

***Damunwha Students' Funds of Knowledge  
in English: A Qualitative Case Study in the  
South Korean Context***

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This study explores the interface between multicultural, or *Damunwha*, students' households and English learning in the Korean context. Korea is a relatively homogeneous nation in terms of its ethnic and cultural diversity. In this context, students whose parent(s) are not Korean are labeled as *Damunwha* students. Despite their minority position, the students have accumulated multilingual and multicultural funds of knowledge, the experience and culture unique to their households. Their use of funds of knowledge in English learning was analyzed from an ecological perspective, which emphasizes learners' active agency in learning. Two junior-high school students from international marriage families and two other students from immigrant worker families participated in this study. Qualitative data analysis indicated that their funds of knowledge for English were twofold: their home languages and connections to home language communities. Their funds of knowledge were significantly influenced by family relationships and socio-economic status. The funds of knowledge contributed to the students' English learning only if the students realized the meaningfulness of their funds of knowledge. The study has implications for increasing the role of multicultural education in general curriculum and building conducive home-school relationship by making home visits.

**Keywords: international marriage, immigrant worker, *Damunwha*, funds of knowledge, English learning resources, ecological perspective**

## **Introduction**

South Korea (henceforth Korea), once considered as a relatively homogeneous nation, has been facing a rapid transition into multicultural society in recent years. In Korea, more than 97% of overall population is Korean and only one official language is spoken. Before the 21st century, ethnic and cultural diversity scores were the second lowest among Asian countries, North Korea being the lowest (Fearon, 2003). In the recent years, however, foreign population is rapidly increasing in this relatively homogeneous country, fueled by an influx of foreign spouses and immigrant workers. At the beginning of the 21st century, Korean men began to seek spouses from other developing Asian countries because of the gender imbalance in rural areas, the declining fertility rate, and globalization (Kim, 2006). Korea has also been allowing more immigrant workers to occupy labor-intensive blue-collar positions, which are less favored by Koreans. Aided by the incoming of foreign spouses and immigrant workers, the foreign population has been increasing steadily for the past five years, and in 2013, it surpassed 1.44 million (Statistics Korea, 2013).

The social phenomenon is termed *Damunwha*, a compound of a prefix *Da-* (multi-) and *munwha* (culture). Although the term literally translates into multiculturalism, the senses of *Damunwha* and multiculturalism are quite different. Although the definition of multiculturalism varies widely, it values having heterogeneous cultural groups in a society, assumes all people should be given equal opportunity, and celebrates diversity (Kubota, 2004). In contrast, *Damunwha* in its literal sense means “ethnically and culturally different from Koreans” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006, p. 1). *Damunwha* does not yet celebrate the diversity of population; rather, it is a term used to refer to people from different origins. Thus, *Damunwha* is not a

direct translation of multiculturalism.

This paper focuses on *Damunwha* students from international marriage families and immigrant worker families, as Korean educational policy for *Damunwha* students targets these two groups. Although they occupy less than 1% of the overall student population, enrollment of these students increased by 21% from 2011 to 2012, and this steady increase is identified in the 2006-2011 period (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2012). They grow up as multilinguals, speaking their home language and Korean, and studying English as a mandatory school subject. In case of an international marriage family, the children usually speak Korean as the first language and learn their home language spoken by one of their parents. As for children from an immigrant worker family, they speak their home language as either L1 or L2, depending on whether they were born in Korea or a foreign country, and how long they have lived in Korea. In accordance with the increase of *Damunwha* students, several studies recently began to investigate the students' academic achievements (e.g., Cho, 2011; Shin et al., 2012). Studies on the students' English education also began to grow out of this context (e.g., Lee, 2013; Seong, 2013; Shin, 2011).

English is a symbolic resource rather than a neutral means of communication, especially in Korea where English is a dominant foreign language. It is directly linked to important social resources, including privileged university entrance, job openings, and promotions (Nam, 2012). The amount of money invested in English education is one of the highest among school subjects (Yoon & Lee, 2011). Believing that English is "power and privilege" (Lee, 2011, p. 204), Korean society treats English as high-valued symbolic capital. *Damunwha* students are not the exceptions, if they are to climb this social mobility ladder. However, previous studies indicate that *Damunwha* students' insufficient Korean ability negatively influences their motivation to study English and studying skills (Seong, 2013; Shin, 2011). In addition, low Socio-Economic Status (SES) exacerbates the problem, limiting the access to quality resources and opportunities (Seong, 2013). A national survey on English achievement indicated that 42.80% of *Damunwha* students failed to meet the standard academic level,

whereas the percentage of their peers was only 29.42% (Shin et al., 2012). The disparity of English achievement increases as the students grow up.

Given the social importance of English in Korea and *Damunwha* students' low achievement, our study addresses the need to investigate the students' hands-on English learning in Korean context, with a focus on their particular family backgrounds and their efforts to learn English using their own resources. The fact that *Damunwha* students are born into a linguistically and culturally diverse family may facilitate their English learning, as they may have previous experience of learning a new language and culture at home. At the same time, *Damunwha* families tend to have lower SES than others, which may cause hardships for the students to pursue their study. Considering the characteristics of a relatively new type of household in Korea, it would be worthwhile to study the influence of their home background in English learning. Based on the result, the study could suggest practical ways to support the minority students' English learning curriculum.

### **Theoretical Background: Funds of Knowledge and the Ecological Perspective**

Students bring their language, culture, way of life, value system, and many other aspects of household daily lives to classrooms. In other words, they bring funds of knowledge into classrooms, comprising "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992, p. 133). The discussion on funds of knowledge has developed from interdisciplinary studies between anthropology and education, theorizing the organic relationship between households and classrooms. The funds of knowledge approach have yielded fruitful findings on integrating immigrant students' resources into academic contexts. In this view, minority students are not considered as disadvantaged, underprivileged individuals; rather, the students have their unique strategic and cultural resources obtained from their households (Moll, 1992; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez

& Greenberg, 2005). Moreover, capitalizing on these resources would greatly facilitate the students' learning in academic settings (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Linguistic minority students could engage in social interactions and make meaning more effectively if home language use in the classroom is allowed (Sayer, 2013). A longitudinal study on linguistic minority students in a Canadian class shows that the students' multilingualism is a significant resource for academic development (Potts & Moran, 2012). In a storytelling class, minority students could draw on community funds of knowledge to represent their multiple identities, by retelling their grandparents' traditional stories to the whole class (Marshall & Toohey, 2010).

In the Korean setting, a few studies already suggest possibilities to make use of *Damunwha* students' funds of knowledge in academic contexts. They experience unique intercultural settings at home from the early age, and this contextual uniqueness creates their funds of knowledge, including intercultural communication and bilingual experience (Yang, Kim, & Kim, 2012). Shin (2011) reported that some *Damunwha* students' home language and intercultural experiences at an early age motivated and facilitated their English learning. Ahn (2008) added that their home language would be meaningfully used for learning English, if the two languages share commonalities. These previous studies provide rationale for studying *Damunwha* students' funds of knowledge in English education.

However, one question remains unclear. Why are certain participants more successful at utilizing their funds of knowledge, whereas others are not? For our study, we adopted the ecological perspective by Gibson (1979) and van Lier (2000, 2004) to address this question. As ecology is a scientific study of relationships between organisms and environments, ecological linguistics investigates "language as relations between people and the world", and regards "language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world" (van Lier, 2004, p. 4). The key concepts in this field are environment and affordance. Whereas the environment "provides opportunities and resources for action, and information for what is to be perceived so as to guide action" (Gibson & Pick, 1986), affordance means "a particular property of the

environment that is relevant” to the students (van Lier, 2000). In other words, the environment is full of meaning potentials; if the learners personalize the potentials by using their own agency, the potentials become affordances. The affordances then promote subsequent action of the agent (van Lier, 2004) because it provides a personalized ground for learners to perform an action.

From the ecological point of view, learners' agency is the key to realizing the meaning potentials and utilize them for learning. They may choose to actively take part in their learning, as agency “enables people to imagine, take up, and perform new roles of identities and to take concrete actions in pursuit of their goals” (Duff, 2012, p. 423). They may exercise their agency to resist or reject certain behaviors and positions, declaring non-participation in learning activities. Depending on how the learners exercise their agency, their personal affordance would be differentially constructed, even if they were situated in the same environment.

*Damunwha* students have acquired their funds of knowledge from households, representing unique symbolic resources for them to use. It depends on their agency to create personally meaningful affordance out of the ample or scarce resources so as to use it for their personal development. Therefore, this study aims to identify what facilitates or discourages these students' utilization of their funds of knowledge by investigating their English-learning environment and affordance in English learning. In this regard, we present two main research questions: (a) What are the *Damunwha* participants' unique funds of knowledge with regard to English learning? and (b) How do the *Damunwha* participants use the funds of knowledge for their English learning from the ecological perspective?

## **The Study**

### **Research Contexts and Participants**

We conducted this study in two *Damunwha* welfare centers providing after-school academic support for junior high school students from *Damunwha*

families. The centers have been providing family-based support for each participant for approximately three to four years, maintaining intimate relationships with all participants and their families. This is the reason why we chose centers instead of schools. Both centers were located in a suburban area. The after-school classes matched a volunteer teacher with *Damunwha* students in need of academic support. Center A matched a teacher and a student, and the teacher taught the student English and mathematics. At Center B, one teacher was responsible for teaching English to two students at the same time. The programs were held in the evening in 3-hour sessions, two to three times per week. The program of Center A was for students from immigrant worker families, and that of Center B was for students from international marriage families. The programs relied on government subsidies and donations for operation.

We recruited four junior high school students (i.e., two from international marriage families, and two from immigrant worker families) as the core participants. In addition, their teachers were invited to collect data on the students' academic abilities. The supervisors, who have been closely caring for the students and consulting their parents at least for three years, were also recruited to collect information on the participants' family. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate and were ensured that their personal information would be kept confidential.

Table 1 shows the basic profiles of core participants. The study was conducted in Korean, because the participants whose L1 is not Korean, Chenik and Hwang, had both lived in Korea for four years and spoke Korean as fluently as their peers, as confirmed by their teacher and supervisor. Their volunteer teachers who taught them English provided their English scores.

TABLE 1

*Core Participants*

Center	Pseudonym	Years in school	Gender	English score	(One of) Parent's home country
A	Chenik	9 <sup>th</sup>	Girl	Average	Uzbekistan
	Hwang	8 <sup>th</sup>	Boy	Above average	China
B	Gahee	8 <sup>th</sup>	Girl	Below average	The Philippines
	Yong	8 <sup>th</sup>	Boy	Average	China

Each participant's SES is summarized in Table 2. We asked the supervisors to roughly evaluate the core participants' SES, referring to the average monthly income of Korean households (4,193,000 won, approximately \$3,884, Statistics Korea, 24 May 2013), and the obtained information is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

*Socio-Economic Status of the Core Participants*

Pseudonym	Father's Occupation	Mother's Occupation	Household Income
Chenik	Part-time Worker	Caregiver	Slightly less than the average
Hwang	Construction Worker	Part-time Worker	Less than the average
Gahee	Sanitation Worker	Translator	More than the average
Yong	Day Laborer	Housewife	Much lower than the average

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection tools included semistructured interviews, background profiles, and open-ended questionnaires. The supervisors of the centers reviewed the designed tools to prevent unintentionally offending the participants. After revising the tools, we pilot-tested them on a *Damunwha* student, a volunteer teacher, and a social worker. We revised the tools according to the result of the pilot study.

The primary source of data was semistructured interviews with the core participants, their teachers, and their supervisors. The interview themes for

students included background information, identity as a *Damunwha* student, their home language, Korean, English, and available resources for English learning. For teachers and supervisors, themes on English classes, family background, friend relationships were added. The interview questions served primarily as a guiding tool rather than a strict protocol, as the participants freely gave their opinion on a given topic.

The first author, who was responsible for data collection, acted more like a participant-observer, advised by the corresponding author. Before the study, she had previous engagements with both centers. She had been a tutor at Center A for a year and had participated in Center B activities, such as giving a speech and organizing field trips. After obtaining a permission to conduct this study, she visited both centers once a week, participated in center activities as a volunteer, and conducted interviews in casual settings. Korean was the only language used throughout our data collection because two participants whose L1 was not Korean were sufficiently fluent to perform daily tasks without difficulty. All of the other participants' L1 was Korean.

At first meeting with each participant, we requested the core participants to provide background information and to complete open-ended questionnaires. Afterward, we conducted semistructured interviews with core participants, using the developed interview questions. Their volunteer teachers and supervisors were invited for interviews as well. Their interview questions were devised based on information obtained from the core participants' interviews. The data from the teachers and supervisors were used to triangulate the student interview data.

To ensure credibility of the students' interview data, the data were triangulated by their responses on open-ended questionnaires and their teachers and supervisors' interview data. All data were transcribed in Korean, and translated into English. The transcript underwent open, axial, and selective coding process. Two qualified external coders coded approximately 20% of the transcript. The coding results were compared and disagreements were discussed and mediated. When disagreements emerged, we selected the most appropriate codes after considering the context in which the interview had been conducted.

## **English Learning of Students from Immigrant Worker Families**

### **Chenik: Practicing English to Fulfill Her Dream of Becoming a Translator**

Chenik's family was from an urban city in Uzbekistan, and immigrated to Korea approximately four years before the data collection. Chenik had a close relationship with all of her family members, spending a considerable amount of time with them and asking for their help. All of Chenik's family members attended the center together to learn Korean. According to the secretary-general of Center A, Chenik's family's income was slightly lower than the average Korean household's, but this did not affect her. She spoke Russian as her L1 and Korean as her L2, and was learning English for her L3. She learned the Uzbek language for a short time but had forgotten most of it by the time of data collection. According to her volunteer teacher, she is highly fluent in Korean, and her English scores were approximately average compared with her peers.

Chenik realized the importance that English holds for her future because of her aspiration to become a translator of three languages: Russian, Korean, and English. The aspiration stemmed from her funds of knowledge at home, where intercultural communication and code-switching between Russian and Korean was her family routine. She considered her knowledge of two languages as her great assets to become a competent translator, and her intercultural communication between Russian and Korean also corroborated the belief that English is an important lingua franca among foreigners. Excerpt 1 illustrates her commitment to become a translator and attitude toward English.

(1)

Chenik (C): I would like to work as a freelance translator in hotels or airports. There are many foreigners (who are in need of translation)... If I become proficient in all three languages, I can make my dream come true, earn money, and help my parents... Although I can't speak English well right now, I

believe it will improve very much if I practice a lot.

Interviewer (I): Which language do you want to learn the most, among Russian, Korean, and English?

C: All of them. If I want to become a translator, I must be proficient in all the languages. Especially English.

I: Why do you think so?

C: English is the world language. I can do everything with English. If I can speak English naturally, then I can become a translator who can translate Korean and Russian into English, and vice versa.

Her funds of knowledge were also put to use in her actual English learning. In her opinion, her knowledge of Russian and Uzbek facilitated her acquisition of English pronunciations, because the two languages and English share commonalities. Utilizing her funds of knowledge, she facilitated her English speaking ability, as shown in the following empirical example:

(2)

C: I think my English pronunciation is better than Korean peers’.

I: When did you learn English?

C: I didn’t learn it. My (home) language has many pronunciations in common with English. The (Russian) alphabet is also similar (to English). And I learned Uzbek too. English, Uzbek, and Russian have similar pronunciations, but there aren’t many similarities between English and Korean. All my friends say that I’m good at English. But it’s sad that my fluency is not very good.

Chenik drew upon her community funds of knowledge for her English learning. Chenik’s ambition to become a professional translator motivated her to obtain access to more family resources. Her family had strong ties with other Russian-speaking expatriate families, and Chenik employed this network to connect with translators and English-speaking people. A friend of Chenik’s mother, who is also the mother of Chenik’s best friend, was Chenik’s role model, a translator of three languages: Russian, English, and Japanese. Chenik

occasionally contacted her to ask for advice and English assistance. She also endeavored to speak English with native speakers who attend the center to study Korean and to obtain a Korean language certification.

### **Hwang: Learning English to Keep Up with Classmates**

Before immigrating, Hwang lived in a suburban area in China. His parents immigrated to Korea in pursuit of higher wages. As Chenik did, Hwang picked up Chinese as his L1 in his youth, and started acquiring Korean after immigrating, when he was 10 years old. Although he did not receive a formal Korean language education, he was highly fluent in Korean at the time of data collection. He was attending English classes in school without experiencing any major difficulties, and his English grades were slightly above average. In contrast to Chenik's family, Hwang's parents could not spend much time with him. His father rarely stayed home because he frequently went on business trips, and his mother worked until late at night. Overall, Hwang's SES was lower than Chenik's.

Hwang was not enthusiastic about learning English, although he knew the need of obtaining reasonable English grades and realized the importance of English to fulfill his dream of becoming an international photographer. According to his teacher at Center A, an English teacher Hwang met in Grade 5 was too strict on Hwang and used physical disciplining, which was a traumatic experience that still negatively affected Hwang's attitude toward English. The following excerpt illustrates Hwang's perception of English.

(3)

Hwang (H): Other people say that English is important. It's the world language. If I become a photographer, I have to travel a lot. In order to communicate with other people around the world, English is the most essential.

I: ... How do you feel when you hear the word "English"?

H: Stressed. Difficult, difficult, difficult, very difficult! I wish all English-speaking countries disappeared from the world.

Contrary to Chenik, Hwang's funds of knowledge did not help his English learning. Hwang did not try to explore similarities and differences between Chinese and English (cf. Shin, 2011), and was not interested in studying English because of his traumatic experience and dislike of the subject.

Despite his disinclination to study English, he did not give up studying it. He reached a compromise between his dislike and the need to study English. He acknowledged the importance of English scores and the need to study it for his student life. Therefore, he invested his efforts at least before his exams, and received satisfactory scores. His compromise is evident in Excerpt 4.

(4)

I: You said English is difficult, right? But your scores are quite good.

What's the reason?

H: I'm good at cramming before exams.

I: What's your reason for cramming?

H: I don't want to study English. But I need the score.

I: Then why don't you just give up?

H: No. It's my life. I can't just let it go.

## **English Learning of Students from International Marriage Families**

### **Gahee: Speaking Two Versions of English**

Gahee's mother was from the Philippines, and worked as a translator in a human rights center for immigrants, translating Tagalog, English, and Korean. Gahee's family was economically stable compared with the other participants, thanks to her mother's professional job. Gahee visited the Philippines once or twice every two years and communicated with English-speaking maternal relatives. Gahee spoke Korean as her L1 and English as her L2. However, her English scores were below average.

Gahee was exposed to English-speaking opportunities at her households;

however, the funds of knowledge were not meaningfully realized to her. As a daughter of a professional Filipino mother, she had already been exposed to Philippine English and lifestyle. She learned English from her mother at young age, visited the Philippines to meet her maternal relatives, and observed her mother working as a translator. Gahee learned English from her mother for a few months in Grades 3 and 4, but she recalled the lessons as a complete failure. Although her mother was a fluent English speaker, she had Gahee repeat her ABC only. Gahee evaluated the lessons as irksome and too repetitive. From then on, she and her mother did not continue study sessions; rather, her mother occasionally taught her English words. Gahee also felt comfortable with this casual approach, rather than participating in study sessions with her mother. At the time of data collection, Gahee wanted to learn from her mother, but she hesitated because of her mother's heavy workload. In addition, she considered that her mother's Filipino English is somehow different from English she learned at school, as illustrated in Excerpt 5.

(5)

I: What language do you use when you speak with your mother?

Gahee (G): Korean. I was born in Korea. I don't understand Philippine English.

I: Oh, you don't?

G: I don't understand their English. Really. The pronunciation here (in Korea) and there (in the Philippines) is totally different.

I: What kind of pronunciation do you mean?

G: The English pronunciation. The word seven [sévn] is pronounced more like seven [séven] there (i.e., in the Philippines).

She perceived that Philippine English is one thing and textbook English is another. Excluding her mother's English, she made investments to learn school English and get good scores. She felt that her school teacher is too old and her teaching methods were not appropriate to her. The only choice she had was to rely on the volunteer teacher at the center. Gahee's attitude toward English learning is shown in Excerpt 6.

(6)

Center B Teacher: Gahee is really enthusiastic in our class. She always completes her homework and studies hard. She usually studies English longer than she is supposed to, to get a higher score. But she still lacks basic English knowledge. I can't help but just let her memorize everything because her midterm is drawing near. If we had more time, I would teach her step by step.

### **Yong: Resisting the Imposed Importance of English Scores**

Yong had a Korean father and a Chinese mother. In contrast to Gahee, Yong's family had to rely on government subsidies for the economically disadvantaged and aid from charities. Because of his family's SES, Yong did not have various opportunities at his disposal, such as visiting China and meeting relatives. According to the president of Center B, who had consulted with his parents for four years, Yong did not have a close relationship with family members, and his older brother frequently harassed him. Yong's L1 was Korean, his L2 was Chinese, and his L3 was English. His teacher evaluated his English scores as between approximately average and slightly higher.

Yong received decent marks in English and scored better than Gahee, even though she was motivated to study hard and had an English-speaking mother. Despite his good grades, he resisted studying English. Excerpt 7 shows that Yong had negative attitudes toward studying English for exams and communication:

(7)

Yong (Y): What if I don't know any English?

I: Then you won't be able to speak with foreigners.

Y: Do I need to?

I: Well, at this time you might not need to, but in the future the situation might be different. And what about English exams?

Y: I just randomly pick an answer. I don't study.

However, Yong's resistance was only limited to studying English for grades and exams. His teacher commented that he showed interest in day-to-day English. For example, Yong occasionally asked the meanings of English words on smartphone games, English abbreviations on books, and memorized interesting English words he read. Yong himself also valued the opportunity to ask about vernacular English words to the teacher in a casual context, as shown in Excerpt 8:

(8)

Center B Teacher: When Yong plays game, there're lots of English words. He wonders about the meaning of them. He asks like, "what does 'craft' mean? ... And if there're some abbreviated forms, he asks why they are abbreviated ... One day we spent the whole class hour to look for the meanings of English words on a game. ... The next day, I thought he may have forgotten everything, but he remembered every single word (that we've covered).

Yong's resistance to study English stemmed from his family issues. According to Yong's teacher, he used to be a smart and excellent student, and had strong basic knowledge in English; however, his mother's excessive pressure to study made him resist studying English. According to Yong's supervisor, Yong's mother was unable to provide appropriate support for Yong, except by demanding that he sat in front of a desk. Finally, Yong gave up in trying to meet her expectations, and lost interest in studying. Although he became disinterested in studying, his strong basic command of English remained, and helped him maintain an average English score.

## Discussion

The first research question addressed what are *Damunwha* students' unique funds of knowledge and how they are related to their English learning. To answer the question briefly, *Damunwha* students' home languages and

community ties could provide great resources for English learning. The home language served as a motivator and a resource for learning English in Chenik's case. Realizing the advantage of having her home language in the Korean context, Chenik visualized her dream of becoming a trilingual translator. Her home language helped her learn English pronunciation more easily than her peers. Her community ties provided her with a role model, who was already a translator. Gahee could access quality resources to learn English, including her intercultural experience in the Philippines and her mother's expertise in English, although she did not fully exploit these. Opportunities to access the home language community network could benefit her English learning, providing authentic chances to speak English. The unique funds of knowledge are not new; Shin (2011) has already suggested the advantages that *Damunwha* homes can give to its child, such as motivation, positive attitude, and multicultural identity. The present data suggest that *Damunwha* students' funds of knowledge, shaped in different households than Koreans, can have meaningful influence on their English learning in an authentic manner.

The funds of knowledge were, however, closely linked to each participant's family relationships and SES. Students from immigrant worker families, Chenik and Hwang, had different family relationship. Chenik's parents spent a considerable amount of time to care her, attended the center together, and provided appropriate help. In contrast, Hwang was left alone at home, partly because of his father's job. Chenik could take advantage of her intimate relationship with her parents to access community resources and expertise, whereas Hwang could not. For Gahee and Yong, their environmental difference was even greater. Gahee's home provided various transnational experiences and access to English expertise because of her mother's professional occupation and stable family income. Compared to Gahee, Yong had somewhat negative relationship with his family members, especially with his mother and brother. What is worse, the family was financially unstable and exerted high pressure to study. In this family environment, Yong refused to study English for exam purposes.

While the research on the impacts of SES and family relationship on

academic achievement is not new, the present study shows how an intangible cultural resource – funds of knowledge – is affected by the two factors. Better SES allows more educational opportunities and experience, and healthy family relationship help them accumulate and reach community funds of knowledge more easily. Whereas the previous research assumed good family relationship and focused on how to integrate funds of knowledge (Marshall & Toohey, 2010; Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Sayer, 2013), the present research calls for attention on the needs to take SES and family bonds into account.

The second research question examined the use of funds of knowledge from the ecological perspective. The ecological perspective concentrates on the relationship between a learner and the surrounding environment. In any given environment, it is the learners' agency to personalize the resources and assign personal significance (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), and use the environment for their learning. Even if different learners are situated in seemingly similar environments, the ways they exercise agency and pursue their learning may be quite different (Kim & Kim, 2013; Parks, 2000). The result of this study corroborates this point, indicating that greater academic achievement was brought by the students' meaningful and personalized affordances (van Lier, 2000, 2004).

Chenik and Hwang's cases illustrate their own efforts to construct their own affordance. In pursuit of her ambition, Chenik strategically expanded her affordance by exercising her agency, such as contacting a translator within her mother's networks. Chenik's affordance was focused on developing speaking skills, rather than achieving higher scores on English exams. Meanwhile, Hwang did not feel personal need to exploit his resources for learning English, investing only a minimal amount of effort to maintain his satisfactory English score, to be a "good enough" student.

In the cases of Gahee and Yong, their exercise of agency and affordances are nested in broader sociocultural contexts than Chenik and Hwang. Although Gahee had funds of knowledge that were directly linked to English and access to more resources, Yong achieved higher scores than her. Gahee was influenced by the common prejudice that English spoken in North America is

the standard. She preferred the so-called Standard English, and neglected the potential value of Philippine English she heard at home. Instead, she tried hard to catch up with her peers by relying on her volunteer teacher, who seems to teach the Standard English. Although her environment provided many useful resources, her affordance was limited to the volunteer teacher. Gahee did not willingly incorporate her funds of knowledge and access to Philippine English into her affordances, leaving her potential resources unused.

Yong's case illustrates the active exercise of agency to resist learning English for exam purposes and creating the affordance meaningful to him. His mother put him under harsh pressure to study English without appropriate supports. In this environment, Yong chose to exercise his agency to reject studying English, rather than accepting the importance of English. In other studies, the willful resistance to learn English appears because of challenges and realities at school and home (Valdés, 2001) or pressure to conform to desired identities at classrooms (Canagarajah, 2004). Instead of studying English for exams, Yong engaged in a personally meaningful activity, learning English vocabulary with smartphone games and asking the meanings of new English words. He created his own affordance about daily English with his own interest and agency, by using his volunteer teacher as a great resource. Yong's data suggests the construction of affordance was not limited to academic purposes, but related to his personal values.

In summary, although the students share similar environments, individual students' realization and perception varies substantially. The participants' affordances were created based on the mediation between the students' individual reasons and contexts of learning English, as the ecological perspective (van Lier, 2000, 2004) suggests. Their individual use of funds of knowledge and resources was more closely related to their affordances, rather than to external, environmental factors. The finding suggests that the given resources themselves remain unexploited unless they are meaningful to the learner. Individual learners' personal evaluation and realization of their environment is the key to exercising their agency to use their funds of knowledge.

## Suggestions and Limitations

Living in a relatively homogeneous Korean society, *Damunwha* students are emerging as a new group of legitimate participants in Korean classrooms. In this context, the present study yields two implications for the students. While this is a small-scale study, it suggests that at a macro-level, the experience of *Damunwha* students should be respected and supported at school. One way of achieving this in educational contexts would be expanding multicultural education to all students from the early age. In Korean national curriculum, multicultural education is integrated in social studies and moral education, introducing one to two textbook chapters on multiculturalism in each grade, starting from Grade 3 (Jun, 2008; Yu, 2011). The proportion of multicultural education should be increased to keep up with rapidly increasing multicultural population in Korea. In addition, the scope of the chapters should be extended, including practical activities to live with multicultural friends in classes. Chapters introducing ethnocentric ideas, such as emphasizing the spirit of a homogeneous nation-state, should be removed throughout the curriculum (Park, 2008). In a micro-level, teachers can establish conducive relationship between *Damunwha* households and classrooms by making home visits, not for teachers' agenda, but for the family. The idea of funds of knowledge has developed from teachers as ethnographic researchers making home visits in order to document each household's useful cultural resources and bring them to classrooms (González, Mall, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers involved in funds of knowledge project reported that they could tap into household funds of knowledge more deeply, refresh their perception toward immigrant households, mediate between homes and schools (Tenery, 2005), and even empower students and parents (Hensley, 2005). Likewise, teachers' home visits would provide meaningful opportunities to explore and utilize *Damunwha* students' funds of knowledge.

In EFL countries in general, this study sheds light on finding ways to incorporate minority or immigrant students' unique funds of knowledge in English learning and teaching. As this study has indicated, the funds of

knowledge facilitate their English learning. In ESL settings where education of immigrant children is of utmost significance, such studies have been practiced incorporating multilingual, minority students' funds of knowledge through various activities, such as storytelling (Marshall & Toohey, 2010), study-group settings (González, Mall, & Amanti, 2005), and plays (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). The activities and practices can be tailored or further enhanced to address the needs of educating immigrant students in EFL settings as well.

The study has limitations due to its small-scale and the scarce number of previous studies on Korean *Damunwha* students' English learning. The study is based on only four *Damunwha* participants' cases in a suburban area, which may not be readily generalizable to other students in diverse contexts. Also, this study has relied on only a few studies in the field of English education in Korea (cf. Lee, 2013; Seong, 2013; Shin, 2011), as the *Damunwha* phenomenon is new in this field. Regarding the limitations, further studies may involve using large-scale quantitative methods to establish generalizability and lay a foundation stone for developing policy. If more literature on *Damunwha* students' English learning is accumulated in a near future, more thorough and in-depth analysis would be made possible.

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