

The 0.02% Learning Disability Rate in South Korea: Understanding Through Confucian Thought

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Abstract: Learning Disability (LD) is a fairly unknown term among the general public in South Korea. Contrary to the U.S where one in five public school students have LD or attention problems. The LD population in South Korea is strikingly low (0.02%). This paper aims to make sense of a puzzling apathy of learning disability in Korea, and offers one possible explanation by zooming in on Korea's cultural ethos heavily rooted in Confucian ideology. A deeper analysis of the philosophical grounds of Confucianism led to conclude that three elements of Confucianism contribute to Korea's low prevalence of LD: Epistemological assumptions on knowledge, an emphasis of unity and harmony, and teachers' morality.

Keywords: Learning Disability (LD), Confucian ideology, South Korea

Learning Disability in Cultural Context

Learning Disability (LD) is a fairly unknown term among the general public in South Korea (Lee & Shin, 2019). According to 2019 statistics in Korea (Ministry of Education, 2019), the number of students represents 0.02% of the total school aged population. An online survey for high school students in Korea reveals that most of them do not know what LD is (Lee, 2005; Shin & Choi, 2022). According to Lee's research (2005), 92 out of 198 college students had not heard about LD at all. Contrary to the U.S where one in five students have LD or attention problems (Learning Disabilities Association of America), the LD population in South Korea is strikingly low.

Teachers in Korea rarely participate in the screening process to classify students in terms of LD, as the concept of LD is not systemized in the Korean educational system (Shin & Choi, 2022). Teachers in Korean schools do not consider LD identification within the teacher's purview. Despite recent legislative efforts, Korea lacks the system for special education, and the public awareness (Kang & Shin 2022; Kim et al., 2009; Shin & Choi, 2022; So, 2022). This is in contrast with the US schooling system with the "epidemic of learning disability" (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998). Teachers in the U.S. routinely send academically struggling children to be evaluated, tested, and diagnosed. Besides LD, other nomenclatures flourish in U.S schooling: cognitive delayed, intellectual disability, emotionally disturbed, Attention Deficit, ADHD, behavioral disorder, communication disorder, oppositional disorder, etc. (Itkonen & Jahnukainen 2010). Compared with U.S., diagnosis and identification of non-physiological disability is not vigorously practiced in Korea.

In each culture, the way underachievement is theorized is deeply situated in its historical and ideological context (Agrawal, 2019; Kim et al., 2019). Similar to Korea, Italy is another

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country where preoccupation with naming is not present (Giangreco & Doyle, 2015). In Italy, normal is defined as within a wider range, so they do not label students who would be labeled as disabled in America. This paper is concerned with the ideological/philosophical system that shapes the unique cultural script regarding Korean education, in order to understand puzzling apathy of learning disability in Korea. In particular, the paper digs deeper into Confucianism as the fundamental ideological foundations of what education is about and what learning is about. What aspect of Confucian approach of learning contributes to a low prevalence of LD in Korea? The paper is not a comprehensive approach to why silence and apathy on LD occurs in Korea, but how Confucianism intersected in forming policies and practices regarding LD.

Special Education in South Korea and its Historical context

Since the founding years, South Korean education has been heavily influenced by the U.S. from curriculum structure, school system, education-related legislations, teacher education, administration system, to testing methods (e.g., Jung, 2018). In the 1950-60s, early years of formation of the system, the Korean curriculum studies relied considerably on translated textbooks from North America. The Korean government adopted decisions made by the council who were composed of US trained scholars and adopted many aspects of American education system. No exception for special education. A federal law, Special Education Promotion Act (SEPA) was enacted in the late 1970s to address the welfare and rights of students with disabilities. SEPA mimicked the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1974) in the U.S. SEPA was later in 2008 renamed Special Education Act for Individual with Disabilities and Others (SEIDO). Learning Disability was first introduced in the SEPA in 1999, and its definition has been controversial since then. The 2008 revision defines LD as one who manifests significant difficulties with learning abilities such as listening, speaking, attention, perception, memory, problem solving or in academic achievement such as reading, writing due to intrinsic factors (Article 10).

As such, there exist solid federal legislatures on disabilities in Korea. These legislations went through several revisions and expansions. The history of special education in Korea goes back to the late 1800s when American missionaries established schools for the blind. Legislative efforts have been constantly made since then to improve the conditions for students with disabilities. The Ministry of Education, Science, and technology (MOEST, 2010) suggested the RtI model as an alternative identification model, and set the guidelines for selection criteria for LD, referral procedures, and screen tests (Jung and Kang, 2015). SEIDO transferred the responsibility for the assessment and evaluation of eligibility for services to Special Education Support Centers (SESCs). Many researchers found out that execution at the classroom level apparently faces a huge hurdle because teachers are not clear in understanding when “academically at-risk” becomes “disability.”

What is noteworthy is that amidst many influences of American education systems, Korea did not seem to actively adopt LD policies and practices of American schools. It is in the 1960s that LD was first identified in the school system and reinforced with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. In Korea, it is not until 1999 that the concept of LD was first introduced. Even after 1999, the government never forcefully enforced the execution of LD diagnosis and intervention at the classroom level. Most special education services have been targeted to students with physical disabilities, and the LD population comprises an overwhelmingly small number, e.g., 1%, according to Special Education Statistics (Korean Ministry of Education, 2023). The 2017 statistics shows that 2.3% of all students receiving special education services are LD (MOE, 2017). Compared with other behavioral/cognitive disabilities like ADHD or dyslexia, LD is less clear in terms of standardization of the diagnosis. Shin and Choi (2022) attributes low prevalence of LD to

its unclear definition and the low public awareness. Many researchers agreed that the vague and arbitrary nature of the identification process of LD has significantly impeded the way LD is implemented in classrooms (Lee DaeSik, 2003; Lee & Shin 2019).

Two Tales of LD: Comparison between US and Korea

In an attempt to make sense of Korea's passivity toward LD, it is worth turning to critical voices of LD developed in the U.S. In the US, critical discourse on LD has proliferated for many decades, challenging the very act of identifying LD. They believe that LD is merely a discursive or political construct to serve the interests of the dominant group and lamented that millions of school children have been falsely identified as "having in their brain." (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Dudley-Marling & Dipbo, 1995; Freedman & Ferri 2017; Gallagher, 2010; Skrtic, 2005; Sleeter, 2010). Danforth (2008) called the two different theories in disabilities the "special education divide": psychological model and social model of disability. These critical and skeptical voices emerged as reactive to the mainstream view about the justification of special placement and diagnosis. Gallagher (2010) attributed the prevalence of LD in America to the victory of the psychological view of learning disability over the sociological view. In the US, the victory of psychology over sociology has promoted a huge special education market. How does, or does not, the social model of disabilities explain Korea's low prevalence of LD? Is Korea's low popularity on LD a result of the victory of the sociological model? Below, I will unpack tenets of LD skeptics and discuss how these critical discourses offer or do not offer its ideological foundations to explain Korea's low prevalence of LD.

The U.S.: Equity discourse

The social model scholars of disabilities assert that LD is a merely social label constructed by a dominant group in order to oppress the oppressed. Social model scholars, i.e., critical theorists, are concerned with the structure of inequality permeated in schools. In the *American Journal of Sociology*, Carrier's (1983) seminal work on disability put learning disability within the sociology of knowledge perspective. In short, Carrier's thesis is that learning disability is a tool to oppress a subordinate group (see also, Baynton, 2013). Carrier (1983) argued that school is an institution that legitimates and reproduces the interests of dominant groups by instituting a test, a particular way of structuring and hierarchizing human differences.

The emergence of learning disability is closely related with the implementation of standardized tests. IQ tests or other standardized tests provided a scientific tool to hierarchizing various types of human capacities. According to Alan Stoskopf (1999), the major educational psychologists became enthused about standardized testing, and showed how those leading theorists became supporters of eugenics during the historical juncture where Americans had to weed out the socially undesirable population (feeble-minded) for the purpose of social efficiency. Baker (2002) made a similar argument about the legacy of eugenic ideology in relation to the justification of learning disability. Both Stoskopf and Baker believe that eugenics is a way of theorizing human differences and leads its a way to American schooling, solidifying its position in the form of standardized testing and concomitant diagnosis.

In an ethnically diverse society such as the U.S, a tremendous backlash against such naming or labeling practices are waged based on a disproportionate identification of learning disability among socially disadvantaged students (Carothers & Parfitt, 2017; McDermott et al.,

2006; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Ong-Dean, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006). The overrepresentation of African American students in special education speaks to the lack of validity in measuring tool, and lack of objectivity in the referral process. In diagnosing learning disability, teachers' implicit bias and preconceptions of the child inevitably set in. With the lack of scientific definition of learning disability, covert racism affects teachers' judgment. Dudley-Marling's (2004) research shows that teachers' preconceived notion of the special education student shapes the bias, and this bias produces self-fulfilling prophecy. It is alarming that the very diagnoses that have everlasting impact on children's self-esteem are made by teachers who are not even professional or medical experts. The danger of identifying learning disability has been a hot issue for scholars who study underrepresented groups.

Many African American scholars have stressed the insidious impact of the labeling and considered separate placement as a discriminatory and racist practice. It is at this juncture that learning disability should be examined to reveal how knowledge or learning is legitimated in relation to power, and how knowledge becomes what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic violence.' Baker's (2002) assertion is convincing that learning disability can be a form of the modern day eugenics movement, marginalizing the historically devalued population.

Beside critical theorists, another skeptics emerged against LD identification. Disability scholars (Armstrong, 1996; Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, 2022; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998) vehemently speak about the vagueness and arbitrariness of the diagnosing process of learning disability (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2001). Many researchers voice concerns over the vagueness of the identification. Thomas Armstrong's (1996) article in the *Phi Delta Kappan* showed in detail how ADD, as an example of learning-related disability, is evaluated in school. Teachers use a behavior rating scale, observe children's behavior (fidgety), and rate children on a scale. Also, Armstrong (1996) argued that the one who exhibited being fidgety in one context may not exhibit the same behavior in another context. LD and ADD, disguised as professional and even medical diagnoses, are no more than the outcome of teachers' arbitrary and subjective evaluations (see also, Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998).

Prominent disability scholars, Kavale and Forness (1998) acknowledged that learning disability is an ill-defined concept. Such arbitrariness results, according to them, in special education functioning like a sponge wiping up the spills of general education (Kavle & Forness, 1998). In fact, the absence of a scientific definition causes disturbing prevalence in learning disability in college as well as K-12. College LD students who were never diagnosed have become a significantly growing population and now demand services and accommodations for tests. Kavale and Forness (1998) believed that the "predominant advocacy theme of entitlement" explains the growth of the LD population. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* featured an article on this laughable phenomenon. Zirkel (2001) reported that students claim to have a learning disability in order to qualify for extra time for tests; interestingly, those students who request special accommodations are from high income families. Zirkel argues that the emergence of such "upper income game players is due to lack of specificity of LD diagnosis."

Due to the messy nature of the definition and identification process of LD, the focus has shifted to intervention and special treatment, rather than diagnosis. The alternative identification of LD, such as RtI, downplays the importance of diagnosis, and asserts that benefits of special education services outweigh the disadvantages. In the U.S., LD discourse is still prevalent under the rhetoric of special treatment and cure.

South Korea: Discourse of unity and harmony

On a surface level, Korea's conspicuous absence on LD discourse seems aligned with the social model of LD. However, historically, Korea took a different path in terms of development of LD discourse. Unlike the U.S., Korea never adopted the psychological view as a policy; thus the paradigm war between the psychology and social model never existed in the first place. While America's critical discourse is deeply steeped in equity discourse, this is not consonant with Korea's apathy. In the 1960s, the Park regime (1961-79) pledged to achieve economic development as the utmost goal. Under the slogan of national economic development, education operated under the rhetoric of efficiency, and difference was sacrificed over academic excellence. Korea focused immensely on the nation's economic development, and schools were a primary means to achieve this goal. From the founding of the country in 1948, Korea has used national testing as a social efficiency and a means to select its elites and weed out less smart students. The national college entrance exam has had notoriously high stakes and always has been a heated agenda for policy makers. Various international media outlets feature Korea's extreme competitiveness toward selective colleges. One BBC report states that 80% of children, including primary and secondary students, attend cram schools, which contributed Korea being the highest stress country among OECD countries (Sharif, 2018, BBC). The efficiency discourse promoted tremendous zeal for social mobility, and perpetuated the authoritarian culture in schools.

In support of the social efficiency model, there has been relative silence as to the malicious effect of standardized testing on the marginalized population, such as underachieving students. Unlike the US, where racial minority educators attempt to disclose the flaws of the system and harm to their own people, the voices of the underrepresented (underachievement) in Korea have been largely neglected and never gained popularity in the academic community, let alone in the general public. Instead, Korea has promoted a strong social mobility discourse and encouraged its citizens to use standardized tests as a means for upward mobility.

What is an interesting divergence from US discourse is that Korea considers "difference" as a threat. In Confucian heritage cultures (CHC), "difference" often means a hindrance to conformity, harmony, and unity, all of which are CHC's crucial virtues. In the US milieu, individual difference is recognized, promoted, appreciated. Moreover, difference is even abused in order to serve a particular group's interest. Christine Sleeter's (2010) well-cited work, *Why is There Learning Disabilities*, detailed the history of LD and reached an interesting finding that the category of learning disability emerged originally as an explanatory tool to explain White middle class's low achievement. Before the category of learning disability came into being, low achievement was associated with poverty, home condition, or neighborhood environments. Learning disability offers a theory to puzzled middle class parents whose children's low achievement cannot be explained within the existing framework. Learning disability, ironically, gave hope for middle class parents, because, as Sleeter states, it "upheld their intellectual normalcy, and it suggested hope for a cure and for their eventual ability to attain relatively higher status occupations than other low achievers" (2010, p.231). Sleeter's analysis shows how LD colluded with a particular group's interest. Leung (1998) poignantly commented such culture: "too much stress on the individual and his/her ability may exaggerate and aggravate the individual differences that exist and may lead to permissiveness for those that are being classified as "less able".(p.31)

In Confucianism heritage culture, valuation of unity and harmony sometimes leads to a strong aversion to disability because of the stigma and discrimination attached to it. Kim, Cheon, et al (2022) characterized Korea as heightened cultural tightness and explained the high stigma

attached to disability with such cultural aspects. Kim, Zhang, and Sun (2019), citing Kang (2002), posit that Korea's attitude toward disability may come from Buddhist culture where disability is considered as karma for sins in previous lives. In the circumstance where a student with the LD label is subject to being bullied or an object of contempt, LD no longer serves as a tool for an educational service. For this reason, teachers in Korea would feel extremely uncomfortable with their action that potentially leads to the LD label.

Still a missing puzzle is left: over the past decades, the special education population is growing in terms of diagnosis and awareness. Other disability categories such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD, has been on the rise. Then the analysis turns to the uniqueness of Korean culture surrounding the meaning of learning/education, heavily influenced by Confucianism. Confucian-influenced culture dictates the unique concept of learning, distinguished from the Western concept of learning. This distinctive culture provides a framework to explain the LD discourse in Korea. The next section will delve into the way Confucianism is ingrained in the sentiment of teachers and educational administrators regarding the understanding of 'learning disability.'

Inquiry Mode

The study adopts a philosophical inquiry in order to question the assumptions that shape the social construction of Learning Disability in Korea. The philosophical inquiry foregrounds Confucianism, which shapes the mindsets and values of education stakeholders in Korea. How might Confucian assumptions both support and constrain inclusive education? The analysis includes identifying core tenets of Confucian philosophy relevant to education, and conducting cross-analysis with key Western philosophical tenets, such as John Dewey, Nel Noddings, and prominent critical theorists. The comparative analysis between Confucianism and western philosophies will reveal how each society's educational practices and policies surrounding learning disability are shaped by respective philosophical roots.

Confucianism and Learning Disabilities

Confucianism and Ontological Perspective of LD

In learning disability, what is "learning"? What kind of learning is lacking in those diagnosed with LD? Confucius envisioned knowledge in a totally different way than the Western psychological model. In the psychological model, learning is about assimilating the learner's mind into a dominant group's knowledge or mastering academic skills required in school learning. In this scheme, those who lack the ability to master the dominant knowledge are considered as LD. Here, critical scholars' question is to the point: Whose "learning" is it? Critical theorists' endeavors to focus on social construction of knowledge/learning urge them to interrogate the validity of the measuring tool for LD: Whose knowledge is the diagnosis of learning disability based on? The same spirit is found in Confucius. In *Analect*, Confucius asserted that the sole goal of learning is self realization, which starts with the learner's urge to solve their own problem.

In Korea, the way the Korean public envisions learning, aside from school learning, is deeply embedded in Confucianism. Confucius believed that knowledge is only a means, and it should ultimately serve for growth and/or self-realization that is achieved through constant struggling of the inner self. Knowledge is obtained through inner struggling, hardship, hardwork, and self training. Those who show low performance in learning are the ones who are not diligent, not striving hard. Leung (1998) put it, "There is common belief in CHC countries that one can

achieve if one tries hard enough. The Chinese proverb ‘diligence compensates for stupidity’ is most illustrative of this belief. This is in contrast to the Western culture where student ability is considered relatively more important for student achievement. (p. 29). The phrase, “diligence compensates for stupidity,” speaks to the importance of efforts and hardship. On a deeper level, it presupposes that knowledge is inner struggling obtainable only through diligence. From Confucius, there are lazy people, but there are no one who can’t perform learning.

People in the Confucianism-influenced culture do not consider innate ability as an important factor in learning. Several researchers who studied the different perspectives between western and eastern culture about learning found out that Asian parents tend to believe that academic performance depends on efforts while western parents perceive learning more about ability (Hess, Chang& McDevitt, 1987; Leung, 1992; Stevenson, 1987). Asian parents instill in work ethics as a way of becoming successful.

Confucianism’s doctrine is strikingly similar to John Dewey (Zhao, 2013). In the article, *Confucius as a critical educator*, Zhao (2013) explained that both Confucius and Dewey view knowledge (learning) as always emerging from the learner’s life circumstances. Confucius connected learners with their own problems based on their own experiences and the world; therefore, knowledge is all a living human being’s pursuit for either survival or self-realization. From this perspective, there is no one who cannot learn. Since he views knowledge as one’s own application rather than acceptance of someone’s knowledge, there is no single human being who is not capable of performing the enterprise of learning. In other words, all living beings constantly learn in reaction to their environment. From the Confucian epistemology, the concept of learning disability is fundamentally problematic

It is not surprising to see the parallel between culturally relevant pedagogy and Confucian thought converge in their espoused pedagogy. In line with this epistemology, Confucius adopted dialogic methods to his disciples. Zhao’s (2013) provides compelling insights by offering a conceptual congruence between Freire and Confucianism, and explains the ideological root in the conceptualization of knowledge. Dialogic approach, as opposed to the top-down transmission of someone’s knowledge, is premised when knowledge is a creation between the learner and the teachers. This disrupts the traditional view of knowledge as acquisition of someone else’s inquiry product, espouses Ladson-Billing’s famous phrase, ‘learning as pulling something out of the learner’s mind.’ The definition of knowledge is shifted to context-based in Confucianism as well as Freirean learning theory. Tan (2018) sees the ideological connection between Confucianism and Freire in terms of context-based knowledge (see also Shim 2018). Tan (2018) states: “Confucius’ attention on the attainment of humanity is his solution to the vexing problems and conflicts plaguing ancient China. The appeal by Freire and Confucius for humanisation and humanity respectively is therefore a direct response to real life and pressing challenges confronting them.” (p. 5)

From Dewey’s and Confucius’s perspective, the phrase, ‘learning disability’ is an oxymoron. It is nonsense to impose one human being’s contextual inquiry/struggling to another human being. Dewey lamented IQ as a mental ability measure and questioned the ethical aspect of intelligence tests for classifying people based on a series of contextually disconnected activities. In critiquing the Colgate president’s address on intelligence tests, Dewey stated that such usage of an intelligence test is anti-democratic as it only reproduces elite aristocracy (Danford, 2008). For Dewey, it is impossible to reduce the multifaceted and fluid nature of human capacity into a single factor, as intelligence is based on the actual activities that an individual undertakes in daily life.

Confucian Ethos, Morality, and Caring: Teacher as Monarch and as Parent

Central to the Confucian morality in teaching is relationship-based caring, which is ingrained in the minds and consciousness of teachers in Korea. Confucianism impacts each teachers' sentiment, moral sense, sense of ethics, and moral responsibility in the way to establish their moral standards. Relationship-based caring push teachers to make sincere efforts to work with academically struggling students; or if not, feel guilty or ashamed of their own inability to provide them with proper instruction. Evidenced in the famous saying in the Confucian tradition, "monarch(king), teacher, father is one," teachers are considered equal to parent in the Confucian tradition. The origin of shame is found in the Confucian thought if teachers do not take on a role of parents. Just as parents do not give up their own child when the child is out of control, teachers in Korea strive toward love and care at the expense of teacher's sacrifice and devotion (Kang, 2009; Shim 2018).

An act of identifying one's deficit is far from an act of caring, regardless of intentionality. According to Baker's scathing criticism of learning disability, a form of classifying people is never innocuous. Referring a student to someone, presumably to an expert, means that the teacher is out of the relationship with the student. In most mainstream US schools, teachers' responsibility of caring is not in the form of relationship-based caring, but in the form of locating a right service. Such referral practice absolves teachers of the responsibility of teaching a whole human being. Feeling of rejection is widely documented especially among minority students (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Carter, Richmond, Marciano, 2021). More importantly, an act of identifying one's deficit prevents teachers from seeing the student as a whole being. Citing Heshusius, Baker (2002) writes, classifying in school is "reducing the totality of someone's humanity to so-called trait, leaving in place an essentializing lens for viewing personhood in the singular" (p. 690).

Due to the Confucius influence of the way of defining teachers' ethics, Korean teachers may be prone to a sense of guilty in partaking the screening process for LD. Teachers who embrace teaching struggling students within their realm of job responsibilities may take the separated placement as uncaring and morally questionable from the Confucian perspective. Such an act may be viewed as a betrayal to the student who shows homage and faithfulness to the teacher.

In this backdrop, Noddings' ethics of care is somewhat radical, by opening the potential to provide a new lens to view LD. According to Noddings (2005), care is the state of a relationship, as in her own words, "A caring relation [sic] is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings" (Noddings, 2005, p.15). Much of non mainstream education literature, such as Freire pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, emphasize caring as a primary act for humanist education (Carter Andrews, D. J., Richmond, 2021; Commarota & Romero, 2009; Liou, Martinez & Rotherham-Fuller, 2016). Caring, as Rojas and Liou (2017) state, starts with acknowledgment and cultivation of student strengths. This ethos is widely witnessed in non-mainstream culture in the U.S. Lisa Delpit (2013) pointed out the cultural difference between mainstream teachers and African American teachers, stating

It is the quality of relationship that allows a teacher's push for excellence...
Many of our children of color don't learn from a teacher, as much as for a teacher. They don't want to disappoint a teacher who they feel believes in them. ... they are disappointed if the teacher gives up, stops pushing (p. 86)

In this example, the African American teachers' caring is manifested in the form of mutual relationship and trust, and results in excellence in student learning.

A striking resemblance is found in the Confucius adage “learning starts with knowing your teacher.” Philosopher Sander-Staudt (2020) sees a vision of a new political thought by merging Confucianism and care ethics. Respect for teachers is strongly emphasized and taught as primary virtue in Korea(Ho, Peng & Chan,2002). The teacher is not the person who transmits pieces of knowledge, but teaches ‘the way’ to his students. Students, in turn, respect their teacher and treat the teacher as their parent. As such, teachers in Confucian culture have a high moral responsibility to care for their students. Tan (2015), researcher on Confucian thoughts, states that “ancient Chinese believed that respect towards one’s teachers is a prerequisite for successful learning” (Tan, 2015). Such an image of the teacher stands in opposition to the teacher who locates a student’s defect and locates a separate service.

Concluding thoughts/Implications

In the United States, the pervasive application of labels such as learning-related disabilities calls for a critical re-examination of their underlying philosophical foundations. The paper argues how Confucian thought has shaped Korean conceptions of learning disability, in contrast to U.S. traditions, where learning disabilities are more widely recognized. Comparing U.S. practices with their Korean equivalents in the diagnosis of learning disabilities offers valuable insights into alternative philosophical frameworks, such as those of Confucianism, Dewey, and Noddings. The Confucian emphasis on teachers’ ethics and high moral standards could possibly foster more caring teacher–student relationships than those typically found within U.S. educational traditions. Adopting alternative philosophies in education may open new possibilities for relationship-based care; thus, provides new framework in which learning disability can be redefined. Specifically, discussions on how Confucian beliefs lead to a different conception of disability diagnosis need to be foregrounded in practical applications within teacher education, e.g., teacher education courses or professional development courses.

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