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Examining language teachers' core competencies at the local level in South Korea

George E. K. Whitehead

HANKUK UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES

Overview

◦ In this presentation I discuss the **first stage** of my **two-stage doctoral research project** which examined the **core competencies** Korean in-service secondary school English teachers require in their professional role.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Education

B.A. (Linguistics)

Certificate for Teaching ESL Linguistics
(30 Credit courses + 30 hr. practicum)

M.A. (TEFL/ TESL)

Ph.D. (Education)

1999 & 2004

The beginning...

2006-2009
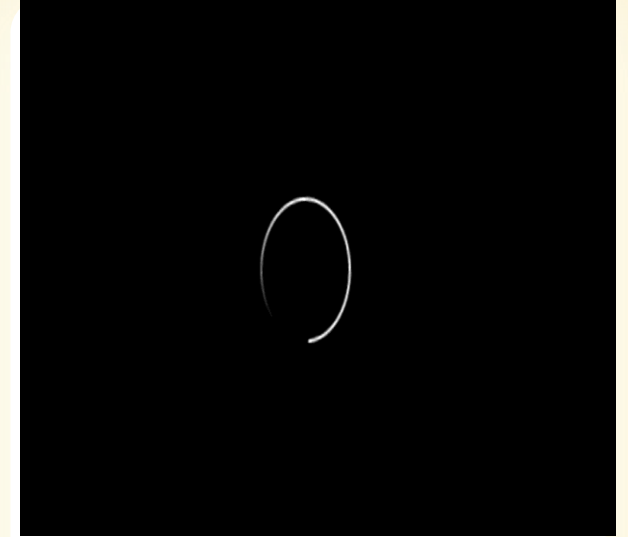

2007-2008

2009-2010

2010-2015

2015-2018

2016-2019

2017-Present

The Future…

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

South Korean Public English Education

◦ English education is a compulsory subject in public school from the third grade of elementary school to the twelfth grade of high school.

  ◦ Elementary - kindergarten to grade 6
  ◦ Secondary school – middle school - grade 7 to grade 9, and high school - grade 10 to grade 12.

◦ Elementary school teachers generally focus on communicative objectives and fostering the development of the 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

◦ From middle school teachers become more and more impacted by high-stakes testing washback
  ◦ Focus on grammar, reading, and listening
  ◦ Little to no focus on speaking or writing as they are not assessed in the KSAT

◦ By high school, almost all of the classroom time is spent preparing for the English portion of the KSAT
  ◦ Mock test practice
  ◦ Test-taking strategies

◦ Secondary school teachers must move schools every 4 years. Thus, they will teach in both middle and high schools during their teaching career.

24. 다음 글의 제목으로 가장 적절한 것은?

A defining element of catastrophes is the magnitude of their harmful consequences. To help societies prevent or reduce damage from catastrophes, a huge amount of effort and technological sophistication are often employed to assess and communicate the size and scope of potential or actual losses. This effort assumes that people can understand the resulting numbers and act on them appropriately. However, recent behavioral research casts doubt on this fundamental assumption. Many people do not understand large numbers. Indeed, large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underestimated in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling). This creates a paradox that rational models of decision making fail to represent. On the one hand, we respond strongly to aid a single individual in need. On the other hand, we often fail to prevent mass tragedies or take appropriate measures to reduce potential losses from natural disasters.

* catastrophe: 큰 재해

① Be Careful, Numbers Magnify Feelings!
② Preventing Potential Losses Through Technology
③ How to Reach Out a Hand to People in Desperate Need
④ Power of Numbers: A Way of Classifying Natural Disasters
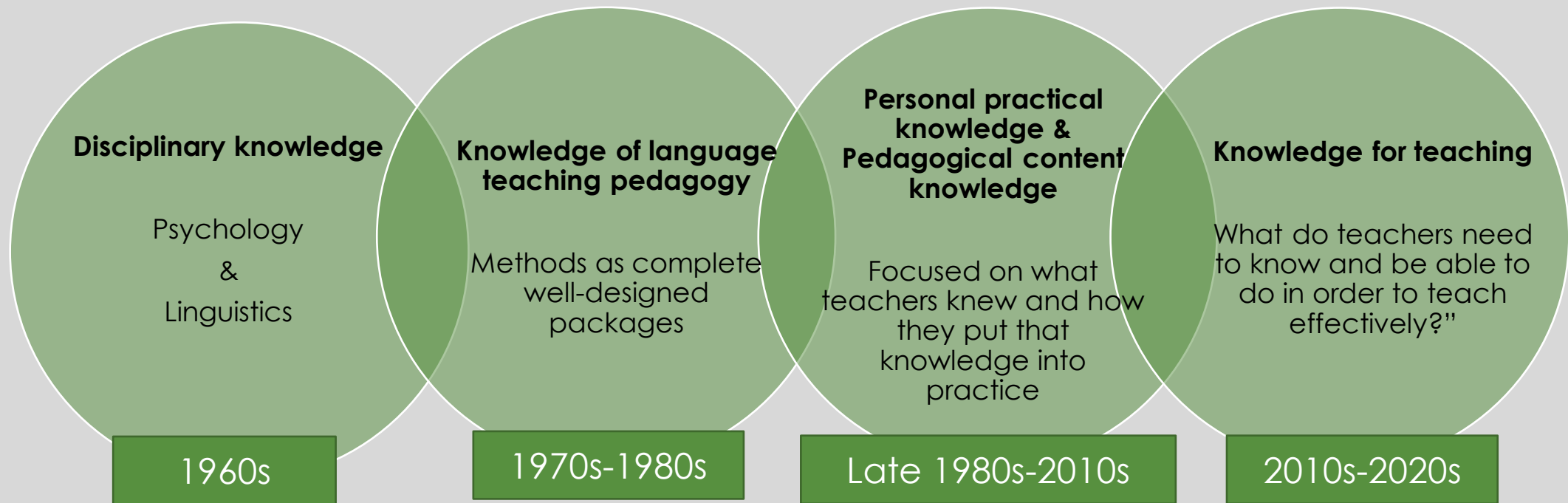⑤ Insensitivity to Mass Tragedy: We Are Lost in Large Numbers

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical Background

◦ A key issue in language teacher education has been and continues to be understanding **what teachers need to learn and develop in order to succeed** in their profession**; language teachers' knowledge base** (Faez & Valeo, 2012).

◦ Work in this area is of great importance in helping to **differentiate between** those who are **qualified** for a language teaching position and those who are **not qualified** (Johnson, 2009).

Past conceptualizations of L2 teachers' knowledge base

Disciplinary knowledge

Psychology
&
Linguistics

Knowledge of language teaching pedagogy

Methods as complete well-designed packages

Personal practical knowledge & Pedagogical content knowledge

Focused on what teachers knew and how they put that knowledge into practice

Knowledge for teaching

What do teachers need to know and be able to do in order to teach effectively?"

1960s

1970s-1980s

Late 1980s-2010s

2010s-2020s

(see Freeman, 2016)

Problems

- **Predominant focus** on what teachers **need to know** rather than **do** (Freeman, 2016).

- Conceptualizations of a **language teacher's knowledge base**, are **largely based on teacher-learners from 'inner circle' countries** where English served as their mother tongue (Holliday, 1994; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004).

- Knowledge base is viewed on a **global scale rather than a local scale** (one-size-fits-all, golden global standards).

  - **"Golden global standards"** do not acknowledge the different needs of different teachers in different settings (Canagarajah, 2005).

  - **EFL teachers are focused on meeting standards set by native speakers for native-speaking teachers.** (i.e., CELTA, DELTA, Trinity, TESOL Certificates, many university programs worldwide).

- Novice teachers often enter the field **unprepared** for their role and duties (Farrell, 2015).

The Way Forward

◦ a more **contextualized, nuanced understanding** of what language teachers need to learn and develop to succeed in their **specific teaching context**.

   ◦ The focus needs to **change from global** to **local** and from **knowledge focused** to **knowledge and action focused**.

   ◦ Important to draw from the **situated work and duties** of teachers in their professional setting.

Knowledge-base ➜ Core Competencies

◦ the term **competencies was chosen** in lieu of knowledge **to allow for knowledge as well as core competencies that go beyond knowing** (skills and abilities) **to be represented.**

  ◦ **Knowledge –** awareness, and understanding of **facts and information**
  ◦ **Skills** – the aptitude to competently **perform an action** at a **high level of expertise** on an ongoing basis
  ◦ **Abilities** – the aptitude to competently perform an action at a **basic level of expertise**

◦ As this study adopted a **complex dynamic systems perspective** (see Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020) of language teachers' core competencies, competencies are conceptualized as **interrelated**, **fluid, dynamic constructs**.

  ◦ They are theorized as **constantly changing and developing** and going through refinement throughout a teacher's career to **respond to the dynamic and situated nature of teaching.**
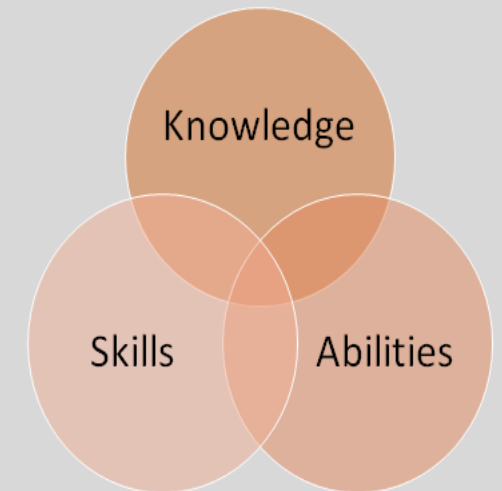
Research Question (local context specific focus)

What core competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities) do **public secondary school English teachers in South Korea** need to fulfill their role as an English teacher today?

METHODOLOGY

Overview

◦ Exploratory qualitative study

◦ To understand what Korean in-service secondary school English teachers **really need** to **know** and **be able to do** in their job.

◦ To produce an initial **working framework of core competencies** from which pre-service and in-service teacher education programs in South Korea can draw from (contextualized programs).
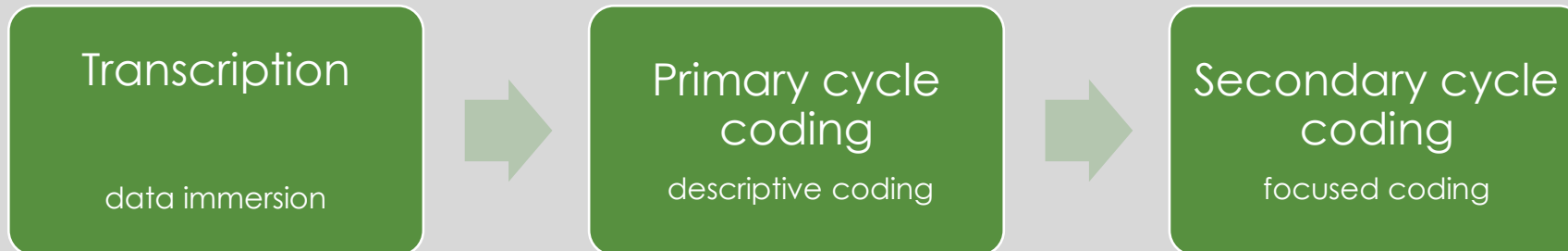
Participants

- 15 Korean public secondary school (middle school/ high school) teachers of English

  1) a current Korean in-service secondary school English teacher

  2) having more than 2 years of experience as an in-service public secondary school English teacher.

- 15 teacher educators

  1) minimum of 2 years of firsthand experience in educating secondary Korean in-service secondary school English teachers

  2) experience in one or more of the following: university undergraduate and graduate school programs, public teacher training institutes, teacher certificate programs.

Data Collection

Data Collection Strategy	Participants
Semi-structured Interviews	15 Korean in-service secondary school English teachers
	15 Korean in-service secondary school English teacher educators
Recorded video observations	10 Korean in-service secondary school English teachers

Data Analysis

◦ Semi-structured interview were transcribed verbatim with the assistance of otter.ai

◦ Data was then formally coded using NVIVO software following procedures outlined by Saldaña (2021) and Tracy (2013)

Transcription		Primary cycle coding		Secondary cycle coding
data immersion	→	descriptive coding	→	focused coding

FINDINGS

Korean in-service secondary school English teachers' core competencies
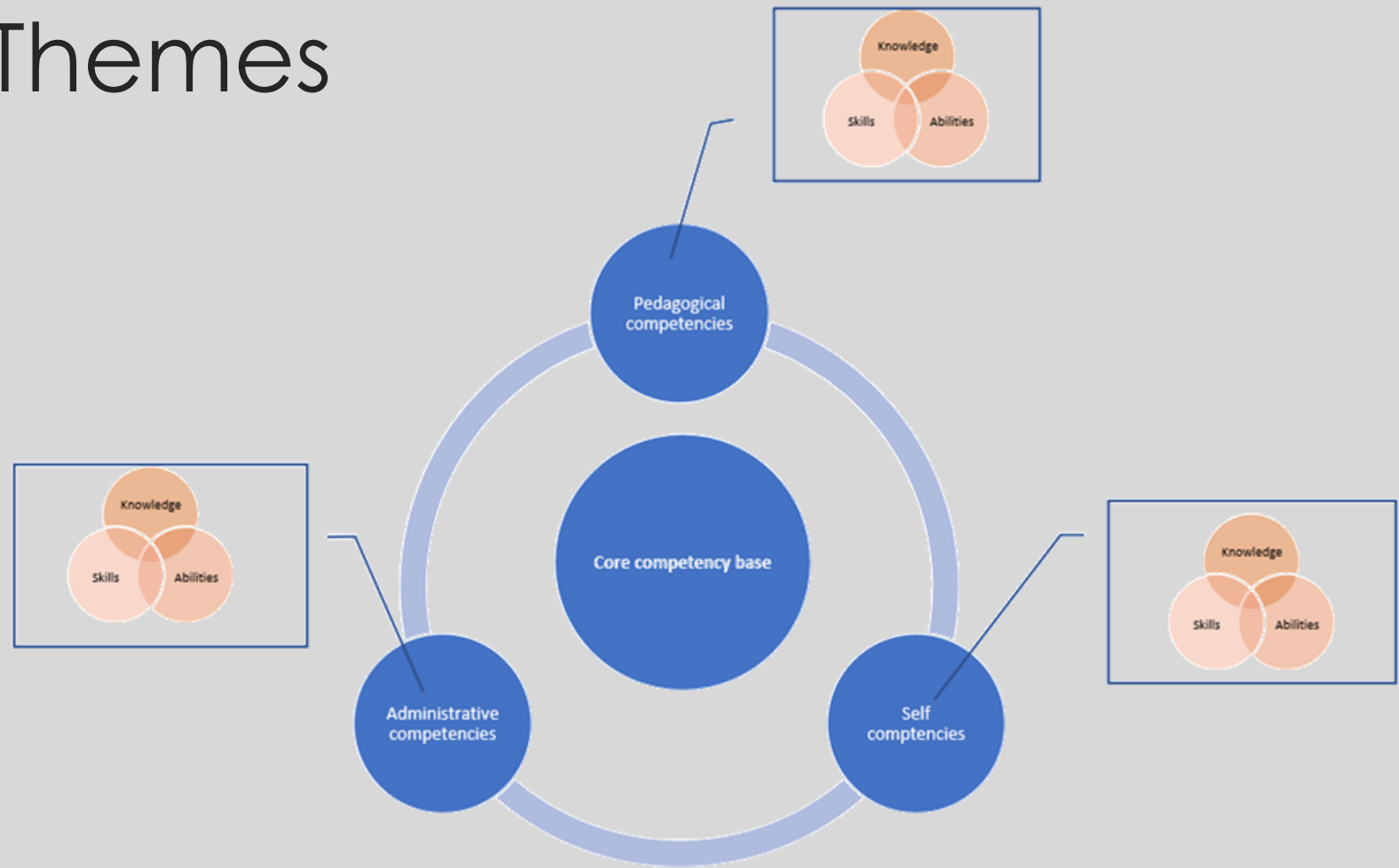
Emergent Themes

- **Pedagogical**
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Abilities
- **Self**
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Abilities
- **Administrative**
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Abilities

	Pedagogic		Self	Administrative
	General pedagogic	Pedagogic content		
Knowledge				
Skills				
Abilities				

Summary

◦ The Korean in-service secondary English teachers' core competency base that emerged in this study consists of an **integrative ensemble of knowledge, skills, and abilities within and across pedagogical, self, and administrative themes.**

◦ A different collective arrangement of competencies may be required at different times to respond to the **situated and dynamic nature of teacher's job both inside and outside of the classroom.**

◦ *NOTE: Although the findings of this study are presented in a categorical manner it is important to note that the* ***categories presented should be viewed as interrelated components which coexist with one another.***

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Key Discussion Points

◦ To date, most of the literature in the field of language teacher education has tended to have a pedagogical focus and **only recently have self competencies** such as teacher wellbeing **gained traction** (e.g., Gkonou et al., 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T., 2020).

◦ Furthermore, **reference to administrative competencies** that teachers need to fulfill obligations of their job in addition to teaching **have been ignored completely** (Winterton et al., 2006).

Key Discussion Points

◦ The **contextual specificity** of some of the core competencies that emerged was apparent.

◦ This points to the need to **move away from prescriptive competency focus**, **one-size-fits-all descriptions, or golden standards** towards developing descriptive profiles of core competencies for **specific kinds of teachers** relating to their **specific teaching contexts.**

◦ The findings highlight the need to **examine core competencies on a local scale** rather than a global scale.

Implications

◦ The core competency descriptive profile which emerged in this study provides **a starting point** from **which local pre- and in-service teacher education programs** for Korean public secondary school English teachers **may be developed.**

◦ Important to **consider other competency areas** (i.e., self, administrative) in addition to pedagogical competencies to properly prepare teachers for their job.

◦ Teacher educators as well as pre-service teachers can **track readiness progress during the duration of pre-service education**.

◦ In-service teachers may also use the core competency profile to **track areas of strength and weakness** and select **areas of focus for their professional development**.

FINAL REMARKS

Final Remarks

◦ Not an **exhaustive list of competencies** but rather an **initial descriptive profile of competencies** required by Korean public in-service secondary school English teachers.

◦ Attainment of **competencies should not be seen or treated as final goals but rather as dynamic constructs** that are framed by one's teaching context which are **constantly evolving throughout one's career.**

◦ To **properly prepare teachers,** approaches are needed that cater to the **knowledge, skills, and abilities required** by teachers within their **own specific teaching setting** (Kumarivedivelu, 2012).

  ◦ Although some of the competencies are specific to Korean public in-service secondary school English teachers, many of these competencies may be **transferable** to other teachers and teaching contexts.

  ◦ To properly prepare teachers for the job of language teaching it would be beneficial for pre- and in-service teacher programs and courses at various levels (BA, MA, professional development programs, etc.)to consider how they can foster the **core competencies teachers will need in their personal teaching contexts.**
    ◦ **Focus on personalization/ individualization**
    ◦ **Contextualized standards as opposed to golden global standards**

Future Research

◦ Further research which investigates these teachers' core competencies **from additional stakeholders' perspectives (i.e., administrators, students, novice in-service teachers)** may elicit additional competencies or contribute to the refinement of the descriptions of the core competencies that emerged.

◦ Future research which repeatedly observes a larger **number of teachers in action both inside and outside of the classroom over an extended period of time** would be beneficial in furthering the understanding of the core competencies they require.

◦ It is crucial for **researchers in other settings around the world** to **conduct similar studies** which investigate these issues in relation to a particular set of teachers who work in a particular role.

Contact Information

George E.K. Whitehead
Assistant Professor
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
Graduate School of TESOL

- Email: gekw@hufs.ac.kr

- Website: profgwhitehead.weebly.com

- ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/George-Whitehead-3

- ORCID: orcid.org/ 0000-0002-9570-1584

- Thesis: https://leicester.figshare.com/articles/thesis/Rethinking_Pre-Service_Language_Teacher_Education_in_the_Global_Era_A_Focus_on_Teachers_Core_Competencies_at_the_Local_Level_in_South_Korea/19336985/1

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