



## Why Do Korean People Prefer White English Teachers? Examining Racial Bias of Korean Parents' Perceptions on Ideal English Teachers

Youngjoo Seo (Andong National University)

Received: 8 August 2024  
Revised: 12 November 2024  
Accepted: 9 December 2024

Seo, Youngjoo. (2024). Why do Korean people prefer white English teachers? Examining racial bias of Korean parents' perceptions on ideal English teachers. *Modern English Education*, 25, 445-454.

### Keywords

racial representation, native speakerism, early English education  
인종적 표본, 원어민주의, 조기영어교육

### Abstract

This study investigates the racial biases and preferences of Korean parents concerning native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in English Language Teaching (ELT). It specifically examines how race shapes perceptions of the "ideal English teacher" in Korea, a nation characterized by minimal ethnic diversity and a strong demand for English education. The research seeks to expose the entrenched racial attitudes that affect English education in Korea and emphasizes the importance of adopting more inclusive and culturally sensitive ELT practices. The participants in this study, primarily mothers, are deeply invested in their children's English education and possess the economic means to enroll them in private English kindergartens. Utilizing narratives from blog posts written by parents of preschool-aged children (ages 3 to 7), the study highlights various factors that influence parental preferences, including racial stereotypes and the perception that English proficiency is associated with whiteness. These parents engage in discussions on blogs, sharing their experiences and expectations regarding English teachers. The findings reveal how these biases affect the hiring and perceptions of NESTs within the Korean context. Ultimately, the study underscores the necessity for enhanced cultural and racial awareness in ELT and offers recommendations for fostering diversity and inclusivity in educational settings.

### Youngjoo Seo

Assistant Professor  
Division of Literal Studies  
Andong National University  
[yjseo@anu.ac.kr](mailto:yjseo@anu.ac.kr)

\* This work was supported by a grant from 2024 Research Fund of Andong National University

## INTRODUCTION

The status and roles of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) mentioned when discussing the qualities of an ideal English teacher have received extensive attention by scholars within the field of English language teaching (ELT) over the past decades (Holliday, 2006; Jenkins, 2000; Jenks & Lee, 2020; Kachru, 1992; Kubota, 2002; Mahboob, 2010; Ruecker & Ives, 2015).

Nevertheless, the racially and linguistically biased attitudes of Korean parents towards NESTs have been largely overlooked, particularly in EFL contexts such as Korea characterized by a largely ethnically Korean population with relatively minimal ethnic diversity. Despite the prevalence of English education fever in South Korea (hereafter Korea),

there remains a relative lack of cultural and racial awareness among Korean parents (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Rather than the evaluations based on language proficiency or teaching qualifications, parental preferences for NESTs are often influenced by racial considerations, highlighting the significance of broader societal attitudes towards race and ethnicity (Holliday, 2006; Kubota, 2002).

This paper aims to explore the racial dynamics surrounding NESTs in ELT, investigating how notions of race impact hiring practices, pedagogical preferences, and perceptions of linguistic authenticity in Korea (Jenkins, 2000; Jenks, 2017). Specifically, the study delves into the racial representations of an “ideal” English teacher as perceived by Korean parents, shedding light on pervasive racial biases and linguistic stereotypes prevalent in Korea’s English language education (Seo & Kubota, 2023). By analyzing narratives of Korean parents raising preschoolers, this research seeks to elucidate the underlying attitudes and beliefs that shape parental perceptions of English teachers.

Adopting digital storytelling through blog posts as research data, the study explores the multifaceted phenomenon of racism in ELT in among Korean parents regarding the issues of ideal English teachers. Digital storytelling research methodology involves the creation and analysis of narratives using digital media to explore personal experiences and perspectives, offering rich qualitative data that reflects the complexities of social phenomena (Jones & Alony, 2008; Robin, 2008). Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between race, language, and education in Korea, highlighting the need for increased cultural and racial awareness in ELT contexts.

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do Korean parents define an “ideal English teacher,” and what factors influence that definition?
2. What are the underlying racial biases and stereotypes that shape parental perceptions of native English-speaking teachers and what impact does this preference for country of origin and skin color have on their children’s English education?

By exploring these questions, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the racial representations of ideal English teachers among Korean parents and their implications for English language education in Korea. Understanding the racial representations of ideal English teachers is crucial for addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in English language education. By uncovering the underlying biases and stereotypes that influence parental preferences, this study can inform efforts to promote cultural sensitivity, combat discrimination, and foster a more inclusive learning environment for students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English Kindergarten (*Yeong-Yu*)

Despite the birthrate decline, English preschools are emerging across the nation, attracting Korean parents by assuring them that their children will effortlessly acquire the foreign language (Korea JoongAng Daily, 25 March, 2023, 1). English speaking kindergartens, known as *Yeong-Yu* (*Yeong eh Yu Chi One* in Korean), offer English immersion programs where all classes are conducted in English, including subjects like art, physical education, and mathematics.

Unlike ‘Maternal English Education’ (*eommapyo yeoungeo*) (Seo, 2021) in which parents take full responsibility for their children’s English education at home, at English preschools, young children are required to communicate exclusively with their foreign teachers in English, establishing an intriguing learning atmosphere that Korean parents willingly pay more than three times the usual fees charged by regular preschools. These parents believe that it should be very good opportunity to learn English since early years.

Despite not being formally recognized institutions for preschoolers, these establishments are commonly referred to as “English kindergartens” by Korean parents for convenience, distinguishing them from regular language schools that provide short-term English classes. Nevertheless, due to their resemblance to formal kindergartens in terms of operating hours and curriculum, they continue to be popular among parents, resulting in long waiting lists and intense competition for enrollment (Kim & Choi, 2023).

As money is considered one of the determining factors in early English education in Korea (Lee et al., 2020), many Korean parents often associate the quality of English education for preschoolers in Korea with the qualifications of English teachers and the tuition fees for private education. These make English kindergartens employ native English speakers from specific countries like U.S. or Canada based on the parents’ preference (Charles, 2019; Jenks, 2017; Seo, 2023b; Seo & Kubota, 2023).

## Racism in Korea

In Korea, a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity, grounded in the notion of a “pure-blooded” Korean identity, has fostered an enduring belief in racial and cultural purity, often leading to discrimination against foreigners, especially from economically developing regions like Southeast Asia and Africa. This ethnonationalist ideology has cultivated a societal preference for Western ideals, as Koreans aim to emulate Western standards, both racially and culturally, in an attempt to elevate their nation’s global economic and political standing. Consequently, many Koreans prioritize Whiteness and Western cultural elements, while darker skin tones are frequently associated with non-Western countries and thus viewed as less desirable (Seo, 2022). This hierarchical view of race has significant implications within Korean society, particularly in the workplace and educational settings. Media portrayals have played a critical role in shaping and reinforcing these stereotypes, often perpetuating negative images of dark-skinned people. Such portrayals contribute to a social stratification system where lighter skin and proximity to Western culture are regarded as symbols of higher status, while darker-skinned individuals are marginalized (Grant & Lee, 2009; Yuk, 2016). This cultural bias reinforces a racially informed “caste” system within Korea, which affects not only social interactions but also professional opportunities, particularly in fields that value Western attributes.

The impact of these racial views is also evident in ELT, where white privilege prevails, marginalizing qualified black educators despite their language proficiency and teaching skills. This preference often equates native English-speaking authority with Whiteness, particularly among teachers from Western nations, leading to racialized assumptions about linguistic competence (Curtis & Romney, 2006; Jenks, 2017). This raciolinguistic essentialism highlights the intersection of race, language, and power in Korea’s pursuit of global status, fostering an environment where racial hierarchy and ethnic nationalism persist.

## Racial Representations of NESTs

The historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism has significantly influenced perceptions of English language proficiency, with native speakers from Western, predominantly white, countries often regarded as the standard bearers of linguistic authenticity (Kachru, 1992). This linguistic imperialism perpetuates racial hierarchies within ELT, privileging white NESTs over their non-white counterparts (Holliday, 2006).

Research indicates pervasive racial biases in the hiring of NESTs, with a clear preference given to white teachers over non-white teachers (Choe & Seo, 2021; Jenks, 2017; Motha, 2014). For instance, in Korea, job advertisements frequently specify preferences for Caucasian NESTs, reflecting deeply ingrained racial stereotypes and preferences (Charles, 2019; Jenks, 2019). Such discriminatory hiring practices marginalize non-white English teachers and further reinforce the racialization of English proficiency.

The preference for white NESTs extends beyond hiring practices to pedagogical preferences and perceptions of linguistic authenticity. Many students and parents perceive white NESTs as embodying “authentic” English pronunciation and cultural knowledge, thereby perpetuating the myth of linguistic purity (Kubota & Okuda, 2016; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Consequently, non-white English teachers may face skepticism or prejudice from students and employers, regardless of their linguistic competence (Choe & Seo, 2021; Jenkins, 2000; Seo & Kubota, 2023).

These racial representations of NESTs have significant implications for non-white English teachers, who often encounter systemic discrimination and limited opportunities for career advancement (Mahboob, 2010). Non-white teachers may experience feelings of marginalization, imposter syndrome, and professional invisibility within ELT contexts dominated by white NESTs (Charles, 2019).

Efforts to challenge racial biases in ELT must address systemic inequalities in hiring practices, promote diversity and inclusion in teacher recruitment, and foster critical awareness of racialized perceptions of linguistic authenticity (Kubota, 2002). ELT programs and institutions must prioritize anti-racist pedagogies, cultural competence training, and equitable hiring practices to create inclusive learning environments (Seo, 2023a; Kubota, 2020). Addressing racial biases in ELT requires a multifaceted approach that challenges discriminatory hiring practices, promotes diversity and inclusion, and fosters critical awareness of racialized perceptions of linguistic authenticity.

## METHOD

### Participants

The blog's subtitle used in this study is “*Yeong-yu* (English Kindergarten) *Nara* (Community): Information on English education for young children.” The members of this blog (approximately 100,000 people, as of the time the research began) are Korean parents raising preschool children who have gathered to freely share information and opinions about English education. There are several commonalities among the members of this blog community based on some information that must be required to join this blog. First, they are parents, mostly mothers, raising young children (3-7 years). The average age of parents raising preschool children is mainly in the early to mid-30s, but the age range spans from pregnant women in their 20s to parents in their 40s raising young children. Second, gender of the parents is not revealed because they participate anonymously, but considering the topics of conversation and the information shared, the majority are mothers who are in charge of raising their children, and some are fathers who are highly interested in education. Considering the high cost of education fee for sending *yeong-yu*, it is presumed that many of them have good educations and high-paying jobs, and their occupations and salaries are often revealed in actual conversations, such as cost of education or experiences of educational institutes. Third, they have high aspirations for their children's education, especially English education, and are willingly investing their effort and time on bilingual parenting. In summary, it can be understood that parents with all economic, cultural, and social capital (Coleman, 1994) make up the majority of the members in blogs. Regarding ethical considerations, I obtained informal informed consent from the blog owners and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' identities.

### Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is a research methodology that involves the creation and sharing of stories using digital media such as videos, audio recordings, images, and text. It is commonly used in qualitative research to explore personal experiences, perceptions, and emotions in a multimedia format (Robin, 2008). This approach integrates qualitative research methods with digital technology to explore how individuals construct and share personal or collective stories in digital spaces. Digital storytelling analysis involves the systematic examination of narratives, often conveyed through digital media platforms such as blogs, videos, or social media posts. By analyzing the content, structure, and context of digital narratives, researchers can gain insights into diverse aspects of human experiences, including identity formation, cultural practices, and social interactions.

Blogs, as one of the sources of digital storytelling, offer a unique space for individuals to express their thoughts, experiences, and opinions, making them valuable sources of qualitative data for researchers (Huffaker, 2005). Digital storytelling through blogs has emerged as a valuable methodology for exploring complex social phenomena such as English education fever for young children in Korea. This methodology leverages the rich narrative data available on online platforms to gain insights into parental perspectives, motivations, and experiences related to English education.

In investigating racialization in ELT, I adopted blog posts as a main data source. Blogs provide access to rich narrative data that capture individuals' lived experiences, emotions, and perspectives in their own words (Jones & Alony, 2008). This allows researchers to gain in-depth insights into the complexities of English education fever from the voices of parents themselves. Moreover, online platforms such as blogs have broad accessibility and reach, allowing researchers to access a diverse range of perspectives and experiences from across different geographical locations and demographic backgrounds. Additionally, digital storytelling methodologies enable real-time data collection, allowing researchers to capture evolving trends, discussions, and debates related to English education fever as they unfold on online platforms.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected over two years (2022-2023), with a particular focus on data at the beginning and end of each semester, considering that parents communicate on children's education most actively for a certain period. As the first step for data collection, I searched 30 relevant blogs that focus on topics related to English education fever for young children, ideal English teachers, English education for young children in Korea. A single blog, known for being the most active community of parents with a strong passion for English education and young children, was selected for this study in line with its purpose (<https://cafe.naver.com/studycool>). Next, I collected narrative data in the form of blog posts, comments, and discussions related to English education fever. In this process, hundreds of narrative data were searched. Data collection involved web

scraping tools or manual extraction of relevant content from identified blogs.

There were about a couple of hundreds different discussion topics and thousands of questions and responses were posted in Korean. After having reading all of the contents of each section of the blog, I categorized them into three topics based on research questions mentioned earlier: 1) the most important factor in choosing English kindergarten; 2) their definitions on ideal English teachers; and 3) factors affecting the qualifications of a good teacher.

For the data analysis and interpretation, narrative data obtained from the selected blogs are analyzed using qualitative coding techniques (Saldana, 2021). I identified recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to parental perspectives, concerns, and experiences regarding their children's English education. The analyzed data were interpreted to generate insights into the racial biases of Korean parents toward definitions and qualifications of good NESTs. Using a thematic analysis method, I coded the postings and found several emerging themes under these three main topics. Finally, I translated the themes and excerpts representing each theme into English for the readers' convenience.

To ensure inter-coder and intra-coder reliability in blog analysis, I tried to reduce ambiguity and increase coding consistency (Campbell et al., 2013). First, I conducted pilot tests on a sample subset of blog posts to allow for refining codes and enhancing coder agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Also, regular reliability checks, such as consensus meetings with peer raters, were adopted to discuss and resolve any discrepancies among coders, promoting consistent coding practices (Guest et al., 2012). Moreover, through reflexive journaling, I tried to encourage coder awareness and help track any shifts in interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## FINDINGS

The study reveals three key themes regarding Korean parents' preferences and concerns about English language education for their children. First, parents strongly believed that English should be taught by "real" native speakers, though opinions vary on what qualifies someone as a native speaker. Factors like pronunciation, language skills, and cultural background were debated, with some parents prioritizing authenticity over teaching qualifications. Second, racial biases played a significant role in parental preferences. Many parents favored white teachers, believing that non-white teachers, especially Black or Asian, might negatively impact their children's language development. These biases were often tied to stereotypes about accents and appearances, reflecting deep-seated prejudices in education. Finally, concerns about non-standard English pronunciation, particularly from teachers from countries like South Africa, emerged as a central issue. Despite qualifications, teachers with accents unfamiliar to parents were often viewed as inferior, with many expressing a preference for North American or British accents. These themes highlight a complex interplay of linguistic, racial, and cultural biases shaping parental decisions in selecting English teachers, emphasizing the need for broader acceptance of diverse English accents and teachers.

Besides, Korean parents also consider several key factors when selecting English academies for their children. They prioritize curricula that emphasize immersive, communicative teaching methods, and value smaller class sizes for more individualized attention, in addition to the primary concerns mentioned earlier. The reputation and success rates of the academies are crucial, often assessed through word-of-mouth and online reviews. Parents also seek safe, clean, and well-equipped learning environments that enhance the educational experience. Finally, while many are willing to invest significantly in English education, they carefully evaluate whether the cost aligns with the quality of instruction and overall value provided by the academy. The following sections provide excerpts and detailed explanations of three main themes.

### Theme 1. "Are the classes are taught by (real) native speakers of English?"

The first emerging theme is that parents had a strong belief that English must be learned from 'native speakers'. However, there were different definitions and standards for who was a 'true native English speaker'. This theme highlights the strong belief among parents that English should be learned from native speakers, but reveals varying definitions of what constitutes a "true native English speaker." Parents debated whether traditional markers like place of birth or long-term residency in English-speaking countries adequately define nativeness. While some parents emphasized the importance of pronunciation and language proficiency, others focused on superficial factors, such as nationality or cultural background, in their evaluation of native speakers. Conversations among participants highlighted the complexity of this evaluation, which extends beyond traditional markers like place of birth or length of residency in English-speaking countries. Participants expressed varying viewpoints on what constitutes a "real" native speaker.

Excerpt 1. (05/11/2022)

**Heri mom:** What is the most important aspect when evaluating “native English speakers”?

**Jinho mom:** Previously, my son’s homeroom teacher said that he was a “foreigner” because he had lived abroad for a long time, but I didn’t feel like he was a native speaker (of English) when I heard his English-speaking. I think it’s difficult to judge just by looking at the degree (of country) he got.

The conversation touches upon the complex nature of evaluating someone as a “native English speaker.” While traditional markers such as place of birth or length of residency in an English-speaking country might be used, they don’t always accurately reflect language proficiency. Jinho mom challenges the notion that mere residency determines nativeness, highlighting the importance of actual language skills over surface-level factors.

Excerpt 2. (11/09/2023)

**Song mom:** How about the pronunciation of a Korean assistant teacher at an English kindergarten? Even if she is an English major and speak English-only, won’t this have a negative impact on your children’s pronunciation?

**Hee mom:** Absolutely not okay! You should learn English from a native speaking teacher. At the very least, by Korean-American and speak no Korean.

**Dami mom:** I pay a lot of money to send my kid an English kindergarten (100% English-only use), I want my child to learn to be a “native speaker” and “a real, real native” no matter what.

The conversation raises questions about the importance of pronunciation in English language learning, particularly in the context of employing Korean assistant teachers at English kindergartens. Hee mom asserts the necessity of learning English from a native-speaking teacher, suggesting that only Korean-Americans who speak no Korean could suffice. This viewpoint prioritizes nativeness over teaching qualifications or language proficiency. Dami mom emphasizes the desire for children to learn English from “real native speakers” regardless of cost, reflecting a common belief among Korean parents seeking the best language education for their children.

## Theme 2. “How many white (*baek-in*) teachers do you have?”

The second theme revolves around the prevalence of preferences for white English teachers among Korean parents. Participants expressed concerns about the perceived impact of non-white teachers on their children’s language learning, particularly regarding pronunciation. Conversations exposed underlying racial biases and stereotypes, with some participants suggesting that black or Asian teachers may have accents perceived as hindrances to effective learning. Others challenged these prejudices, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in teacher representation. This theme delves into racial biases that influence parental preferences for white English teachers. Many Korean parents expressed concerns that non-white teachers, particularly Black or Asian, may have cultural traits that hinder effective language learning. Racial stereotypes were evident in discussions, with some parents showing a preference for teachers who matched Western ideals of appearance, like blond hair and blue eyes. However, a few participants challenged these biases and advocated for diversity, recognizing the value of teachers from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Excerpt 3. (02/22/2022)

**Jenna mom:** What is more important, nationality or (native-like) appearance?

**Yura mom:** There was a previous experiment conducted at Harvard. The results of the study showed that the English learning effectiveness of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed teacher was more than twice that of an Asian teacher.

**Leo mom:** In some ways, this could be a racist discourse... There was an interesting episode. One of my colleague was a second-generation Korean-American. A parent suddenly called and complained to me to change the teacher, saying “I paid the same amount of money (like other parents), but the teacher in other classes had blond hair and blue eyes, but why is there a teacher with black eyes and black hair in my class? It’s a waste of money!”

The conversation delves into the complexities of racial biases in education, particularly in the context of English language instruction. Yura mom cites a study from Harvard that seemingly demonstrates a preference for blonde-haired, blue-eyed

teachers over Asian teachers in terms of perceived effectiveness in teaching English. This raises concerns about the influence of racial stereotypes on educational outcomes and the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes. Leo mom identifies the discourse as potentially racist, noting an instance where a parent expressed dissatisfaction with a Korean-American teacher purely based on physical appearance, equating blonde hair and blue eyes with higher value in education.

Excerpt 4. (03/07/2024)

**Cathy mom:** I heard that my child’s native English teacher is from Europe. Does this make sense? There is no way to check because there is no information other than the name in the teacher profile.

**Sunny mom:** My child had a similar case, but it turned out that he was from Uzbekistan. After that, most of the white people who said they were from Europe without revealing their nationality were from Uzbekistan. He is an illegal instructor who is not issued an E-2 visa and is not a native English speaker...

The conversation raises concern about the authenticity and qualifications of English teachers, particularly regarding their nationality and visa status. Cathy mom shares her personal experience of encountering a teacher from Uzbekistan posing as a European introduced as NESTs, highlighting the issue of misrepresentation and illegal teaching practices. This conversation underscores the need for transparency and accountability in the hiring process, as well as the importance of verifying teachers’ qualifications and visa status.

### Theme 3. “I’m afraid my child may learn non-standard English pronunciation”

The third theme centers on concerns about non-standard English pronunciation, particularly from teachers from non-preferred countries like South Africa. Teachers from South Africa are allowed to get an E-2 visa, which qualifies them to teach English in Korea, but they are relatively discriminated against in from Korean parents who prefer teachers from North America, such as the United States or Canada. Some Koreans expressed fears that their children might learn “wrong” pronunciation from such teachers from non-preferred countries, reflecting a common perception that certain accents are not standardized but inferior. Parents worried that unfamiliar accents would negatively impact their children’s English education, reflecting broader biases towards non-American or non-British accents. Some participants recognized this as an unfounded prejudice, acknowledging the need to broaden acceptance of diverse English accents.

Excerpt 5. (09/28/2022)

**Sofia mom:** I’m quite picky about pronunciation and accent, so I prefer people from North America, but I don’t think how they look is important. My child’s teacher is an “Asian”-looking appearance, but he grew up in the United States from a young age, so he is a “complete American” both linguistically and culturally.

**Rogan mom:** If you grew up in the United States from a young age, you are often a “real” native speaker in terms of pronunciation and culture. However, there are many people who think that you cannot speak English as well because you have a Korean appearance.

The conversation highlights the complex interplay between language proficiency, cultural identity, and appearance in perceptions of English speakers. Sofia mom’s preference for North American pronunciation and accent reflects common biases towards native English speakers, while downplaying the significance of appearance. However, Rogan mom challenges this perspective by acknowledging the privilege afforded to those with a “complete American” upbringing yet also recognizing the discrimination faced by individuals with non-Western appearances, despite their linguistic and cultural fluency.

Excerpt 6. (12/19/2023)

**Sami mom:** I’m afraid my child may learn non-standard English pronunciation from teachers from South Africa”

**Kai mom:** To us, the pronunciation of South African teachers is bound to be bad. What we are familiar with is the American or British style. We naturally think of things we are not familiar with as strange and bad.”

The dialogue exposes deep-seated biases and prejudices towards non-standard English accents, specifically those from South

Africa. Sami mom's concern about their child learning non-standard pronunciation reflects a common perception that certain accents are inferior or less desirable. Kai mom's response reinforces this viewpoint, suggesting a natural inclination to perceive unfamiliar accents as "bad" simply because they deviate from the American or British norm. This conversation underscores the need to challenge linguistic prejudices and promote acceptance of diverse English accents.

## Discussion

Through an in-depth analysis of online conversations among Korean parents, several key themes have emerged, shedding light on the pervasive influence of racial biases, linguistic stereotypes, and cultural perceptions. The first theme delves into the challenges and biases inherent in defining who is a native speaker based solely on superficial criteria such as place of birth or appearance. The second theme exposes deep-seated racial biases in the preference for white English teachers among Korean parents. It raises concerns about the prevalence of racial biases in the education sector and the potential exploitation of non-native English speakers. The third theme revealed deep-seated biases towards non-standard English accents, with participants associating familiarity with the American or British style with superiority.

A critical analysis of online conversations among Korean parents further reveals biases towards teachers of certain races, with a marked preference for white instructors. Parents emphasize nativeness and standardized pronunciation, often equating American or British accents with linguistic superiority. This cultural preference underscores a need for clearly defined criteria beyond superficial characteristics like race and accent when identifying qualified English instructors (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Instead of focusing solely on accent or nationality, educational institutions should prioritize teaching credentials and cultural competence to foster an inclusive, skill-based understanding of proficiency (Piller, 2016).

Moreover, the findings highlight that racial and linguistic biases in Korean ELT extend beyond teacher selection and affect how language proficiency is conceptualized. The Korean aspiration to align culturally and economically with the West often leads to an unspoken hierarchy, situating white, Western teachers at the top and darker-skinned educators at a disadvantage. This preference not only disadvantages non-white teachers but also reinforces linguistic prejudices against non-standard English accents. It implies that English taught through diverse accents or by non-white individuals lacks legitimacy, thereby marginalizing highly qualified educators who do not conform to these narrow perceptions of "ideal" English proficiency (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Seo & Kubota, 2023).

The implications of this raciolinguistic essentialism in Korean ELT are far-reaching, particularly as Korea moves towards increased multiculturalism. Despite the recent inflow of migrant workers and international spouses, the nation's media and educational institutions often sustain outdated stereotypes of racial hierarchy. Studies argue that media depictions reinforce negative stereotypes about Black individuals, consolidating racial biases that impact teacher recruitment and student perceptions of proficiency (Grant & Lee, 2009; Seo, 2022; Yuk, 2016). As such, media, educational institutions, and government agencies play a pivotal role in shaping these perceptions, emphasizing the need for policies and practices that dismantle racial and linguistic hierarchies.

For a transformative approach in ELT, educational institutions must recognize and respect linguistic diversity by exposing students to multiple accents and perspectives in English. Educators must be equipped with cultural competence, enabling them to foster inclusive pedagogies that acknowledge and celebrate diversity within the classroom by fostering linguistic diversity by providing students with exposure to various accents and encouraging an appreciation for the richness of linguistic variation (Piller, 2016; Seo & Kubota, 2023). This exposure prompts reflection on how societal biases shape perceptions of language proficiency and underscores the importance of embracing a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be a proficient English speaker (Norton & Toohey, 2011). It is essential to recognize that linguistic variation is natural and valuable, and all accents deserve respect and recognition for their unique cultural and linguistic contributions.

Furthermore, educational institutions must expand their efforts beyond the classroom to include parents and the broader community. Effecting meaningful change in ELT requires addressing the perceptions of parents, who play a pivotal role in shaping educational decisions. For example, educational institutions actively engage parents through workshops that address racial biases and highlight the importance of linguistic diversity. Such workshops could emphasize the value of diverse accents and cultural perspectives, demonstrating that English is a global means of communication rather than a language confined to specific racial or national identities. Additionally, distributing informational guides focused on raising awareness about racial biases in education and the benefits of embracing linguistic diversity can serve as an effective tool for parent and community engagement. These materials can provide a detailed exploration of the issues surrounding linguistic and racial prejudices in ELT, while also highlighting how inclusive educational practices enhance students' global competencies and intercultural understanding. These actions not only create equitable learning environments but also contribute to dismantling entrenched biases, empowering students to thrive in a multicultural and interconnected world.

Ultimately, addressing these biases requires a multifaceted approach that includes critical examination, policy reform, and community engagement. Standardizing hiring practices based on teaching qualifications, cultural awareness, and pedagogical skill—rather than nationality or skin color—is an essential step. As Korea navigates the complexities of globalization, its ELT sector must prioritize inclusivity and equity, allowing all qualified educators to contribute to language learning and cultural exchange. Adopting such an approach would not only elevate the quality of ELT in Korea but would also signal a commitment to an inclusive educational landscape, thus setting a progressive standard for language education in multicultural societies (Seo & Kubota, 2023).

## Limitations and Conclusions

This paper provides a comprehensive exploration of the complex dynamics surrounding English language education for young children in Korea, particularly within the context of private English kindergartens. Through an in-depth analysis of online conversations among Korean parents, several key themes have emerged, shedding light on the pervasive influence of racial biases, linguistic stereotypes, and cultural perceptions.

By documenting instances of discrimination based on physical appearance and nationality, the study contributes to raising awareness about the need to address systemic inequalities and promote diversity and inclusion in the education sector. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in the field of English language education. By highlighting the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking teachers and the implications of parental preferences for teacher characteristics, the study can inform policy interventions and educational practices aimed at promoting equal opportunities and combating discrimination. The study encourages critical reflection on cultural stereotypes and prejudices that influence perceptions of language proficiency and teaching effectiveness. By fostering dialogue and awareness about the complexities of language learning and teaching, the study contributes to promoting cross-cultural understanding and empathy in multicultural societies like Korea, ultimately fostering more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

Despite its significance, there are methodological limitations to consider. Firstly, the data primarily stem from conversations among Korean parents, potentially restricting the findings' generalizability. Secondly, the analysis relies on subjective interpretations, introducing the possibility of bias among different researchers. The lack of standardized criteria for data analysis could compromise the reliability and validity of the findings. Lastly, the study may lack a comprehensive understanding of broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts influencing parental attitudes, potentially oversimplifying interpretations of preferences for English teachers.

This research has implications for teacher recruitment, training, and professional development in Korea. By highlighting the factors that shape parental perceptions of ideal English teachers, educators and policymakers can develop strategies to recruit and retain a diverse teaching workforce that reflects the multicultural reality of contemporary society. Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on race, language, and education in Korea, with the ultimate goal of promoting social justice and equity in English language education.

## References

- Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth semi-structured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294-320.
- Charles, Q. D. (2019). Black teachers of English in South Korea: Constructing identities as a native English speaker and English language teaching professional. *TESOL Journal*, 10(4), doi:10.1002/tesj.478.
- Choe, Hongsung., & Seo, Youngjoo. (2021). Negotiating teacher identity: Experiences of black teachers of English in Korean ELT: How race and English language teacher identity intersect in the expanding circle. *English Today*, 37(3), 148-155.
- Coleman, J. S. (1994). Social capital, human capital, and investment in youth. In A. C. Petersen & J. T. Mortimer (Eds.), *Youth unemployment and society* (pp. 34-50). Cambridge University Press.
- Curtis, A., & Romney, M. (2006). *Color, race, and English language teaching: Shades of meaning*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grant, R. A., & Lee, I. (2009). The ideal English speaker: A juxtaposition of globalization and language policy in South Korea and racialized language attitudes in the United States. In R. Kubota & A. M. Y. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice* (pp. 44-63). Routledge.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Sage.
- Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, 60(4), 385-387.
- Huffaker, D. (2005). The educated blogger: Using weblogs to promote literacy in the classroom. *AACE Review (Formerly AACE Journal)*, 13(2), 91-98.

- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford University Press.
- Jenks, C. J. (2019). English for sale: Using race to create value in the Korean ELT market. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 10(4), 517-538.
- Jenks, C. J. (2017). *Race and ethnicity in English language teaching: Korea in focus*. Multilingual Matters.
- Jenks, C. J., & Lee, J. W. (2020). Native speaker saviorism: A racialized teaching ideology. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 17(3), 186-205.
- Jones, M., & Alony, I. (2008). Blogs—the new source of data analysis. *Journal of Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, 5(1), 433-446.
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). *World Englishes: Approaches, issues, and resources*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kim, Jeehee., & Choi, Tae Hee. (2023). Enacted curriculum of private English kindergartens in Korea: Cases of three play-based English kindergartens in Seoul. In R. Khan, A. Bashir, B. L. Basu, & M. E. Uddin (Eds.), *Local research and global perspectives in English language teaching: teaching in changing times* (pp. 111-126). Springer Nature Singapore.
- Kubota, R. (2002). The author responds. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(3), 485-487.
- Kubota, R. (2020). Fostering antiracist engagement in Japanese language teaching. *Japanese Language and Literature*, 54(2), 347-358.
- Kubota, R., & Okuda, T. (2016). Confronting language myths, linguicism and racism in English language teaching in Japan. *Why English*, 165-183.
- Lee, Mun Woo., Kim, Haemee., & Han, Mun-sub. (2020). Language ideologies of Korean mothers with preschool-aged children: comparison, money, and early childhood English education. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(7), 637-649.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Mahboob, A. (2010). The NNEST lens: Nonnative English speakers in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(1), 129-133.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage Publications.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412-446.
- Yeongyu-nara. (2024, August 1). *English kindergarten community: Information on English education for young children*. <https://cafe.naver.com/studycool>
- Piller, I. 2016. *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Rajagopalan, K. (2004). English language teaching as linguistic imperialism. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(3), 385-391.
- Robin, B. R. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21st century classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 47(3), 220-228.
- Ruecker, T., & Ives, L. (2015). White native English speakers needed: The rhetorical construction of privilege in online teacher recruitment spaces. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(4), 733-756.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). Coding techniques for quantitative and mixed data. *The Routledge Reviewer's Guide to Mixed Methods Analysis*, 151-160.
- Seo, Youngjoo. (2021). An emerging trend in English education in Korea: 'Maternal English education' (*eommapyo yeongeo*). *English Today*, 37(3), 163-168.
- Seo, Youngjoo. (2022). Creating the space to talk about race and racism in English language teaching. *Modern English Education*, 23(3), 1-9.
- Seo, Youngjoo. (2023a). Development and application of an anti-racist approach in English language teaching: from theory to practice. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1-13.
- Seo, Youngjoo. (2023b). Why can't I teach English? A case study of the racialized experiences of a female Ugandan teacher of English in an EFL context. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(5), 1965-1988.
- Seo, Youngjoo., & Kubota, R. (2023). Exploring lived experiences of Black female English teachers in South Korea: Understanding travelling intersectionality and subjectivities. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 36(1), 21-38.
- Yuk, Joowon. (2016). The (mis)understanding of race and racism in multicultural Korea. *Korean Journal of Sociology*, 50(6), 125-145.