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Three Korean English Language Teachers' Identities Constructed in Teaching General English

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This qualitative study examines three Korean English language teachers' perceptions on teaching general (or practical) English courses in college to explore their teacher identity construction. Following the framework of grounded theory, in-depth interviews were used for data collection. The interview data were supplemented and strengthened after a period of time, which resulted in the teachers' reinforcing their perspectives and reflecting upon their roles and identities as college English teachers. Depending upon the data, the teachers considered that the current college English education has often emphasized practicality focusing on four language skills, resulting in their students' more concerns on grade and aggravating their shallow thought system. Such students' attitudes and the institution's focus on practicality engendered the participant teachers' perceptions that their value is underestimated and the quality of college education undermined. An integrated, content-based system to substitute for the current English education was suggested by the teachers. Conclusively, how the participants' professional teacher identities have been developed in association with teaching general English is discussed with implications of the literature.

[**Korean English language teachers' perceptions/teaching general English/focus on practicality/quality of college education/professional teacher identities**]

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the initiation by the Korean Ministry of Education of EPIK (English Program in Korea) in 1996, college English education has focused on improving communicative ability especially in listening and speaking skills so students will be able to talk with native English speakers in English (Hong & Jung, 2006; Park & Bang, 2016b). To meet this requirement, English teachers in colleges have mostly taught general or practical

English courses that have mainly dealt with skill-based knowledge or test-oriented instruction as in Taiwanese high schools (Pan, 2008). It is likely that avid students have achieved superior language skills (Poulshock, 2011). More often than not, however, the English teachers have played the role of language trainer in giving hints or know-how in order to help their students raise their scores of various types of English tests such as TOEIC or TEPS (Park & Bang, 2016a).

Korean English language teachers (henceforth, KELTs) teaching those practical English courses in higher education have usually studied and done research on the English language and literature or English education for their M.A. or Ph.D. degrees; however, most of their teaching in general English classes is concentrated on the four skills of language. If we assume that the KELTs' teaching of their majors has to do with content directly related to their professional development as professionals or teacher researchers, it can be understood that they are not delivering the same content in the current general English courses, or being engaged in their academic specialties. Accordingly, they might have struggled with this knowledge delivery system of the current general English education. Here in lies the mismatch between "collegiality and individuality" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Mora, Trejo, & Roux, 2014), i.e., between the situation they are involved in as practical English instructors that are given by their schools and their values and beliefs they want to uphold as individual professionals. This is the conceptual idea in which the researcher has envisioned for this study.

There is some literature that has studied perceptions of college general English program in the specific Korean EFL context (Craig & Oh, 2013; Nam, 2005). The former study talked about general English program evaluation and redesign, and the latter explored new communication-based English curriculum and instruction in a specific university English program. Despite the characteristics of these studies that are primarily related to students' and teachers' consciousness of communicative language teaching in particular, they did not identify the college general English course as a whole and its effects on the teachers' identities. In a lot of literature, Korean researchers have clearly referred to problems and directions for college English education as liberal arts that are quite reflective and critical in its discussions (Choi & Lee, 2016; Chung, 2007; Kim, 2006). However, few studies have focused on the English teachers themselves, simply dealing with the phenomena around college English education. That is, they have rarely highlighted KELTs' perceptions of their teaching general English courses which they are engaged in for years and themselves as the course instructors. The present study explores KELTs' identity construction through their perceptions of teaching general English courses in Korean universities.

For this purpose, the study responds to the following research questions.

1) How do KELTs in higher education institutions perceive their teaching general

English courses in college?
2) How do they construct their teacher identity through the perceptions?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. General English Education: Its Applicability and Perceptions on It

The English language is being used in more than eighty percent of the world's knowledge nowadays (Abdulaziz, Shah, Mahmood, & Haq, 2012). With its popularity and emphasis on practical purposes, English has been taught in higher education as well as primary and secondary educations in countries speaking English as a foreign language. It has been often called by the name of 'general' or 'practical' English courses (Qu, 2012; Yoon & Jang, 2009). Research of college general English programs in such countries has recently focused on reality and applicability of the courses in their colleges (Kojour & Heirati, 2015; Li, Zhao, & Cao, 2016). Kojour and Heirati (2015) examined Iranian students' and teachers' beliefs in ESP (English for specific purposes) by specifically looking into the change of learners' beliefs while participating in English courses. His findings concluded that the learners changed their beliefs about the general English course highlighting grammar and vocabulary. In the change, their teachers' role of mediation was essential to help the students be able to do better in reading comprehension using the teachers' teaching strategies. In the survey report of Li et al. (2016), Chinese students' perceptions of college English courses were investigated. The research results covered that the main problems in Chinese college EFL course were closely associated with the students' academic motivation in regards to empowerment, interest, and success. Depending on their perceptions, the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) was found necessary for their college English education.

In the specific Korean EFL context, research of college general or practical English courses was primarily regarding the English program itself (Craig & Oh, 2013; Ko, 2010; Lee, 2000; Yoon & Jang, 2009) or more specifically, it has to do with learners' or teachers' perceptions on the program or the possibility for any change in the perceptions (Lee, 2014; Nam, 2005). The research on programs is primarily aimed at developing and intensifying it, and so has been concerned with overall evaluation and redesign (Craig & Oh, 2013; Yoon & Jang, 2009); the improvement of the educational quality of general English program of their particular universities (Lee, 2000); the learner needs analysis (Ko, 2010; Lim & Kim, 2004); and the availability of communicative English programs (Lee, 2000). Among these studies, most noticeable is Lee (2000) which addressed that a

general English program focused on communication should be applied with a context-sensitive nature. That is to say, the program could be well attuned to one university, yet may not be suitably matched with other universities.

Concentrating more on the agents implementing the English program, Nam (2005) thoroughly explored Korean college students' and teachers' perceptions of CLT by evaluating a specific college English program at a Korean university and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the college EFL curriculum. The results showed that the students' attitudes were negative toward the effectiveness of the communication-based curriculum. In contrast to the studies that examined English programs or learners' perceptions of them, it is noteworthy that Nam focused on consciousness of both teachers and students on the English curricula. Similarly, Lee (2014) examined students' perceptions of general and practical English divided in her school through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. It was found that the students did not only want to develop communicative speaking skills, showing their preference and tendency toward the practicality, but also appealed for the necessity of level differentiation in their classes.

2. Identity Construction of English Language Teacher

1) General Features of English Teacher Identity Construction

One trend of research on English teacher identity construction draws upon Wenger's (1998) theory of identity formation that discussed the two processes of identification and negotiability in communities of practice. Wenger suggests that identities are formed amid the "tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p. 188). As Wenger argues, identification is both reificative and participative in which the two concepts, participation and non-participation are pivotal to the process of identification. Negotiability, on the other hand, comprises the ability to shape and claim the ownership of meanings that is concerned with the communities of practice. Other researchers discuss language teacher identity based on Wenger's theory. One study is Tsui (2007) examined one teacher's lived experiences as a learner and teacher of English, in which she reported the teacher's stories of six-year teaching. There were some struggles with his multiple identities including both a deaf-and-mute student in CLT and being a marginal teacher at the first place. Tsui also discussed the interplay between reification and negotiation of meanings, and the institutional construction and his personal reconstruction of identities. Additional research drawing on Wenger's social theory of identity formation, Trent and Gao (2009) investigated second-career English language

teachers' identity construction in Hong Kong secondary schools. The second-career teachers' skills and experiences were not valued, which was reflected in the gap between the institutionally endorsed identity positions and the type of teachers they wanted to be. In this case, non-participation was employed by the teacher participants to create the space they needed to enact their ideal model of teacher identity. Identity formation was shaped by multiple trajectories for those teachers, where each trajectory offered diverse practices shaping the meanings.

Another direction for identity research lies in novice teachers' suffering from the distance between expectations prior to actual teaching, the practical realities they are faced with, and the professional development that they achieve through their struggles. Trent (2012) illustrated this aspect of identity construction with participants of English language teachers teaching in Hong Kong. The struggle as a beginner teacher caused the participant teachers to have a different outcome for their future profession as a language teacher. According to Trent, such a different identity construction proposes the distinct process of identity formation depending upon the participants' engagement in the teaching practices, their relations with students and colleagues, and their positioning within different discourses of teaching.

Furthermore, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) explored ways of theorizing language teacher identity juxtaposed with three different theoretical frameworks including social identity theory, theory of situated learning, and concept of the image-text. To do this, they cited three data-based studies of language teacher identity. Underlying are the two independent lines of thinking about language teaching. In the first, language teachers are seen as technicians who merely apply the right methodology, yet the teacher now has become the focus of research attention and language teacher identity as "a crucial component in determining how language teaching is played out" (p. 22). The other line of thought explores the sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching. Issues of teacher identity are appropriately connected with substantive issues since language teachers experience professional and social marginalization both in schools and outside, such as the unstable position of non-native English speakers (NNESs), the status of language teaching as a profession, and relations with students.

2) ESL/EFL Teachers' Identity Construction

At the center of research on identities of teachers teaching English as a second or a foreign language is the power-related issue in which nativism or ownership of English language has been problematized (Amin, 1997; Tang, 1997). Amin (1997) indicated that there was a connection between race and language ability for some learners who come

from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and her participant teachers came to feel disempowered by their students' stereotype of an authentic ESL teacher. However, the participants improved their sense of identities by not perceiving their identities as othered and marginal, but rather resisting the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992). Tang (1997), in his study of power and status of non-native ESL teachers, had similar consequences in that non-native ESL teachers perceived the lack of English language proficiency and fluency relative to their counterparts, yet overcame the obstacles they felt. They were bilinguals, sharing a mother tongue with their students, empathetic listeners for low-level students, and agents for educational change. Tang discussed the social identity of non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) where there was a lot of potential for accomplishment.

It is noteworthy that research of ESL/EFL teachers' identity has been recently done in post-secondary institutions of many extending-circle countries, where they investigated the teachers' personal, socio-cultural, or professional identities (Chen, 2009; Navnyko, 2015; Mora et al., 2014). Chen (2009) examined personal, socio-cultural, language learning, and professional experiences that influence Taiwanese NNESTs' identities, and developed knowledge and understanding of the ways that teachers' experiences while studying in the U.S. led to the transition of their identities and the change of future teaching practices. Likewise, Mora et al. (2014) explored professional identities and development with Mexican English language teachers. What they pursued was to observe the interplay between professional development, identity and agency, and the effect of English language teaching certificates on these factors. They found a close but complex connection between the teachers' identities and their professional development. Another study of EFL teacher identity, Navnyko (2015) focused on Russian English language teachers' selves as a way to bring about the understanding of the complicated professional teacher identity. As a result, no significant relationship was found between teachers' imagined linguistic communities and their perceptions of selves as English language teachers. This was reported true for the hybrid identities of English language learner, user, and multi-competent speaker.

3) KELTs' Identity Construction

As for research on KELTs' identities, I focus on the Korean teaching context in particular. Most of the previous research has been primarily involved in the discussions of the perceptions on KELTs themselves as language teachers. Nativism, i.e., how to negotiate with their identity as NNESTs was the main concern. Choe (2008) explored KELTs' struggling with their non-nativeness in the TESOL profession with four participant teachers. They viewed themselves as second-rate teachers, inferior to native

English speaking teachers (NESTs) because of their lack of native-like pronunciation and target language cultural knowledge. They constructed their identity from their non-native status, an obstacle to positioning themselves in the profession. For strategies to remove negative self-images, TESOL training in English speaking countries and experience in the target language culture were proposed. Consequently, three out of four teachers could reconstruct positive images of themselves in those countries. Choi (2009) investigated how a KELT understands herself as an English teacher while she negotiates the junction between multiple discourses and her professional identity formation. The study found the teacher's understanding of herself diverse and complicated in the discourse of native speaker fallacy. Her limited linguistic status as a non-native English speaker also made her doubt her status as a competent language teacher. In another study of perceptions on KELTs themselves, Park and Bang (2016a) explored how KELTs in university EFL settings perceived themselves as language teachers and how the perceptions influenced their teaching practice and professional teacher identity. In their study, four participant teachers perceived themselves as teachers in general, rather than English language teachers. They had a sense of linguistic deficiency, and thus had the need to improve their language abilities and constantly engage in professional development. This sense made them experience struggles with the discrepancy between the two self-images that they have established. One is the ideal self-images as good humanistic teachers which turned out an invariant teacher identity, and the other is perceptual images of themselves in which they are lacking native-like language proficiency. Further research of KELTs' identities through their perceptions about themselves was conducted by Park and Bang (2016b) and it revealed their consciousness of the current college English education policy in favor of NESTs and their status as NNESTs. In their research, the teachers recognized that the employment policy of NESTs is not always effective for English education, but rather doubted NESTs' qualifications as college professors. The policy eventually made the KELTs feel insecure and frustrated with their position and situations at colleges which led to a minor role in class.

As a way of researching teacher reflection, Yang and Bautista (2008) distinctively had an arts-based inquiry such as letter writing and self-portrait as reflective and transformative tools in pursuit of the KELT identity. It was essential to see how the KELT shaped their teacher identity through interrelated negotiations with herself and others. They concluded that "Korean English teachers are continuously complying with values, standards, and norms from the individual, school, and society…[They] struggle to establish their own identity, and this struggle can result in positive transformations" (p. 303). Similarly, Lim (2011) used teachers' reflections to explore Korean student teachers' personal histories and beliefs in search of the qualities of a

good English teacher. In doing so, he attempted concept maps which integrated qualitative analysis and multidimensional statistical analysis. They revealed that Korean students experienced a high level of pressure for English proficiency when they considered English teaching as their career. What is meaningful for his study is the realization that teacher identity develops from the interaction between the knowledge experience and the institutional practice.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

Three KELTs participated in the present study, and they have been teaching English in liberal arts or English departments for more than ten years at Korean universities. They differed from their major fields in the graduate study for their M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from one another, but had lots of experiences in teaching general English in common.

1) Jeongin

Jeongin has been teaching almost all aspects of English skills including English grammar, reading, writing, speaking, and TOEIC/TOEFL for fifteen years, and is currently teaching English listening/speaking and writing in the liberal arts department and English literature for English majors as a part-time instructor at a few universities. She studied in the department of English Language and Literature in Korea and the U.S. for her M.A., and has changed her major to English education since she returned from a seven-year stay in the U.S., and is currently working on her dissertation in the field of TESOL.

2) Jinsung

Jinsung has been teaching general English in many universities as a part-time instructor for more than twenty years. He has been teaching English listening, writing, and conversation to undergraduates and English Education to graduate students. He studied for his second M.A. in English Literature in Australia after receiving his M.A. in Korea though he had to stop his foreign studies for financial and academic reasons.

3) Yujin

Yujin began with her teaching in a full-time non-tenured position in a Korean

university and got recently promoted to a tenured position. She studied American Literature for her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Korea and also studied in the M.A. TESOL program in an American university to fulfill her goal of becoming a specialist in English education. She has been teaching practical English and English grammar mostly to sophomore and junior students. Table 1 below provides an overview of the participant teachers.

TABLE 1
Overview of the Participants

Pseudonym	Age/Gender	Degree completed	Status (at data collection)	Year of teaching (years)	Which E. components to teach	Which language to teach
Jeongin	48/F	M.A. in the U.S.	Non-tenured	15	Every component	English
Jinsung	53/M	Ph.D. in Korea	Non-tenured	20	Every component	Korean & English
Yujin	47/F	Ph.D. in Korea; M.A. in the U.S.	Non-tenured (2011); Tenured (2016)	20	Every component	Korean

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis and the interpretation of the study are based on grounded theory which is an inductive, qualitative research methodology. It enables the researcher to understand the data conceptualized from the interaction with the worlds, i.e., the participants' teaching environments, and lets the data speak for itself (Glaser, 1998). Individual interviews as a data collection method were conducted in 2011 at first, and were conducted again in 2016.[1] The latter interviews aimed at supplementing and reinforcing the former interview data, and thus the participants were reminded of their own responses to some discursive themes which emerged from the first interviews. The interviews are semi-structured, and the questions in the first interviews are regarding 'teacher the self' such as 'What role do you think you are playing as an English language teacher in Korean socio-cultural contexts?' or 'Have you experienced being emotionally affected?'; and 'teacher related to teaching' such as 'Are there any beliefs and values in your teaching?' or 'What are the challenges or struggles you have experienced in your

[1]This study is partly based on the author's dissertation that explored five Korean English language teachers' identities for which data were collected in 2011. The ideas of current study have been inspired by the data.

English classes?' The interview language was preferably chosen by each participant.

For the data analysis, the researcher at first repeatedly listened to and read audio and interview data transcribed verbatim. The analysis has been saturated from the conceptualization of the data in terms of coding, memoing, and sorting, so that the researcher could obtain meaningful themes as they emerged. Table 2 below shows an overview of data collection dates.

TABLE 2
Data Collection Dates

Participant	Interview
Jeongin	March 3 (Preliminary); March 29; July 11 (2016)
Jinsung	March 30; July 21 (2016)
Yujin	February 11 (Preliminary); April14; Oct. 18 (2016)

IV. FINDINGS

1. English as Skills

1) Aggravating Students' Concern on Grade and Their Shallow Thought System

The participant teachers agreed to the idea that English has been taught with the focus on the improvement of four skills for years. The phenomenon is much more severe in the skill-based English classes, as they expressed, though there is a tendency that students are usually concerned with raising their grades rather than seeking profound knowledge and exploring academics. The following narrative illustrates this perception:

> It seems that most of the students are motivated to get good grades from the very beginning of the semester. There is a tendency to belittle English classes. Though I prepare many class materials to make classes more interesting, I see their primary interest in grades. In that situation, it's difficult to lead and manage the class as a teacher. (Jinsung, March 30/11)

Jinsung considered his students' focus on grades as a tendency to make light of general English classes, underlying his difficulty as a teacher. That tendency, he continued, consequently made him emotionally hurt and humiliated, and this is the same in NESTs' class situation. Jeongin also understood that the English classes at college mainly deal with listening and speaking among the four language skills. Her narrative speaks that "Because the term of English teacher represents a function of skill or technique, I do not

want to be a technician or a person skillful. I mean, teaching English in general, English speaking, it can be skills" (Jeongin, March 29/11). Yujin added that "It appears to be evident that the general English education is being done toward four skills. In fact, writing is also too light for students, isn't it? I mean, we are teaching too easy writing" (Yujin, Oct. 18/16). Agreeing with her remarks, but slightly differently, Jinsung addressed in 2016 data collection that "They tend to avoid burdensome classes. For example, if it's English writing, they are unwilling to take it. Improving grade is their main purpose….The students do not catch up with the difficult or complicated class well" (Jinsung, July 21/16).

Another instance comes from Yujin's narrative that shares one of the students' perceptions of taking English courses: "Students go to private institutions to learn English. So I said to them, why are you spending money in learning English outside? They say that they cannot get good grades when the English classes they take are difficult. That's the problem" (Yujin, Oct. 18/16). This perception implies that English education has been mainly concerned with four skills of language, and college students have been used to taking English courses which are relatively easy to take and that they assume learning English at the private institutions is similar to that at the university. This means that the universities have rarely provided the quality of education they should have necessarily given as higher educational institutions.

It was also found, extending the above discussion, that English education focused on four language skills would aggravate college students' general thought system that the participant teachers consider depthless and shallow. Jinsung demonstrated that his students these days would not like to take challenging classes, and he observes this picture every semester at the universities where he teaches. Yujin also acknowledged the same phenomenon:

> When I teach at the level I want as a college teacher, my students would complain it too much. Somehow I think I have to teach very shallow knowledge. These days' students are the smart phone generation. They in general do not read, write, and think the content knowledge in depth. Some of the students ask me 'what will be the use if I learn about American literature?'(Yujin, August 18/16)

As in above, she agrees with Jinsung's understanding of the Korean college students' attitudes. To this acknowledgement, she added that they just choose classes they regard as easy to take, and emphasized that they think very little of the humanities. Furthermore, Jeongin confessed that there exists her students' unconscious distinction between professors in the major-subject program and ones in the liberal arts, saying that "Teaching speaking or listening is different from teaching major field of study, for

example, English Literature" (Jeongin, June 21/11). In her perception, it is implied that the current English education is dealing with simple language skills rather than content-based knowledge and its elaboration and applicability.

2) No More Specialties of English Subjects

The participant teachers perceived that English courses are not valued as much as they were in the past. According to Jinsung's narrative, the market of English education has been reduced a lot over the last decade. He explained about the present status of English language in which English is being merely considered one of many foreign languages, and it does not pay special attention any longer inside and outside schools. From his perspective, the Korean college students today do not feel the necessity of English learning as compared with the past. It seems that his acknowledgement is based on his awareness of how significant English has been in recent years. Likewise, Yujin revealed her perception on what English courses in college means nowadays and in comparison of major fields of study as follows:

> Today almost all students are additionally taking courses for their minor and double majors. The score of major subjects has been considered much more important than before. So, the students are likely to make light of English classes. The students seem to think of English courses as one of many liberal arts. And also, there are so many students who have been to foreign countries, and English ability is not that competitive. English has been generalized recently in our society, thereby not exceptional any more. My school is also planning to abolish English Department and integrate it with Chinese Department. (Yujin, August 18/16)

Yujin's consciousness, as demonstrated above, is very similar to Jinsung's in that both of them observed that their students perceive the English class as not special or required, but counted as just one of a variety of humanities subjects that students can willingly take for their selective studies. Both teachers straightforwardly pointed out in common, the status of English courses in college has been quite weakened. For Jeongin as well, English is never regarded as distinguished in the Korean context. English is so prevalent nowadays that many people are interested and engaged in teaching and learning English, with many different types of English instruction. This made her consider that her teaching English is not unusual, and intensified the conception that what she is teaching is techniques in her general English courses. Accordingly, teaching the courses did not help her discover her identity as a teacher, recognizing that her ability was not appropriately evaluated in the present teaching system. We can listen to the following:

> I sometimes teach very low level of students. When I teach English basic rules and structures, I don't feel like I am a person working at higher education institutions, so I think that I have to teach something more and new for them. We need not necessarily get a Ph.D. degree to teach those basic things. (Jeongin, July 11/16)

According to the excerpt, Jeongin wants to teach content that is well-matched with the college level of education. This would be, as she perceived, the proper way for her as a college professor, and in addition the common perspective the teacher participants have had toward the general English education.

2. Becoming English Language Teachers Nowadays

1) Adapting to Students' Needs: A Way of Becoming a Good Teacher

The teachers shared a sense of obligation in which they should adapt themselves to realities that their students are faced with. Their narratives represented the students' general inclination not to take difficult or demanding classes since those classes are hard for them to catch up with. Rather than complaining or opposing the tendency, the teachers tried to accept it as their teachers. Jinsung's data reflects this perception as follows:

> I have to adapt myself to my students' level or interests. My job is to follow their needs and requests, and I do my best as always even if the curriculum or the subject I should teach changes every semester….I could carry out hard training on them, so promote their better ability, if I intend to, but after all, we should consider the students' level of learning ability. (Jinsung, July 21/16)

In addition to this understanding, he asserted that the overall atmosphere in educational society has been changed, and that there is a shared recognition in society that the education has collapsed. It appears that his perception as a KELT has been extended in association with the general educational sight and recognition of the public. Likewise, Yujin also acknowledged that she has to help her students' realistic needs, which is also important for her. The following narrative shows her consciousness:

> For my students to get the job, it is essential right away to speak fluently or get high scores in TOEIC. I realized that I was stupid to think that only teaching my major was meaningful. What I have insisted for the field of teaching is not always necessary now. I switched my mind. It is more important for me to

> become a good teacher. (Yujin, August 18/16)

Explaining what her students' needs are, she added that "Imposing learning her major field of study on my students as a professor is not desirable. If I teach what they do not want, that's my selfishness. I just want them to learn English with pleasure and comfort in my class" (Yujin, Aug. 18/16). This conception made her feel comfortable and easy as she confessed. Likewise, Jeongin recognized that "It doesn't matter only if my own standards, the matter of quality as a teacher are accomplished" (Jeongin, July 11/16). That is, she wanted to be proud of herself as a good teacher under the strict norm that she set even though she has been teaching skill-based English in many classes.

2) Aspiring in-Depth Education by Combining Content and Skills

The teacher participants ultimately represented their desire to apply an ideal curriculum that they think for the future English education. Although they pointed out pitfalls of the current skill-based English education, they were willing to express their recognitions on what they could and should provide for general English education system. Jinsung articulated his perception concerning this: "Even though I should not always teach content knowledge, it is true that it's lacking. I mean, the current English education too much emphasizes techniques, so I basically stand for education focused more on contents" (Jinsung, July 21/16). This way he acknowledged there was room for updating contents as much as functions. Similarly but with a little more elaboration, Yujin disclosed one of the ideas that she has envisioned for the English curriculum below:

> I am thinking about teaching college English with a little difficult level that would be equivalent to the level of TOEIC reading part. Teaching knowledge in depth is what we should do for an ultimate goal, not only focus on language skills or oral ability….In my view, whatever the background reasons are, the quality of English education in Korea has been downgraded. For students in high proficiency, we do not have to have foreign teachers mainly in charge of listening and speaking because the students are good at those. We need to find some fields that KELTs can show their talents. (Yujin, August 18/16)

The above excerpt does not only signify the necessity for something more than language skills for college English education, but implies advantages that KELTs can have as local teachers. For example, she explained about the need to incorporate her expertise into the general English class: Descriptive language items could be explained in terms of the scientific nature of language, thereby stimulating her students' intellectual curiosity. She

asserted that her classes are open for college students, not the others. Yujin's perception is also comparable to Jeongin's preference in teaching general English which could combine contents and skills. Jeongin pointed out that "Language is not the main specific area, but can be applied in general" (Jeongin, July 11/16). She further addressed that language should include every aspect from decoding through knowledge to content. Here is her acknowledgement in relation to the characteristics of language she meant:

> We should not ignore any part of language because it's a basic source and a resource for other academic fields. However, there should be still an objective. I would like to teach [English] language in an integrated way, making it possible that I am able to promote my students' vocabulary learning and simultaneously their own thinking on contents in reading. From this standpoint, the contents should be combined with skills. The existing learning approaches such as skill-based learning or communicative learning are not the answers. (Jeongin, July 11/16)

As suggested above, Jeongin agreed to the necessity to go beyond the current skill-/ function-based language education, and the existing communicative learning approach is not enough either. She expanded her acknowledgement toward her status as an English language teacher: "There is a gap between teaching general English and teaching major subjects. I have a view that there is a hierarchy in teaching within myself. Students do not respect me that much. Their assumption about me as a teacher is a little bit different" (Jeongin, June 21/11). By stating a 'gap' between the two fields of teaching, she acknowledged she seems to be 'lowered' in the hierarchy of teaching as a teacher teaching general English. This indirectly represents her aspiration for the language instruction that would be equivalent to the level of college education.

V. DISCUSSION

1. Degraded Status of English: Undervalued English Language Teacher

Three KELTs' perceptions on their teaching of general (or practical) English courses have included the students' recognition and attitude toward the status of English education. The teachers discovered their students' lesser concerns and interests in general English, in which they considered general English courses just one option of the liberal arts, not counted as required courses. They agreed with each other on the view that the students' main concern is with grades, not focused on actual learning from academic curiosity. Depending upon the participants' perceptions, there has been a

tendency among the students to seek for taking lighter and easier courses to get higher grades, and the present English instruction played a role of aggravating their shallow knowledge and thought system. It is considered that the current English education might have affected their students' concerns and learning attitudes.

The study suggests that the participant teachers' recognition reflects the present English education system which is focused on four skills of language (Choi, 2016), especially listening and speaking skills to promote students' oral communication ability. This change of attention in regard to general English courses in Korean colleges is echoed in Qu (2012) that explicates the problems English departments in Chinese universities are faced with in response to the *practical turn* (emphasis added) in English studies. According to his report, despite the success of various English training agencies and the importance of linguistic capital for personal success, the craze for English has declined in the study of English as a major at the university level. In short, the recent focus on practical English undermines the academic quality of English education in China. This aspect is fairly consistent with the results from the present study.

The students' attitudes of practical English courses contributed to the teachers' recognition of their degraded position as language teachers. They regard themselves as being 'lower' in the hierarchy in general English teaching as in Jeongin's perception. In other words, the teachers in charge of those English classes are undervalued or not appropriately evaluated. This is well reflected in Jeongin's statement in which the current teaching to low level students in English proficiency does not necessarily require a Ph.D. degree most KELTs currently have. The teachers' consciousness of their status as language teachers is also represented when it comes to her relating to her comparison with teaching major subjects.

2. Combining Contents and Skills: A Way of Pursuing Alternative English Education and Constructing Professional Teacher Identity

Depending on the participants' consciousness, it is obvious that they thought they should adapt themselves to their students' present necessities as a priority. By doing this, they positioned themselves as adaptable agents to the students' favorable learning environments, thereby making sure that the teachers' goals, values, and beliefs are used to confirm their identity (Schutz & Davis, 2000; Schutz & Lee, 2014).

Along with the adjustment, they would like to pursue their values and beliefs regarding what they suppose is better for college English education, or what should be taught at the college level for their students. The teachers expressed the notion that their students need to get exposed to higher level of language education which does not merely emphasize language functions or oral proficiency, yet rather, a content-based and

integrated way of education that requires being more involved in thinking and knowledge in depth. Behind this perception was the teachers' being deeply concerned with the degraded recognition of English courses in college owing to the skill-based English education with the purpose of 'practicality,' although English still remains as linguistic capital (Park, 2012; Song, 2011) in the Korean society. The teachers' conception, in a sense, signifies that it is time to be reconsidered and reestablished as liberal arts education that would be affected by the change of consciousness of the times (Park, 2014).

It appears to be evident that the teachers have ultimately experienced a gap between what they have taught in their classes and what they think they should provide their students. Their striving for content-based English instruction, one of which could be literature-based language program (Kim, 2015), seems to be an effort to fill up the gap. Considering that the language is a basic source and a resource for other academic fields, just as Jeongin pointed out, it is noteworthy to say that the purpose of language instruction at college is not to acquire knowledge of language itself, but its expansion and applicability to deeper thought system. The participant teachers deliberated their role of a good teacher as associated with their students' needs and appropriate college education. The rationale that they perceived no more specialties in general English courses is attributed to the situation that language as skills has been an end, rather than a means in the classroom. This reflects the teachers' perspective that general English programs in college could be enhanced, so that they construct themselves as professionals not technicians.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has explored three KELTs' perceptions on teaching general English courses in college and their teacher identity construction through the perceptions. The three participant teachers recognized that the current English education system in college never provided something more than liberal arts program, or special status as an international language, nor promoted the quality equivalent to higher educational institutions. Teaching general English represented the teachers' degraded position as language instructors and college professors. They acknowledged that such a changed view and attitude would be attributed to the educational focus on practicality. They doubted its goals and effects, but instead, aspired more content-based curriculum that enables their students to deepen their thought system and enlarge their knowledge bases.

Through the participants' narratives, they found their professional identities emerged from the interaction with their students and their understanding of the relationship

between their teaching contexts and social and educational recognition. Although it does not appear that the status of the participants, being non-tenured is a crucially attributable factor in the results of the study, it would be more productive if both tenured and non-tenured college English teachers are included as participants in further research. This is considered a limitation of the current study. However, it is through qualitative inquiry that we can deeply understand and listen to study participants' inner voice on their experiences, situations, and themselves. A much larger number of participants would still be a help in collaboration with quantitative research methods and could consequently promote a deeper understanding on KELTs' identities.

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Examples in: English
Applicable language: English
Applicable level: Tertiary

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