Chapter 17
Korean Immigrant Parents’ Involvement in Children’s Biliteracy Development in the U.S. Context

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the experiences of Korean immigrant families in the United States, this chapter highlights the importance of parental involvement in the bilingual literacy development of young English language learners. Findings of two projects on Korean parents’ engagement in Korean and English language development at home are presented. These findings yield several insights into Korean immigrant parents’ perspectives of and experiences in supporting their children’s biliteracy development. This chapter suggests not only the importance of parental role but also the teachers’ role in bilingual literacy development among young children. Suggestions for educators to support immigrant families to enhance their children’s biliteracy learning are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Asian students in the United States are often considered as a model minority as they seem quickly acculturated to the new culture and successful in academic performance (Kao, 1995; Lee, 2009). In fact, Asian students at the fourth-grade level surpass the other racial and ethnic groups in reading and math achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), implicating that Asian immigrant children make
positive academic progress in the U.S. school system. Such academic achievement among Asian students has created a public myth about Asian students, which often causes the lack of appropriate and timely support for them. Furthermore, the term “Tiger Mother” coined by Amy Chua (2011) in her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, brought a sensation in the media to Asian mothers’ eagerness to support their children’s education and high expectations for their children’s academic work. Such depiction of Asian parents in the media, however, overstated and distorted Asian immigrants’ efforts to support their children’s academic learning (Shin & Wong, 2013).

Scholars have long been arguing against the model minority myth by demonstrating how Asian students struggle not only with academic work but also with peer relationship without receiving any support from schools (Lee, 2009; Lew, 2005). However, challenges and efforts that their families experience are not often documented by researchers and recognized by educators. Therefore, Asian immigrant families’ perspectives and experiences need to be calibrated to help educators deepen their understanding of immigrant students and provide support in the classroom. To this end, this chapter delineates the experiences of Korean immigrant families to explore how they organize their home literacy practices to support their children in both heritage language (HL) and academic English development, what motivated them for determined efforts to develop their children’s biliteracy learning, and what challenges they encountered in the course of guiding their children.

**BACKGROUND**

According to the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), approximately one million Korean immigrants live in the United States. Historically, Korean immigrants have come to the United States for political, economic, military, and educational reasons (Min, 2013). Korean immigrant students, like other Asian immigrant students, are often depicted as model minorities due to several characteristics, including academic achievement, respect for teachers, and seemingly very few academic challenges. Furthermore, Korean immigrant parents, like other Asian parents depicted in the media, are also often viewed as having a high expectation for their children and making considerable efforts to offer support for their children’s learning. Therefore, this chapter explores how first-generation Korean immigrant parents in the U.S. conceptualize their roles in supporting their children’s heritage language development and academic learning. More specifically, this study aims to provide insights into Korean immigrant parents’ perspectives of their efforts and decision making on everyday literacy practices to support their children’s biliteracy development.

Research has shown that Korean immigrant parents are very positive toward their children’s heritage language maintenance (Brown, 2011; Cho & Krashen, 2000; Kim, 2011). Korean parents have been reported to have a strong desire for their children to develop and maintain a high level of proficiency in the Korean language, believing that it can contribute to solid cultural and ethnic identity as Koreans and better future economic opportunities (Jeon, 2010; Park & Sarkar 2007; Song, 2010). To do so, Korean parents employ various strategies to support their children’s learning of the heritage language. An “only-Korean-at-home” language policy has been reported (Brown, 2011; Song, 2016a), along with regular visits to Korea (Park, 2007) and sending their children to Korean weekend schools (Brown, 2011; Song, 2016b) which offer Korean language instruction mostly to second-generation Korean children. Despite the importance of Korean weekend schools for HL maintenance and as “a social and emotional support

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