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Writing Instruction in the Middle Grades: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry of Teacher Perceptions and Practices in South Korea and the United States

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Writing Instruction in the Middle Grades: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry of Teacher Perceptions and Practices in South Korea and the United States

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Introduction

Writing is one of the essential skills for academic achievement and career development in the 21st century. In today's information-flooded society, it is important to teach students how to communicate effectively and convey information accurately. Writing is an essential tool to express ideas at the personal and professional levels. However, best practices in writing instruction have not been well researched. Few professional development opportunities have been provided for educators to improve their teaching of writing in the classroom (Graham, 2019). The need for research and instructional improvement has been recognized by teachers and scholars in many countries. Collaborative investigations have started to examine issues in writing pedagogy from a cross-cultural perspective (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2018; Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Veiga Simão et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study is to examine writing instruction in South Korea and one state within the United States (US) by exploring the perceptions and instructional practices of those who teach writing to students in the middle grades. The term middle grades in this study refers to various grade ranges (6-8, 7-8, or 5-8) in the state whereas most middle schools in South Korea serve grades 7-9. When students enter middle grades, they learn to write in diverse genres and write to demonstrate their understanding of complex texts. Students are often asked to explain content knowledge in a piece of informational writing. They also engage in a series of writing activities to produce a lengthy text. The literacy curricula in South Korea and the US reflect these expectations (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham et al., 2014; Hodges et al., 2019; Jang, 2013; Park, 2007). Even though the middle grades are a critical time for students to make a significant transition from elementary-to secondary-level expectations (Ray et al., 2016), little is known about how teachers support them to achieve this important learning goal.

Comparing one cultural context to another helps teachers have a deeper understanding of their own teaching context. Moreover, cross-cultural studies offer an opportunity for educators and researchers to be exposed to educational contexts beyond their own. A cross-national investigation is a collaborative endeavor to examine common educational issues in different linguistic, cultural, and social contexts (Kelly, 2013). Therefore, this study has tried to make sense of

contextual factors that affect teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to writing.

The purpose of this comparative inquiry is to address the following questions:

- In what ways are teachers in South Korea and one state in the US teaching writing in the middle grades?
- How are they prepared to teach writing?
- How do they perceive best practices in writing instruction for middle-grade students?
- How do they support students with varying writing abilities and motivate them to write?

Review of Literature

Writing Education in South Korea and the US

Over the decades, national survey studies in South Korea and the US have documented how writing is taught from primary to secondary grades (e.g., Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graham et al., 2003; Graham et al., 2014; Jang, 2013; Kim et al., 2020; Lee, 2012; Myers et al., 2016; Ray et al., 2016; Troia & Graham, 2016). These studies focused on educational trends associated with each country's changing policies, standards, curricula, and instructional approaches. South Korea and the US have distinct historical, linguistic, cultural, and societal contexts. For example, Korean education is characterized as being highly competitive (Lee et al., 2012); teachers are expected to cover a great amount of curricular content rather than dwelling on process-oriented learning, such as process writing (Kim et al., 2020). On the other hand, in the US, workshop models in writing are commonly practiced in elementary schools (Troia et al., 2011). Process writing is one of the prevalent approaches adopted by US middle school teachers (Hodges et al., 2019).

More specifically, writing education in South Korea has gone through major reforms with revisions of the national curriculum and standards to include diverse aspects of writing development and learner-centered instructional approaches. The 2015 Revised National Curriculum indicated that students in the middle grades should learn how to construct and present ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (The Ministry of Education Korea, 2015). Under this overarching framework, the contents of writing instruction are specified to

promote student-centered, collaborative learning in areas of text types and purposes, writing strategies, and writing attitudes across grade levels. However, high-stakes assessment is still a predominant force driving classroom instruction. For example, a survey study by Jang (2013) shows that many middle and high school teachers in South Korea are not satisfied with their instructional practices in writing. They wish they had more time and resources to support their students' specific needs in the classroom. Teachers reported that pressure from standardized testing and assessment was a major factor that limited the time they could devote to providing targeted support and feedback to individual students.

Similarly, high-stakes assessment has negative impacts on writing in US classrooms (McQuitty, 2012). At the middle and secondary levels writing is often used to evaluate students' understanding of complex texts and subject-matter material. The Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts indicate that students in grades 6-8 are expected to demonstrate content knowledge from research and evaluation of various resources (CCSS, 2010). CCSS offers a progression of writing objectives to be met at each grade and across grades, but it does not specify how writing should be taught in the classroom to achieve the grade-level expectations (Graham et al., 2015).

Despite continuous reforms in the learning standards, methods of teaching writing in the classroom have not changed drastically in past years in South Korea (Park, 2007) and in the US (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Traditional approaches to writing are commonly observed in upper-grade classrooms where students learn writing skills and conventions in teacher-directed lessons (Wright et al., 2020). Filling in the blanks, responding to short answer questions, or copying information are common classroom practices (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Jang, 2013). Beyond the language arts class, little time is spent on extended writing or composing text that is more than a paragraph long (Graham et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2020).

Instructional Practices in Writing: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

For the past decades, observational and survey studies have examined teacher perceptions and practices in writing at US schools. Many studies highlight that teachers' instructional practices in writing are influenced by their knowledge and beliefs (e.g., Hodges et al., 2019; Martin & Dismuke, 2015; Zuidema & Fredricksen, 2016). Time devoted to writing and types of writing activities are highly associated with teachers' attitudes toward writing (Gardner, 2014; Graham

et al., 2001). Teachers' instructional strategies and modifications are affected by student characteristics and specific school context (Brindley & Schneider, 2002; Garcia & O'Donnell-Allen, 2016; Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; McQuitty, 2012). Results of these studies reveal that the quality of writing instruction and the rigor of practices in middle-grade classrooms are inadequate to help diverse learners grow as competent and independent writers.

Extended writing activities are often hindered by time constraints and the heavy load of content that has to be covered. High-stakes exams are the major hurdle to promoting authentic practices in which students write for real life purposes. Despite the fact that today's young people spend more time engaged in written expression with electronic devices, technology use to facilitate writing is still limited in a typical middle-grade classroom (Graham, 2019). Moreover, teachers do not receive specialized training to integrate process-oriented or content-based writing into their daily lessons. Research highlights that professional development efforts are critical for providing quality instruction and promoting student engagement in writing (Troia et al., 2011).

Many researchers have pointed out that describing a full picture of students' writing growth over time is not a straightforward task (Bazerman et al., 2017; Lee, 2016). Writing development is complex and varies by individual students (Graham, 2019). Specific components of the writing lessons in a classroom are dissimilar across different educational contexts. Nonetheless, examining how writing is taught in various linguistic and cultural settings is useful for advancing writing pedagogy. A comparative analysis of writing instruction generates accounts of social and cultural differences across nations. It brings "[an] improved understanding of the broad relations between teachers, practice, and pupil experiences (the relation of the how and what of teaching to what is learnt) and the wider social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are embedded" (Kelly, 2013, p. 417). Therefore, cross-cultural inquiries underline similarities and differences in educational practices with consideration of the larger social and cultural context. The current inquiry seeks to explore practices of writing in the middle grades, based on teacher experiences in the classroom.

Methods

This study aims to describe and analyze how participants make sense of their settings and actions. It uses a semi-structured interview method in which

participants are asked to respond to a set of questions but have the flexibility to elaborate their responses in their own terms (Craig, 2011). We, a teacher educator in each country, collaborated to set up an interview protocol through a series of online meetings. Open-ended questions were created in Korean and English to examine teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of writing. Interview questions were reviewed by another teacher educator who specializes in writing education to ensure clarity of the interview questions. Using a purposeful sampling method, language arts teachers in the middle grades from various schools in South Korea and the US were invited to participate in the study. A total of 16 teachers did so. The eight Korean participants came from different regions of the country. The eight US participants came from various towns in one northeastern state. In both contexts, there were a mix of schools, in terms of the socio-economic background of the students and the funding, public or private. All but one of the schools were co-educational. Several teachers worked at schools with diverse language learners. Three teachers worked at art-specialized schools. All Korean participants were ethnic Koreans and three were male. All US participants were female and three were people of color. Although the sample size was small, the participating teachers represent various educational contexts.

Table 1 shows participants' educational and professional backgrounds. Initials from KA to KH refer to the Korean participants. Initials from UI to UP indicate the US participants. Their teaching experiences in middle grades ranged from three to 20 years. Despite varying professional experiences, the participants' educational backgrounds specifically in writing pedagogy showed a similar pattern. Most participants majored in either Korean Language Arts (KLA) or English Language Arts (ELA) education with an emphasis on language, literature, or reading when they were enrolled in teacher education programs. Several teachers received advanced degrees with a concentration in reading, grammar, or literature. Few participants received specialized training on how to teach writing although some were part of a series of professional development sessions with a focus on writing after they became classroom teachers. Participants' self-perceptions of their professional abilities in writing and writing instruction showed a similar pattern. Most felt moderately to highly confident about their own writing ability and ability to teach writing.

Table 1

Participant Information

Initials	Highest Degree	Major	Years of Teaching	School Characteristics
KA*	Masters	Reading	6-10	Private religious all girls
KB	Doctoral	Grammar	>10	Public, high-performing
KC*	Bachelors	KLA	>10	Arts-specialized
KD	Bachelors	KLA	6-10	Suburban, public
KE*	Doctoral	Writing	>10	Arts-specialized, high-performing
KF	Bachelors	KLA	6-10	Urban, public
KG	Bachelor	Grammar	3-5	Specialized to serve diverse language learners
KH	Masters	Literature	>10	Suburban, public
UI+	Masters	Reading	>10	Suburban, public, serving diverse language learners
UJ	Bachelors	ELA	3-5	Suburban, public
UK	Bachelors	ELA	3-5	Suburban, high-performing, public
UL	Bachelors	ELA	6-10	Suburban, high-performing, public
UM	Bachelors	ELA	>10	Urban, arts-specialized
UN+	Masters	ELA	>20	Urban, public, serving diverse language learners
UO+	Masters	Reading	6-10	Urban, low-performing
UP	Masters	Reading	>20	Urban, public, serving diverse language learners

*Male teacher

+Person of color (US teachers only)

The data sources for this study are the transcripts of the semi-structured interview with each participant and a brief written survey completed by the participant prior to the interview. Participants responded to open-ended questions

in four areas: (a) personal and professional background, (b) knowledge, beliefs, and values, (c) writing instruction, and (d) affective aspects of writing (see Appendix A). The semi-structured interviews were held online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We used grounded theory to find patterns in the data. We analyzed the data, using constant comparison (Glaser, 1992). More specifically, raw data were reviewed by the authors for open coding, then axial coding was refined and sorted out for categories. Inter-rater reliability was ensured by constant comparison of the data and continual refinement of the coding methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Country-specific terms and educational contexts were clarified during the coding procedures. The clarification of terms and contexts helped us reach consensus on coding categories. Then, coding categories were refined with consideration of cross-national patterns that represent commonalities and differences in teacher perceptions and practices. This process helped the researchers validate the coding methods and the thematic categories (see Appendix B). Recurring themes were generated to address the research questions.

Findings

The findings of the study showed both commonalities and differences in teacher perceptions and practices of writing for middle-grade students. Some patterns were country specific and influenced by each country's educational and cultural context, but other recurrent patterns were associated with participants' personal and professional backgrounds. Three themes emerged from an in-depth analysis of the contextual factors that influenced participating teachers' writing practices and instructional strategies. These themes were teacher knowledge and professional development, writing practices for middle-grade students, and strategies for struggling writers. We will present the major findings with representative examples from the teacher responses.

Teacher Knowledge and Professional Development

Our findings showed that participants' knowledge and professional experiences in writing were highly relevant to their teaching. Cross-national patterns were common in responses that described how teachers' professional backgrounds shaped their writing instruction. Country-specific factors in their responses were associated with each country's curricular and assessment requirements. School

settings and student characteristics critically affected teacher instruction and professional experiences.

Specifically, a common pattern was observed in the initial teacher preparation programs in which the participants were enrolled. Most participants did not recall specific courses or training that targeted writing pedagogy. They reported that they received from minimal to no formal preparation in middle-grade writing instruction. Instead, they gained instructional knowledge about teaching writing from methods courses that they took in their teacher education programs. Meanwhile, participants reported that they had participated in professional development opportunities to advance their literacy instruction skills once they became classroom teachers. Yet, they pointed out that the professional development opportunities emphasizing writing for in-service teachers were not as common as for other subject areas. Out of the 16 participants, only one teacher (KE) held an advanced degree in the teaching of writing. And only two teachers (KA and UL) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities on a regular basis to improve their writing instruction.

Nevertheless, a slight difference was noticed in participants' experience of professional development regarding middle-grade writing instruction. Korean participants reported they joined professional development activities based on their personal interests and investment whereas US participants reported that they received mandatory training at their school. For example, a US teacher stated, "I have spent at least 25-30 hours per year in professional development for writing. A staff developer came in and showed examples, introduced units and new strategies, and provided feedback" (interview with UI). A Korean teacher, KA, mentioned that he had searched and attended professional development programs on his own to learn practical skills to be used in his classroom. Similarly, another Korean teacher, KG, shared that a workshop provided by a professional association helped her learn instructional strategies she could try in her writing lessons. Furthermore, the providers for teacher professional development programs differed. Korean participants reported that their training was offered by professional associations or government-funded educational agencies, while US participants indicated that their training was provided by their own school district.

Perceptions on Writing Proficiency

Participants shared their views of what proficient writing should look like in the middle grades. Their expectations could be grouped under two themes. First,

students in the middle grades should be able to create their own ideas and express them in a cohesive and logical manner. For example, a Korean teacher suggested that students should be able to “develop their own ideas and present them logically” and “know how to provide supporting details appropriate for the purpose” (interview with KG). Similarly, a US teacher stated that students should be able to “structure an essay that follows a logical order, has a clear order, has a clear thesis and guiding argument/claim, evidence to support their claim, and analysis [that] not only links their claim and evidence, but looks at it creatively from an author’s purpose, standpoint or a theme-based one” (interview with UK).

Second, participants expect that their students should understand elements of diverse types of writing and be able to write in various genres for different purposes and audiences. A Korean teacher emphasized the need for students to practice writing in various genres, stating “there should be different expectations for different types of writing. Some students are better at narrative writing but need improvement in informational writing. They should practice writing in diverse genres” (interview with KA). Likewise, a US teacher said that students should have “the opportunity to write for different purposes, audiences, and across various genres including both fiction and nonfiction” (interview with UL). Overall, the interview data show that Korean and US participants had similar expectations for middle level writing.

Perceptions of Best Practices

Participants shared what they believed to be as best practices in writing instruction for the middle grades. US participants mentioned process-oriented writing programs such as the writers’ workshop model as effective practices to implement in the classroom. A process approach to writing is based on the principle that students produce a piece of writing, following a sequence of writing stages, completing tasks in each stage, and revising their work in progress before creating a final product (Troia, et al., 2011). Using this approach, teachers would model specific steps to take in each stage of the writing process and walk through the steps with their students. For example, UL described her lesson structure: “we follow the writing process and a gradual release model. Typically, we will learn about the elements for a particular writing piece, reading examples/mentor texts of the genre, and then work step by step to plan the elements for our own writing pieces.” Similarly, UJ said, “In my class, we utilize Writer’s Workshop to teach writing. This is an entire unit focused on one type of writing, accompanied by

anchor texts to serve as reference points for students.” Using a process approach, UL and UJ provide guided practice for their students to apply the various elements of writing and complete a final work with teacher guidance.

Korean participants shared what they believed to be best practices from diverse standpoints. Many mentioned that they implemented student-centered learning approaches and project-based learning in which collaborative activities were offered and student initiative was encouraged. These teachers incorporated some aspects of process writing, but their writing lessons were not necessarily structured to provide guided practices for students in all stages of the writing process. For instance, KH commented, “I will introduce lesson objectives at the beginning of the class. The rest is for students to engage in writing activities.” Similarly, KG stated, “I design my writing lessons, using a student-centered approach. I do not follow the unit sequence presented in a textbook. Instead, I restructure the units appropriate for project-based learning, so students can apply what they learn in the project.” Korean participants were expected to follow the unit sequence suggested in a textbook, but they were also able to redesign lesson content by supplementing materials and activities.

Other participants responded that they provided a more structured lesson in which the teacher introduced writing strategies and skills in direct instruction, and then had students apply what they learned to produce a final product. For example, a US teacher (UO) worked at a school serving students from low-income families. Her students needed to strengthen their foundational skills in writing to become independent writers, so she utilized explicit and direct instruction to teach writing elements and skills. She mentioned that she often starts “with a writing video either of me modeling or from YouTube. Then, I ask students to create a sentence or two as a ‘We Do’ [activity]. Students are then able to share their writing before independent practice.” A Korean teacher (KE) taught at a school that served students from high-income families. He reported that he provided direct instruction based on the textbook with limited time for students to practice writing during the lesson. Instead, his students engaged in performance-based writing tasks independently by applying their writing skills learned from teacher-directed lessons.

Writing Practices for Middle-Grade Students

Participants shared how writing is taught in their classroom, in terms of instructional methods and strategies, class activities, frequency of writing

practices, and assessment. Teacher responses reflected each country's learning standards and curriculum required for the middle grades. That is, students are expected to engage in writing practices (a) to demonstrate their understanding of complex texts, (b) to express their own ideas or claims, (c) to present information, and (d) to engage audiences for different purposes. The use of textbooks to deliver content from the national writing curriculum was commonly mentioned by Korean participants. Also, Korean participants reported that they had some flexibility in restructuring the content of a textbook and designing their own lesson plans. Meanwhile, US responses showed that the use of textbooks varied by school. Most US participants reported that they could choose or develop their own materials to be used in writing lessons.

Nevertheless, the participants found it challenging to engage students in extended writing and assist to compose a lengthy text. They also communicated the struggle they faced in trying to teach students of different ability levels in one uniform lesson. A Korean teacher described this challenge: "My students struggle with creating ideas. They may be stuck in this stage, so cannot move forward. Therefore, I had to pay more attention to the drafting stage, providing resources for them to create ideas" (interview with KB). Similarly, a US teacher described a wide range of student abilities, stating, "Students vary in level. I have writers who are on a 2-3 grade level, who struggle with basic English conventions, and I have writers who are highly proficient" (interview with UI).

Also, depending on school climate and student characteristics, participants had to adjust their instructional style to teach writing for diverse learners. For example, a Korean teacher worked at a school in which more than 30 % of the students were Korean language learners. She shared her instructional strategies for diverse language learners: "I had to provide an outline for the Korean language learners to follow," which made it "easier to produce a final product" (interview with KG). Likewise, a US teacher who worked at a school with diverse language learners stated, "It is difficult for English learners to start writing anything if they [can't relate to the subject matter]. I try to keep the topic interesting. We usually have a discussion first.... I think writing should be fun" (interview with UN).

A US teacher who worked at a school serving students from low-income families, applied the Writer's Workshop model in her lesson. She described how she tried to address varying levels of writing ability: "I focus on where the students are [in terms of their writing level] and try to increase their writing

ability” (interview with UP). A Korean teacher works at a school that serves students from low-income families. She applies student-centered and process writing approaches in her lessons. She reported, “I show my students good examples in each step of the writing process and provide feedback for each step” (interview with KF).

Daily Practices

Daily practices in writing show some differences, such as the time spent on teaching writing, the types of writing activities, and the assessment methods used to monitor student learning. The frequency and length of writing practice sessions also vary in the different local contexts. For example, a Korean teacher who works in an affluent school district explained that “I provide direct instruction, but students practice writing a lot. They are asked to demonstrate their learning in writing. They compose a short piece of writing twice a week” (interview with KA). A US teacher who also works in an affluent district stated, “In the seventh grade, we cover literary analysis writing, fiction narrative writing, compare and contrast writing on literature, argumentative writing, informational writing, and poetry writing. When we are in a writing unit, we are working on writing one or two classes a week, so two to four hours of writing engagement” (interview with UI).

When it comes to implementing process writing in a classroom, a US teacher explained that “[t]ypically, we will learn about the elements for a particular writing piece, read examples/mentor texts of the genre, and then work step by step to plan the elements for our own writing pieces” (interview with UL). Meanwhile, Korean participants described how they spend more time instructing students on specific writing elements in the early stages of the writing process. For example, a Korean teacher stated, “My students struggle at the pre-planning stage [of the writing process] ... I emphasize the importance of the writing process in class. I help students generate ideas by providing as many resources as I can” (interview with KB).

Participant responses showed that daily writing instruction was affected by school and student characteristics. Teachers adapted their lessons to address student characteristics in a specific school setting. For example, the responses of two participants who taught at an art-specialized school reflected the unique context that shaped their writing instruction. A Korean teacher (KC) had difficulty providing targeted writing support in the classroom because the time available for

language arts lessons was constrained due to other curricular requirements. Therefore, he utilized extracurricular activities to promote writing among interested students. Similarly, a US teacher (UM) infused music and art elements in her writing instruction to motivate her students who are talented in arts. Both teachers adapted their writing instruction to meet curricular requirements while adjusting to the characteristics of their students.

Instructional Support

Most participants found it challenging to help their students build foundational skills. They admit that middle-grade students still need to improve basic skills in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, sentence development, sentence fluency, and editing skills. The participants were aware of the need for making adaptations to assist struggling writers in their classes. US participants reported that they assisted struggling writers, using small group or one-on-one conferences during instructional time. Korean participants found it difficult to provide additional support during writing lessons due to limited time and resources. More specifically, KA and KC responded that, to address this issue, supplementary intervention programs were established at their school to work with a group of students with lower than grade-level abilities. They experienced success when their struggling writers worked on foundational skills. They also reported that a strong foundation helped students build their confidence in writing.

Participants utilized reading materials and mentor texts during writing lessons. US participants responded that they use reading materials as a source for students to write about. They reported that their students often practice reading and writing simultaneously within the same lesson. The US participants also use a wide range of mentor texts for students to refer to as a model in order to practice specific writing styles or crafting skills. Sources for mentor texts are, but not limited to, teachers' own writing, samples done by former students, or excerpts from literature or informational texts. Likewise, Korean participants reported that they use reading materials as a source for students to write about and mentor texts as references. For example, KB utilized reading materials when students generate ideas in a planning stage of the writing process. KF used writing samples done by former students, so her students were aware of what the final product of a writing piece would look like.

Strategies for Struggling Writers

Participants in both countries have similar challenges and struggles to support diverse students in class. All participants agreed that struggling writers need instructional adaptation and modifications. Struggling writers need additional support to strengthen their foundational skills and more engagement in independent practice. A lack of motivation and engagement in writing was a concern for most participants. Interestingly, teacher perceptions about struggling writers and strategies to engage them showed some cultural differences.

Korean participants perceived that students' reluctance in writing can be attributed to a high stakes testing environment. They reported that their students were readily discouraged when writing tasks were subject to grading or assessment. KA commented, "If students think that they are not good at writing, it is because their writing is graded. They are afraid of being assessed." Another teacher stated, "Students feel pressured when their writing is up for grading. They often asked me if points would be taken off for misspelling words" (interview with KF). They also mentioned students' negative experience and low confidence in writing as reasons behind their reluctance. KE shared his concern, "Most students struggle in generating ideas. They would say, 'I don't know what to write' or 'I don't know how to start.'"

US participants stated that students were reluctant to write because of a lack of foundational skills and limited experience with independent writing. They reported that their students were discouraged from investing time and effort at the individual level in challenging writing tasks. UJ said, "I believe students sometimes do not like writing because they are uninterested in the material, or they believe the writing process is too long and tedious." They also mentioned students' lack of exposure to various genres. UL stated, "It can be difficult for students to remain engaged in writing if they do not enjoy the genre, so it's important to include a variety of writing genres and styles in the curriculum."

Despite minor cultural differences in what teachers perceived as the reasons behind students' lack of interest and engagement in writing practices, all participants were concerned about the ability of middle-grade writers to express their ideas cohesively and creatively. They observed that the quality of student writing had decreased over the years. They also noticed that students engage in out-of-school writing by exchanging ideas and expressing their feelings freely on social media platforms. However, incorporating students' out-of-school writing into classroom practice is not a simple matter. In some cases, casual use of

language on social media hinders students from meeting the expectations of academic writing.

Motivational Strategies

The participants applied a wide range of instructional strategies in their writing lessons. Reading and media resources that students can relate to were commonly used to increase student engagement. Student interest was the most important factor that teachers considered when motivating their students to write.

Participants agreed that affective aspects play a critical role for student growth in writing, so they tried to implement as many motivational strategies as they could.

The US participants reported that they used interesting reading materials to engage students in writing activities. During a typical writing activity, students read texts to respond to given prompts. Students' initial responses to the texts became a draft for a longer piece of writing. They also used literature or fiction materials to spark students' interest. Students got ideas for their own writing from the books they read in class or independently. The US participants noted that providing engaging material is an effective way to motivate reluctant writers. Words like interest, choice, and peer support were often mentioned in their responses. For instance, UI said, "When students are motivated to write, the writing is enthusiastic and well thought-out, and I do this by engaging their interest and making sure the topics and reading are of interest to them. I also allow for more choice when it comes to choosing topics and projects."

Korean participants reported that they used reading materials and media resources to spark student interest. They highlight the importance of building positive relationships with struggling writers to encourage and improve their confidence in writing. Words like praise, interest, and encouragement are prominent in their responses. For example, KA stated, "I asked my struggling writers to choose a topic that they like to write about. I tried to compliment their efforts. Rather than pointing out weaknesses, I give them praise for what they do well."

Nevertheless, most participants do not hold a systemic pedagogical framework that helps increase student motivation and sustain student engagement to achieve learning goals in writing. Many responded that they were willing to invest in new strategies, techniques, and resources for their students to become competent and independent writers. They wished they could receive more training in assisting students with varying abilities and providing targeted support in class.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' knowledge and beliefs influence how writing is taught in a classroom. Few participants in the study received specialized or systemic professional development with a focus on writing pedagogy. Individual teachers' own investment and efforts were key to enhancing writing instruction and applying new strategies in their classrooms. All participants agreed on the importance of professional efforts to devote more time to writing and to improving their teaching skills.

The findings document similarities and differences in writing practices provided for middle-grade students based on school characteristics, daily practices, adaptation for diverse learners, and available resources. Teachers' daily instruction for writing is affected by their professional context, including school climate, student characteristics, and flexibility in curriculum content. The participants have applied what they believe to be best practices while adjusting their writing instruction to their specific situations. Nevertheless, the findings reveal that pressure from high-stakes assessment and the diverse needs of students in a classroom are major factors preventing learners from meeting the expectations for middle level writing.

Korean and US participants alike face challenges in middle-grade writing. Common challenges are a lack of time to devote to writing in a classroom and difficulty in engaging struggling and reluctant writers. Students' writing abilities are varied. Some need to build foundational skills. Others need to be motivated to practice writing on their own. Moreover, advanced writers need to be challenged to practice in diverse genres. Supporting students with a wide range of writing abilities is even more difficult combined with the demands of high-stakes assessment.

Despite many constraints, Korean and US participants were willing to invest time and effort to motivate their students and help them grow as writers. Teachers who strongly believe in the importance of writing are likely to pay more attention to pedagogical skills and employ adaptations to meet the diverse needs of their students. This indicates that teachers should receive additional training and proper resources to advance their instructional practices in writing (Myers et al., 2016).

Implications

The current study examined middle level writing instruction from a cross-national perspective. A comparative study like this one offers an opportunity to uncover the hidden assumptions about writing pedagogy and provides new insights into what affects teacher perceptions and practices. Writing is a valuable tool to assess students' understanding of complex texts, content knowledge, and analytic thinking. The current inquiry revealed both similarities and differences in the middle-grade writing instruction that the participating teachers provided in the classroom. More classroom-based, observational studies are needed to illuminate how teachers engage middle-grade students in the process approach to writing and motivate them to write in diverse genres.

More research on students' writing development needs to be conducted. Participants in the study noted that their students struggle to make the transition from elementary to middle level writing. It is alarming that students do better in writing in elementary school than in middle school (Wright et al., 2020). Students' writing development is complex and varies at the individual and grade level, so developing writing lessons to meet diverse needs is not a simple task. However, it deserves a great amount of attention as today's teachers have more diverse students whose backgrounds vary by gender, class, culture, race, ethnicity, language, and disability status (Graham, 2019).

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Interviews were conducted during the worldwide pandemic. Some teachers were in transition to remote or hybrid instruction. Changes in instructional settings might have affected their responses both positively and negatively. For example, some teachers took advantage of digital space to enforce online writing activities while others felt stressed out about teaching virtually. The study relied on the data collected from a small sample. The findings were drawn from teacher responses on writing practices without classroom observations that would have provided more accurate accounts of writing instruction. Despite the fact that the participants were recruited from various school settings, with diverse demographic characteristics and professional experiences, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to represent each

country's writing education, nor to provide a complete picture of how writing is taught in their classrooms.

Conclusion

A cross-cultural investigation of writing instruction like this one provides an opportunity to learn about instructional practices beyond one's own context. Although each country's writing practice is uniquely situated in its education system, policies, learning standards, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches, it is worthwhile to investigate commonalities and differences in ways that teachers teach writing in middle level classrooms. The results of this study provide a detailed account of teachers' knowledge and beliefs, and their classroom practices in various school settings. Findings of this study highlight the need to advance writing instruction in the middle grades and to develop further research observing teachers' practices in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions in English

Personal Background

- What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
- During your college education, what was your major or main area(s) of study?
- How many years have you been teaching?
- As part of your teacher training (undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, or graduate study), to what extent did you study the teaching of writing, such as theories, pedagogy, methods, strategies, skills, and so on?
- Please describe teaching of writing courses or workshops you took in initial and/or advanced teacher education programs.
- How do you feel about teaching writing in general?
- Do you feel competent about teaching writing to all students in your class?
- How would you describe yourself as a writer?

Professional Background

- In the past years as a middle school language arts teacher, how many hours in total have you spent in formal professional development (e.g., workshops, seminars, lesson studies, etc.) that dealt with teaching writing?
- Can you describe the characteristics of your school and district?
- Can you describe your school's writing curriculum?
- Can you describe your students and their writing performance?
- Have you moved from one school to another? Is the current school a lot different from the school(s) that you worked in before? If so, describe the differences.

Knowledge, Beliefs, and Values

- Are there theoretical models or approaches that you apply to teach writing?
- Did you take any courses on writing instruction or writing theories?
- How do you support your students' developmental needs in writing?
- What do your students feel about writing?
- How do you define proficient writers?
- What do you know if a piece of writing is well written?
- How do you define struggling writers?
- How do you support struggling students in your class?
- Do you have any thoughts as to why some students might not like writing?
- What do you think best practices of writing would look like?

- How do you try to apply best practices in your class?

Writing Instruction

- Please describe how many hours per day or per week you teach writing in class. How often do your students engage in writing in your class? Is there a writing routine or sequential activities for students to engage in?
- How do you plan writing lessons? What do you consider when you plan your writing lessons (e.g., student level, student interest, engagement, connections to reading, connections to real life purposes, skills, grammar, mechanics, etc.)?
- Do you think that your instructional style of teaching writing differs from that of other teachers in your school?
- How do you differentiate writing instruction for students with varying abilities?
- Are you satisfied with the writing progress that your students are making?

Affective Aspects of Writing

- Do your students like to write? Please describe students who like to write and those who don't?
- How do your students react to writing activities?
- How important do you think it is to motivate students to write?
- How do you motivate your students to write? Are there any strategies that you found especially effective or successful to motivate students?
- How do you support your students in developing good writing habits?
- Are there any resources that you found helpful to motivate students to write or improve their attitudes toward writing?
- Do you think teachers can make an impact on student attitudes toward writing and on their writing performance?

Appendix B

Coding Schemes

	Question Items	Coding Categories	Themes
Personal Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education level/major - Teaching experience - Perceptions of one's own writing - Perceptions of one's teaching of writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contexts of teacher knowledge and beliefs associated with teaching practices - Self-perceptions of professional abilities - Advanced learning in writing pedagogy 	<p>Knowledge and practices situated in personal and professional contexts (In what ways are teachers in South Korea and one state in the US teaching writing in the middle grades? How are they prepared to teach writing?)</p> <p>Instructional strategies (How do they perceive best practices of writing instruction for middle-grade students?)</p> <p>Practices in the middle grades (In what ways are teachers in South Korea and one state in the US teaching writing in the middle grades?)</p> <p>Instructional and motivational strategies for struggling writers (How do they support students with varying writing</p>
Professional Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional training - Voluntary professional development - Prescribed curriculum - School setting (income, urban/rural, student gender) - Student characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching contexts associated with teaching practices - Importance of student characteristics - School climate - Flexibility in curricular content and design for writing lessons 	
Knowledge, Beliefs, and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theoretical foundations or pedagogical approaches - Developmental perspectives - Struggling and competent students - Best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing pedagogy from methods courses - Developmental growth in writing - Knowledge of best practices - Advocates for struggling students - Definition of proficient writing 	
Writing Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instructional strategies - Modification of curricular activities - Differentiated instruction for diverse learners - Student motivation and engagement strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time spent on writing - Grouping purposes - Instructional scaffolding - Teaching of writing strategies - Linguistic support - Foundational skills - Additional or differentiated support for struggling students 	

Affective Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Motivational strategies- Student attitudes- Student interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strategies for reluctant writers- Ways to spark student interest- Motivational strategies	abilities and motivate them to write?)
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