education**

Increased immigration and the institutionalization of cultural and multicultural training for both learners and teachers open many opportunities for adult education research. Examples include:

1. To what extent are programs for immigrants consistent with the best thinking with respect to adult learning, adaptation, and acculturation?
2. To what extent do instructional materials and approaches reflect best practices with respect to multicultural education in a modern democracy?
3. To what extent does instructor training in cultural and multicultural education foster respect for both Korean culture and the home cultures of immigrants?
4. How do immigrants view the programs and to what extent does class participation affect out-of-school behaviors and the self-efficacy of learners.

In this session, we would like to broadly discuss both these specific questions and other ideas that might occur to colleagues as we work together to set a research agenda for future studies.