Understanding the professional identity of overseas Korean schoolteachers: The case of Korean transnational educators in one school in Southeast Asia

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The professional identity of overseas Korean educators has hitherto not been studied. This article examines the professional identity of Korean teachers working in a Korean school in Southeast Asia. Through a qualitative case study exploring the teachers' experiences, challenges faced and perceptions of their roles as cultural ambassadors, the study demonstrates how teaching in an overseas Korean school enhances the teachers' sense of responsibility, commitment and professional development. Data was analysed through the lens of ecological systems theory. Findings indicate that personal factors, including teacher agency, flexible attitudes and external support, are crucial for teachers' meaningful overseas teaching and sense of professional fulfilment.

Keywords: professional identity; dispatched teacher; overseas Korean school; case study; ecological perspective

INTRODUCTION

The right to receive a Korean education is guaranteed by the Act on *Educational Support for Overseas Korean Nationals* for an increasing number of Koreans living abroad (Statistics Korea, 2023). However, 1,400 Korean teachers working at 34 overseas Korean schools in 16 countries face challenges in delivering this education, especially in unfamiliar environments (Lee et al., 2016). For one, they must consider overseas students' and parents' unique educational needs, which often differ from those in Korea.

Moreover, teachers' global employment experience affects their professional identity (Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Although considerable research has been devoted to teachers' professionalism and professional identity in general, less attention has been paid to the experiences of overseas Korean schoolteachers. Teachers' teaching experiences affect their job consciousness, job satisfaction and stress (Tubre & Collins, 2000), which in turn affects their quality of teaching and learning. To examine this phenomenon in-depth, we developed a qualitative study to examine overseas Korean teachers' experiences, teaching environment, and professional identity formation.

Our study explores the multi-layered context surrounding overseas Korean teachers and how they conduct their educational activities. It aims to understand the meaning and context of their teaching experiences and professional identity, including their perception of their roles, which previous studies have not covered. Moreover, while this study examines Korean teachers, understanding the professional identity of educators in transnational contexts has broader implications for overseas educators in other settings, including how diverse teacher identities intersect with factors such as professional training, personal qualities and cultural adaptation to the local and home settings, which has implications for equity and quality education in global and local contexts (Hauerwas et al., 2017). Specifically, the study focuses on one overseas Korean school in Southeast Asia. The guiding research questions for the study are:

1. How has teaching in an overseas Korean school shaped teachers' current professional identity?
2. What are the ecological variables affecting the professional identity of overseas Korean schoolteachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional identity is complex, dynamic and constantly changing. It is a concept derived from career identity (Edwards & Burns, 2016). Career identity is constructed through vocational exploration and commitment (Porfeli et al., 2011). For career identity to be recognised as professional identity, the job must be recognised as a profession. Therefore, studies on the professional identities of various professionals working in different environments have been conducted (Cruess et al., 2016). We review many of these below.

Teachers' professional identity

The view of teaching as a profession has changed with the times. In the past, teachers were considered professionals who conveyed content knowledge about subjects (Schulman, 1986). Since the 1980s, many countries have promoted neoliberal education reforms, including decentralisation, competition and efficiency (Macam, 2022; Verger et al., 2013). This has led to teachers playing a reduced role as professionals and instead as implementers of standardised curricula, which is related to teachers' de-professionalisation in the past 40 years (Frostenson, 2015).

However, a different perspective sees teachers as active professionals who reorganise the curriculum according to the situation and review lesson plans, refining education in this process (Craig & Ross, 2008). Among the elements of a teacher's professionalism, skill is methodical knowledge that enables the practice of education, and disposition is an inner aspect of an individual (NCATE, 2001). In addition, professional identity emphasises not only the function of professionals but also the ethical aspects (Hamilton, 2012). Moreover, as agents of educational change, teachers enhance their professionalism by actively reflecting on their teaching practices (Pantić, 2015; Tarosa, 2024).

Teachers' professional identity is formed when teachers answer the following questions: 'Who am I?', 'What am I doing in this classroom?' and 'Who do I want to be?' (Mockler, 2011; Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding teachers' professional identity is important because it relates to how teachers perceive their roles, goals and work commitments. Furthermore, a teacher's identity is a key factor in determining what and how the teacher will

teach, and it is closely related to the teacher's practices (Lunenberg et al., 2007). Teachers' identity is also associated with the teachers' abilities (Day et al., 2005), job satisfaction and self-esteem (Beijaard et al., 2000).

In addition, teacher identity is shaped and reshaped by their previous experiences as students and preservice teachers. When reflecting upon their early experiences, many teachers attempt to replicate in the classroom the positive experiences they had in education when they were students and early-career teachers. This indicates 'the powerful interaction between personal histories and the contextual influences of the workplace' (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 230). The same goes for dispatched teachers who travel abroad to experience teaching in a new country and, in turn, enhance their teaching capacities and agency through overseas experience (Rosenfeld et al., 2022).

Previous studies have also revealed that teachers' professional identity relates to their roles concerning students, curriculum and their lives in and out of school (Beijaard et al., 2004; Reeves, 2018). Teachers are cultural beings influenced by their social and cultural contexts, broadly affected by societal culture and, more narrowly, by community influences, such as school and classroom culture (Langley et al., 2014). In other words, teachers' educational beliefs and identity are formed through interaction with society, and the social and cultural environment then influences teachers' identity formation, which is an important foundation for understanding teachers as active professionals today.

Additionally, with the increase in teacher mobility in recent decades (Toraman et al., 2020), studies on teachers' experiences and identities related to educator international mobility have been conducted. According to this trend, overseas and international schools provide students from various countries with different education tailored to the local culture and globalisation trend (e.g., see Santos, 2020, for a case from Hong Kong; and Gillies, 2001, for a discussion of American international schools around the world). Since mobile educators face a rapid change in their teaching environment (Bailey, 2015), the extant literature points out that agency and international learning experiences play a crucial role in shaping a teacher's professional identity (Armour et al., 2017; Colliander, 2018). This brings us to Korean overseas schools.

Education for overseas Koreans

In 2023, the global population of overseas Koreans was approximately 7.08 million, accounting for about 14% of the total Korean population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Recognising the importance of developing global human resources, the Korean Ministry of Education emphasised the need to train and educate these seven million overseas Koreans to foster international talent in 2010.

Overseas Korean schools are educational institutions established outside Korea to provide education based on Korea's elementary and secondary curriculum. With approval from the Ministry of Education, these schools operate under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to educate overseas Korean nationals (*Act on Consular Assistance of Protecting Overseas Korean Nationals*, 2020). As stated earlier, there are 34 overseas Korean schools in 16 countries. The number of enrolled students is approximately 13,580. Figure 1 shows the locations of these schools; most are located in East and Southeast Asia. The curriculum of each school mirrors Korea's domestic curriculum while also reflecting the characteristics of the host country and the demand for learning the local language (Overseas Education Institution Portal, n.d.).

**Figure 1: Distribution map of overseas Korean schools**

Source: Authors

There has been research on education for overseas Korean students focusing on students' educational experiences, curriculum and research on principals and teachers. Choi and Jo's (2015) study found that education in overseas Korean schools positively impacts students' academic achievement and college adaptation. Other studies suggest that the curriculum in these schools should be supplemented with aspects such as career education and regional understanding (Chang, 2018; Jang, 2020). Research on teachers in overseas Korean schools also highlights challenges in providing high-quality education due to limited resources (Youn & Chung, 2013). Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the need to tailor education to the unique characteristics of students and regional contexts (Song, 2022).

Theoretical framework: Ecological perspective

Since teacher identity changes are multidimensional and dynamic, researchers have conducted studies about teacher identity in different settings, suggesting the importance of an ecological approach to teacher identity. In this sense, the ecological perspective is concerned with verifying the complementarity of humans and the environment and considering humans and the environment as interdependent. It emphasises the appropriateness of the fit between individuals and the environment, the mutual exchange between them and factors that support or hinder this exchange (Germain, 1973). Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between concepts in Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner& Morris, 2006) ecological system theory, which highlights the need for insight into how the ecological environment surrounding the individual constitutes a holistic intersection of varying (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-system) contexts.

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory
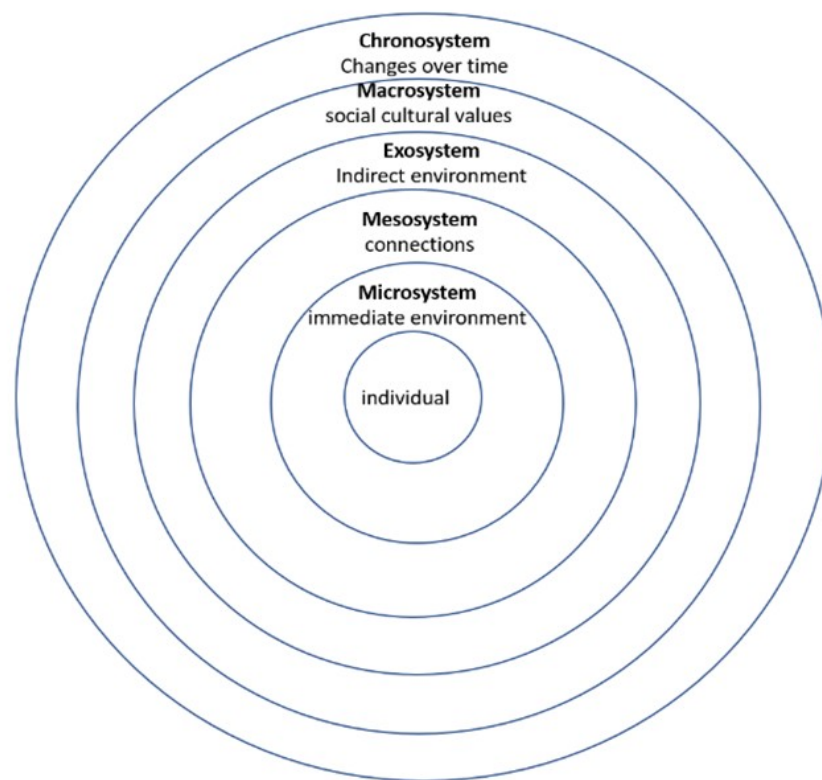
Source: Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* **(6th ed., pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**

From the perspective of exploring the relationship between individuals and the environment to better understand human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), studies dealing with teacher development have also been conducted from this ecological perspective (Hofstadler et al., 2020; Wu & Liu, 2024). Therefore, we have adopted the ecological systems model to comprehensively examine overseas Korean teachers' professional development. This model will be further illustrated and applied in the findings and discussion sections.

METHODOLOGY

Since this study aimed to understand the development of overseas Korean schoolteachers' professional identity and the complex contexts that affect educators' identity formation, an in-depth qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research provides an understanding of complex problems and situations (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Specifically, we conducted a case study to focus on schoolteachers' perceptions of their identity development and the challenges they faced working at an overseas Korean school.

A case study is a research methodology that explores a particular case of a phenomenon based on various data, such as interviews and observations, to enable a deep understanding of the case within its naturalistic boundaries (Yin, 2009). The case in this study is Korean overseas schoolteachers' professional identity development at one school in Southeast Asia. Data was collected through interviews with four teachers from the school, along with document analysis of the research participants' teaching materials, the school's website content and research reports on overseas Korean schools.

According to Pugh (2013), people's motivation and professional development can be approached through in-depth interviews. The interviews in this study were conducted in Korean and were semi-structured. They were conducted twice per participant for an average of 51 minutes per session to explore the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and teaching experiences. The interviews were conducted through Zoom. Open-ended questions were used so as not to confine the responses of the research participants. The first author, who conducted the interviews, used a flexible semi-structured approach, allowing her to adjust the order of questions in response to the participant's answers.

Interview questions focused on professional self-reflection, including becoming an overseas Korean schoolteacher, job satisfaction, difficulties, opportunities and conflicts, and strategies to overcome the challenges (see Appendix A). In addition, documents were used as supplementary data to further explain phenomena beyond the in-depth interviews. To this end, teaching materials, school websites and research reports on overseas Korean schools were collected and analysed. Together, this data supported methodological triangulation for a deep analysis of the relationship between the teacher's personal and professional experiences and the development of their teacher identity in the educational context of the study (Wenger, 1998).

Context, participants and selection criteria

The teachers who participated in this study worked at P School (a pseudonym used to conceal the school and participants' identities). P School is an official overseas Korean school approved by the Korean Ministry of Education and the local Education Bureau. It is a small school—offering elementary education—with 3-15 students per grade and a total student population of less than 50 students. There were few teachers in the school, and the majority (four) agreed to participate in this study. Since rapport between the interviewer and interviewees positively impacts data quality (Horsfall et al., 2021), the study targeted teachers from P School with whom the first author had established rapport. The selection criteria included being a current teacher in an overseas Korean school for at least one year at the time of the study. It was also critical that the educators had significant experience teaching in Korean schools in Korea prior to their overseas experience. This supported a deeper examination of the role of dispatched teachers' overseas experiences in further developing their professional identities.

The researchers were able to establish trust and better comprehend the teachers' experiences because the first author had already developed rapport—through educational professional development in Korea—with one of the teachers from P School before the study. This teacher served as a gatekeeper to introduce the first author to the other participants. Their ages, teaching careers, levels of education and years of teaching experience were diverse. As it was a small school, the sample represented the school at large. Table 1 provides further details.

Table 1: List of research participants

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Education level	Teaching Experience (years)	Teaching in an overseas Korean school (years)
1	M	30-39	MA	15	1.5
2	F	50-59	MA	27	2.5
3	F	40-49	MA	19	1.5
4	M	30-39	BA	14	1.5

Analysis

Following the transcription of the interview files, data was analysed through qualitative thematic analysis for emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the transcripts were read multiple times to attain familiarisation with the data. Second, codes were identified. Third, similar codes were combined into categories, and then similar categories were combined to form the themes (Merriam, 2009). Once initial themes were derived, inconsistencies between interpretations were discussed and transcripts were re-read to check again whether the themes reflected the content and voices of the participants (a coding example is presented in Table 2 with further examples in Appendix B). Finally, the themes were shared with participants for member-checking to confirm the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). The member-checking and methodological triangulation strengthened the confirmability and dependability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 2. Example of interview content coding results

Themes	Categories	Codes
Responsibility for students' socialisation	Cultivating Korean identity	·Focusing on Korean and math classes ·The priority of my role is Korean education ·The priority of my role is teaching Korean culture ·A lot of time for preparation for Korean classes
	Education for understanding local culture	·Students are living in this country, not Korea ·Students should mingle with the local people ·Understanding the language and culture of this country, which are essential for living there.

Ethics

To protect participants from harm, the researchers received Institutional Review Board[1] approval before commencing the study. During data collection, the researchers ensured informed voluntary consent, confidentiality, anonymity and beneficence. They provided detailed information about the study's purpose, process, and measures to protect participants' rights and wellbeing. In addition, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, participants' identities were strictly protected in the writing of the report, and results were shared with participants to ensure they benefitted from the research.

FINDINGS

Teachers who participated in this research talked about their experiences, reasons for applying to overseas Korean schools, and life as an educator at P School. Since professional identity encompasses all the teacher's knowledge, practices, and dispositions, the experiences of the participants related to the teacher's application and creation of knowledge and practices were included. To answer the first research question, this section presents the professional identities of overseas Korean schoolteachers in three categories: responsibility for students' socialisation, commitment to work and advancement as a teacher. The second research question is addressed in the final part of this section, which describes the contexts in which teachers form their professional identities.

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[1] Seoul National University IRB No. 2307/004-013.

Responsibility for students' socialisation

Teachers aimed to help students socialise effectively, enabling them to interact with diverse people while maintaining their Korean identity. 'Socialisation' is a learning and social development process in which individuals interact with their surroundings (Coakley, 2017). P School students needed to adapt and thrive in both the Korean community and the local community. Thus, teachers focused on two aspects of socialisation: fostering a Korean identity and adapting to the local community.

Teachers at P School put significant effort into teaching Korean language and culture. Participant 1 explained, 'I try to teach students a lot about folk games that are popular in Korea'. Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned kimchi-making activities as part of experiencing Korean culture. Teachers also used their experience and expertise to implement educational methods for teaching Korean. For instance, Participant 1 employed peer teaching methods, Participant 3 emphasised reading education, and Participant 4 used quiz-solving activities to enhance students' Korean skills. Recognising that students raised in a bilingual environment might struggle with Korean, teachers tailored their approaches to improve students' language proficiency.

The educational goal of P School is to cultivate students' Korean identity while also fostering open-minded individuals who understand and appreciate diverse cultures. Teachers at P School did not view these two goals as conflicting; instead, they guided students to understand and engage with the local culture through the lens of their Korean identity. They emphasised the importance of educational support to help students comprehend the community and country in which they live, whether in Korea or elsewhere. For instance, Participant 2 mentioned that teachers invited students from other local schools to visit P School, providing opportunities for the Korean students to familiarise themselves with the local culture and interact with local peers through activities like cooking and playing together. Participant 4 also highlighted that the teachers organised world culture festivals at the school to encourage open attitudes toward various cultures.

Education about the community and local language was also conducted to support better integration locally. According to the school website, P School conducts the 'understanding my hometown' activity as part of cultural diversity education. Here, the phrase 'my hometown' refers to the area where students currently live outside of Korea, where they grow up immersed in the community and learn about its history, language and culture. Education that emphasises local languages and adapts to the local community is a common part of the curriculum, not only in P School but also in other overseas Korean schools. This indicates that the education of overseas Korean schools is playing a role in helping students adapt to the local community, and P schoolteachers agreed with this education policy.

Commitment to work

P School is small, requiring each person to handle numerous responsibilities. Despite this, teachers at P School, selected as dispatched teachers, demonstrated a strong willingness to do whatever was necessary for their students. Unlike public schoolteachers in Korea, who must transfer to a different school within the province every five years, teachers dispatched to overseas Korean schools undergo a rigorous selection process involving three rounds of tests. In other words, the research participants feel a strong sense of pride and mission because they

applied directly and were selected through a rigorous screening process to work at this school rather than being assigned through a local rotation system.

Unlike Korea's educational system, which separates after-school activity instructors from regular class teachers, P School teachers are responsible for regular classes and after-school activities due to manpower shortages. For example, all students at P School participate in after-school activities, and all teachers must guide these activities after regular class hours. Participant 3 described this effort as follows:

> It's hard for everyone . . . it's hard to find instructors, and we just have to do it [after-school activities] ourselves. Teachers who come here are all talented and willing to do it [after-school activities] if the school situation calls for it. Even though it's hard, we just do it.

Participant 4 added that he had no complaints about the many tasks because he chose to apply to P School, fully aware of the school's situation. Having passed the examination and interview, he dedicated himself to his job with a sense of mission and responsibility. In addition, participants responded that their role is to guide students, ultimately to promote students' growth and happiness and that this idea is the same as when they were teaching in Korea. However, considering the learning environment at P School with insufficient learning materials and extracurricular opportunities outside of school, teachers showed their willingness to provide various experiences and academic guidance. Participant 2 thought that when teaching students locally, there are cases where students experience something for the first time in their lives at school, and through this, students learn. For example, while students in Korea can learn arts, sports, and other studies through private tutoring outside of school, students in the local context of this study do not have that option. Therefore, the teachers in P School did their best to provide these activities at school.

This demonstrates the teachers' dedication to providing high-quality tuition to their students in a context where many students cannot receive extra assistance, such as private tutoring outside of school. In Korea, these students would go to *hagwons* (private tutoring firms), which almost all youth attend in Korea, but this isn't available in the country of this study. Thus, the P School teachers provided this service. To this end, participants emphasised that providing various experiences to students is important. They stressed the importance of providing high-quality education to students beyond academic guidance and often integrated these with the existing curriculum. For example, Participant 4, who specialised in physical education, offered activities that students might not easily encounter locally. He used his expertise to introduce students to new experiences.

The school, which had been open for less than five years, faced a period of inactivity due to Covid-19. In this challenging situation, the research participants expressed that, despite the burden of setting precedents in their educational activities, they engaged in various initiatives through active interactions with colleagues, demonstrating a shared sense of responsibility. Participant 3 described her colleagues as 'people who are willing to do whatever needs to be done due to the school situation'. Participant 1 also noted that, compared to his experience in Korea, he felt more satisfied with his job performance because he regarded others' responsibilities as his own and shared the difficulties and burdens of work.

In Korea, an individual teacher's work is clearly separated, so the burden and challenges are managed independently. However, at P School, the members of the school organisation work together to address problems collectively. Participant 4 elaborated on the sense of teamwork among teachers:

> In Korea, when I am in charge of something and do something, it feels like I am the only one working hard, and others may have a bit of a feeling of 'I don't care what happens, I

> just do it that way'. Here, if you do something as the main task, it feels like everyone is in charge and shares responsibility. So I don't feel frustrated when I'm working on something.

Participant 4's perspective aligns with the findings of Fullan (2016), which suggest that cooperation can improve the ability to understand complex situations and adapt to change through dialogue between members. Here, Participants 1 and 2 highlighted the active communication among teachers. Participant 1 mentioned that rather than merely repeating previous educational activities, all teachers collaborated to review and improve existing programs through active communication. This collective approach fostered a sense of responsibility for their educational activities and a commitment to achieving high-quality education.

Furthermore, the scope of work for P School teachers extended beyond the school itself. They believed that, in addition to education, the school can serve as a focal point for the community. Participant 1 stated that it felt like the school was establishing itself as a base for the Korean community because the small Korean community focused on the education of students with hope and interest, and this was a feeling he did not have in Korea. Consequently, teachers participated in and cooperated with community events.

Advancement as a teacher

Teaching experience in overseas Korean schools facilitates professional growth for teachers. Collaborative activities and self-development efforts contribute to individual growth and help to foster a cooperative organisational culture.

Teachers enhanced their skills by confronting challenges unique to their overseas contexts. Sharing personal experiences and abilities became a process for addressing school tasks and growing together with colleagues. This cooperative teaching culture enabled teachers to broaden the scope of their work and develop their educational abilities. Participant 2 described her experience of facing unexpected challenges and collaborating with colleagues:

> Actually, all the teachers who come as dispatched are motivated and have excellent work skills. Teachers help each other well and cooperate well, so although it's hard work, I don't think there's any difficulty that I can't bear.

Teachers commonly said that their colleagues had special talents. In other words, one of the reasons for being selected as a dispatched teacher is to be able to teach students with special skills. Teachers at P School shared their specialties with fellow teachers and applied what they learned to teaching students. Participant 1 shared his experience with learning from his colleagues as follows.

> All teachers have different specialties. Some teachers are good at sports, and people whose musical knowledge is so deep that they write and compose their lyrics. I know how to do this and that, but there are things I learn by watching from the side that I don't know how to do. So, instead of teachers doing these things alone in each classroom, they now do them together with fellow teachers.

This mutual learning and sharing of expertise among teachers at P School illustrate the benefits of a collaborative and supportive teaching environment. Teachers emphasised education not only for students but also for themselves. They tried to learn, and these efforts were reflected in the class. In addition, teachers expressed responsibility and mission for education for overseas students by utilising their professionalism and specialties as dispatched teachers. In

this process, teachers autonomously sought to improve their professionalism and shared their expertise with colleagues through mutual learning and teaching.

Teachers at P School answered that the scope of work is broader outside of school than when teaching in Korea. Teachers have difficulty promoting work within the school, using local communities, including Korean associations and local institutions, when designing and implementing curriculum. In this process, teachers communicate with various people and improve their interpersonal skills. Participant 4 answered that he had to communicate with a local company and the Korean community to promote School Sports Day, and this experience provided him with a chance to improve his communication skills.

Experience at overseas Korean schools also affected individual career paths. Participant 1 said he could consider his professionalism and career path while working at an overseas Korean school. While working at P School, he felt that his aptitude was handling administrative tasks or making educational plans from a macro perspective. He was good at it and said he could change his career path after returning to Korea.

Crossing classroom, school, and community contexts

Since this study was conducted from an ecological point of view, how the teachers interact with the various contexts surrounding the teachers was analysed. Figure 3 summarises teacher professional identity development at the different ecological levels.

Figure 3. The professional identity of teachers linked to various levels of the contexts
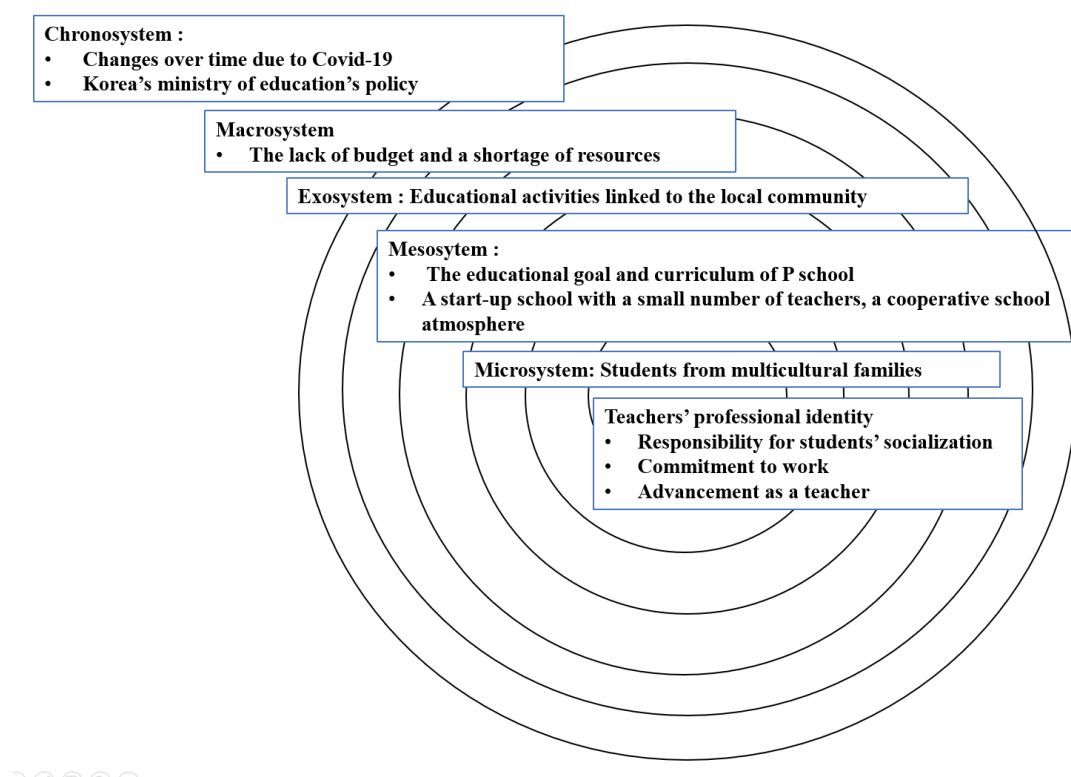
First, teachers often mentioned students' Korean proficiency in the classroom context, the microsystem. In the school, which has many students from multicultural families, students' Korean skills vary widely. Participants indicated that students' Korean proficiency is considered when teachers plan and conduct classes. Since students raised in a bilingual environment may not speak Korean fluently, teachers focus on improving students' Korean

language skills. These characteristics of students affected teachers' teaching methods, and teachers used a mixture of English and Korean during teaching.

The mesosystem level concerns the school curriculum. While overseas Korean schools follow the official curriculum set in Korea, schools nevertheless can assign an extra number of hours to foreign language learning considering the local circumstances (Overseas Korean Education Portal, n.d.). According to P School Curriculum Briefing Data, the number of English and local language classes out of 35 hours per week is 16, accounting for a large proportion of the weekly education. Teachers who teach according to the curriculum emphasise learning the local language and English.

Participants also mentioned that a cooperative atmosphere between fellow teachers and the principal influenced their teaching. In other words, the support of school management and cooperation with colleagues was a driving force behind the practice of goodwill and commitment to the teaching profession. Yet, at the same time, a lack of resources and a small budget influenced their heavy workload. One participant answered that the principal's support allows teachers to plan and implement creative and challenging educational activities instead of strictly following the existing curriculum. This teacher explained that the principal respected teachers' agency and decision-making, consistent with Ryan and Deci's (2000) research that curriculum restructuring is related to autonomy because teachers want to set their own goals and decide for themselves what is important and meaningful.

The exosystem pertains to the local environment beyond the school. At the community level, the participants agreed that trust and support from parents was vital. Teachers need to maintain appropriate relationships with parents and for parents to support the school and teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). P School teachers stated that their smooth relationships with parents, the principal and their colleagues significantly helped them focus on teaching students well.

The macrosystem refers to the broader cultural political economy in which the school is embedded. At the macrosystem level, the lack of budget and a shortage of resources leads to a heavy burden on teachers. One of the most critical issues facing Korean schools is the need for improved facilities and an adequate number of teachers, both of which are closely tied to government financial support. While the government budget for overseas Korean schools has grown, the increase in student enrolment has been much steeper, resulting in decreased education funding per school and per child (Park et al, 2022). Although P School teachers say their work is 'difficult but should be done with responsibility', they answered that more teachers are needed for the students' studies. Accordingly, the teachers wished that many more teachers would apply to work at the school to provide activities suited to the student's various levels and interests. Finally, at the chronosystem level, changes over time due to COVID-19 and other factors concerning Korean society's changing social and political characteristics influenced P schoolteachers. In particular, due to COVID-19, an online teacher training program was implemented using Zoom. Through this online training, pre-dispatched teachers could directly communicate with teachers currently dispatched at overseas Korean schools. Thus, before moving abroad, teachers could receive online training that better prepared them for integration into the local school and community. This shows the benefits of online learning to conveniently overcome the limitations of distance and learning for professional development (Ibrahim et al., 2022). In addition, the Korean Ministry of Education's policies played a crucial role. The Ministry develops textbooks tailored to regional characteristics and hiring policies. According to P School curriculum briefing materials, localised textbooks are used in social studies classes,

and experiential learning linked to these textbooks is conducted. P School teachers promoted students' systematic understanding of the local country by using localised textbooks developed through the Korean Ministry of Education's project to support learning materials for Korean schools abroad.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the first research question, the findings indicate that identity is formed and changed in multiple and dynamic ways within a particular context (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This was evident in the experience of the research participants. For example, research participants with more than 10 years of teaching experience in Korea responded differently when comparing their teaching experiences in Korea and overseas Korean schools. They changed their teaching practices and attitudes, transforming their professional identities. The transformation of teachers' identities when working in schools abroad correlates with Flores and Day's (2006) findings in Portugal and Hauerwas et al.'s (2017) findings in Italy that cultural and contextual factors affect the identity of teachers and, as their teaching careers advance, the role perceived by them also changes. Thus, during their overseas service, Korean schoolteachers develop a sense of national pride and multicultural sensitivity that they do not feel when working in their country of origin. This has ongoing implications for equity and quality education in the overseas Korean schools where they work and in schools back in Korea when these educators return home. By becoming more aware and reflective on issues of equity and diversity, Korean overseas schoolteachers practicably learn about diversity and multiculturalism and how to promote it through education (see also Rodriguez et al., 2023; Zhang & Chan, 2023).

Additionally, the teachers at P School acknowledged the unique context of their environment and tailored their instruction accordingly. This approach aligned with previous research, indicating that a teacher's identity is closely linked to the context in which they teach (Beijaard et al., 2004; Reeves, 2018). In this sense, participants formed a wider professional network than in Korea, linking closely with school management and the local community and reflecting deeply on their professional lives as teachers. Unlike teachers working in Korea, overseas Korean schoolteachers work in foreign contexts with reduced teacher infrastructure and multi-layered human relationships within and beyond the local Korean community.

Regarding the second research question, which discusses the teachers' professional identity environment, the findings show that teachers must expand their concerns beyond the classroom toward the whole community. This indicates 'the importance of professional development in equipping educators with the skills and knowledge needed to collaborate effectively with community partners' (Zeng et al., 2024). According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), the characteristics of students, fellow teachers and principals can be influenced by the community and, in turn, influence the formation of a teacher's professional identity. For example, according to Kennedy et al. (2012), various interactions with the community influence teachers' perceptions and performance of roles. In this way, P schoolteachers overcome the lack of school resources to support students' educational activities by cooperating with the community. In the process, the teacher's sense of connectedness—with students, other educators and the community—affects their performance in the school (Langley et al., 2014). For instance, while working overseas, the teachers met many individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, including local teachers, domestic parents and students, and international English teachers, which helped them cultivate an open mindset. This aspect of teacher development is related to Santos's (2020) research findings on teachers at an international school in Hong Kong. Santos found that teachers reported working across cultures and languages in an international school

helped prepare students to be future leaders. This contributed to a sense of meaning and expanded purpose in their work, thus motivating the teachers to continue working in the school.

In addition, teachers in this study enhanced their professionalism by actively leveraging resources and infrastructure of the local community into their classrooms with the awareness that they were members of that wider community. Education through continuous and active connection with local communities eventually leads to students' understanding of the region. In other words, teachers used local resources for regional understanding of education, and a virtuous cycle occurred in which education through connection with local communities helped students understand the region. This finding is related to Song's (2022) study, which examined Korean teachers who participated in developing localised textbooks in Cambodia. She found that teachers felt their professionalism in social education by connecting to the local community had improved. It is recommended, therefore, at the level of policy that schools and education bureaus prioritise enhancing further school-community relations by prioritising more community engagement in overseas settings.

Three key implications result from this study. First, educators can support their professional identity development through practising reflexivity (Pantić, 2015). In this study, teachers looked back on their educational activities and tried to improve their shortcomings by not repeating previous activities but by planning and implementing education to take into account the characteristics of students, schools, peer teachers, parents and communities.

Second, external support and policies must be provided to support teachers' professional development. Teachers want their students to have many experiences, grow physically and personally, and work hard to achieve this with a sense of responsibility and mission. However, educational activities have many restrictions due to a lack of support in the school environment. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the educational environment with more material resources to maximise the effectiveness of education.

Additionally, teachers carried out the many tasks assigned to them with a sense of responsibility, and this sense of responsibility and dedication was analysed as an element of the professional identity of teachers at overseas Korean schools. However, too much work given to teachers can lead to burnout (Farber, 2000), so finding ways to support teachers at Korean schools abroad is necessary. Teachers who participated in this study emphasised that mandatory training (from Korea) was not helpful to their educational activities and that localised training would provide more practical help for carrying out educational activities. Participants in the study said they could get practical advice and the assistance necessary to work well abroad by communicating online with overseas Korean school teachers via training prior to dispatch. According to the teachers, this training is practically helpful in supporting them in adapting to local life and the context-relevant needs of the school. We, therefore, argue for the need for further pre-departure teacher training in the future.

Third, teachers working at Korean schools abroad do not continue working as they previously did but adapt to the new environment and carry out their teaching duties flexibly. While guiding students in an environment completely different from Korea's educational environment, teachers faced various difficulties but tried to solve problems with an open mind. This is related to adaptive expertise, one of the elements of teacher expertise, especially the ability to respond to problems immediately and solve them skilfully (Horowitz et al., 2005).

Overall, teachers at P School conducted education to understand the local community and used appropriate educational materials. Since a teacher's teaching expertise is cultivated based on their own experiences and experiential knowledge in the context in which the teacher is located (Schön, 2017), the expertise of P School teachers is meaningful in developing their educator identity and professional acuity based on an understanding of the local setting.

CONCLUSION

This study explored teachers' professional identity in an overseas Korean school in Southeast Asia by examining their attitudes and practices toward school education. The study found that the professional identity of teachers who worked in Korea and then moved overseas to continue their teaching career was characterised by an inquiring attitude to produce and apply practical knowledge and a strengthening of their Korean identity. Though the teachers at P School encountered educational challenges due to a lack of resources (Youn & Chung, 2013), they collaborated with colleagues to provide excellent educational experiences to students. In an environment where the educational infrastructure is lacking, the support from the community, including the principal and parents, has a positive impact on the teachers' active educational activities. Overall, this study is meaningful for overseas Korean schools, providing insights into the professional identity development of educators who migrate to continue their educational activities overseas.

Before concluding, however, several limitations of the study should be noted. Since the study only involved the participation of four P School teachers, drawing generalisations from this small sample size is not possible. As consistent with qualitative research, the study's strength is its in-depth examination of the phenomenon of Korean overseas schoolteachers' professional development. Another limitation of the study is that since no participatory observation was made, the interaction between the research participants and the environment could not be observed. The study sought to mitigate this limitation through methodological triangulation, including analysis of school websites and teaching materials (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011). Furthermore, because the interviews were conducted in Korean and the research was written in English, some meaning may have been lost in the translation from Korean to English. To compensate, the researchers used two translation programs and cross-examined the transcriptions and translations several times.

Additionally, it should be acknowledged that individual personality traits may have influenced the educators' decisions and professional identities, or their responses may have been influenced by how they perceived the interviewer, both of which necessitate a nuanced interpretation of the data and its implications. Here, the process of member-checking provided further reliability that the translation and interpretations presented herein are accurate and trustworthy. Finally, as the situation of overseas Korean schools differs by context, future research should examine comparative perspectives across overseas Korean school settings. These follow-up studies could examine convergent and divergent possibilities for teacher professional development across overseas Korean schools. This would enhance a comprehensive approach to the study of the professional identity development of dispatched Korean educators, contributing findings that would be useful both for Korean educators (at home and overseas) and other dispatched educators working in various settings. Overall, the present study indicates that personal factors, including teacher agency, flexible attitudes, and external support, are crucial for dispatched teachers' meaningful overseas teaching and sense of professional fulfilment.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions (Examples)

1. What made you interested in working at Korean schools overseas?

2. What is an impressive experience for you working at an overseas Korean school?

3. What are the enjoyable things to do while working at an overseas Korean school?

4. What are the difficulties of working in an overseas Korean school?

5. What is the difference between your teaching experience in Korea and teaching experience abroad?

6. What do you think students, parents, colleagues, and the principal expect from you?

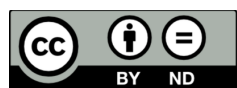7. What do you consider when designing and conducting classes?

8. If you could organize and run the curriculum as you wish, what kind of classes would you like to teach?

9. What are your priorities when working?

10. What policies have helped you in your teaching experience? What policies need improvement?

Interview questions may vary depending on the research participant's circumstances and the interview context.

APPENDIX B

Themes	Categories	Codes
Responsibility for students' socialization	Cultivating Korean identity	· Focusing on Korean and math classes · The priority of my role is Korean education · The priority of my role is teaching Korean culture · A lot of time for preparation for Korean classes
	Education for understanding local culture	· Students are living in this country, not Korea · Students should mingle with the local people · Understanding the language and culture of this country, which are essential for living in this country.
Commitment to work	Willing to work	· Selected as a dispatched teacher-willing to show my competence and expertise · Focusing on academic guidance as well as providing various experiences · The priority of my role is to promote students' growth · Happy to see students' improvement
	Sharing the high sense of responsibility	· Increased responsibility for performing tasks - plan and practice · Being a superman · High autonomy
Advancement as a teacher	Development through collaborative action	· Colleagues like a team member or a comrade · Colleagues with different teaching experiences in different regions · Cooperative atmosphere among teachers · Dealing with unexpected situations in unfamiliar environments
	Self-development	· Effort for self-improvement · Learning leadership · Understanding the difference · Being open-minded ·Learning interpersonal relationship
Crossing classroom, school, and community contexts	Microsystem	· Large academic gap between students ·Many students from multicultural families. ·Level-focused teaching according to students' Korean level · Promoting peer teaching
	Mesosystem	· Teach after school classes · High workload

Themes	Categories	Codes
		· A school that emphasizes English education · A school that emphasizes multicultural sensitivity · A school that emphasizes Korean identity · A start-up school · A small-sized school · Parents want language education · Lack of human resources
	Exosystem	· Parents who trust and respect their teachers · Parents who trust and respect their teachers · No malicious complaints from the parents

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