Students’ motivation to study music: The South Korean context

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Abstract
As part of an international mapping exercise to investigate students’ motivation to study music as compared to other school subjects, this study examined South Korean students’ perceptions of subject value, competence and task difficulty, based on the expectancy-value theoretical framework. A sample of 2671 students was drawn from 11 schools (grades 5–12). The results suggest a decline across school levels in students’ perceptions of the value of music, and an increase across school levels in perceptions of task difficulty and parental expectations of effort in test-driven school subjects (i.e., mathematics, Korean, science). These trends among South Korean student motivational profiles may demonstrate the impact of high-stakes college entrance examinations. Students reported high parental expectations for student success in rigorous academic subjects, which might have negatively influenced students’ values towards non-tested subjects such as music, art and physical education (P.E.). However, the high ranking of interest in music as a subject, along with relatively stable reported interest in music over time, suggests that South Korean students have a notable interest in music learning, but it is likely that the emphasis on examinations in South Korea may minimize the potential for exploration or expansion of this interest.

Keywords
competence beliefs, cross-cultural comparisons, expectancy-value theory, motivation, music education, school subjects, self-beliefs, task difficulty, testing, values

The context for this article
This article reports data drawn from an international mapping exercise that involved eight different countries (Brazil, China, Finland, Hong Kong, Israel, Korea, Mexico and the USA),
which examined students’ motivation to study music as compared to other school subjects (e.g., art, mother tongue language, physical education (P.E.), mathematics, science). Readers should refer to the lead article in this series (McPherson & O’Neill, 2010) for a full explanation of the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study, reliability and validity of the questionnaire scales, and description of the methods used to gather and analyse data. Further information on the eight-country analysis can be obtained by contacting the research team leader (McPherson) or, in the case of this article, the lead author.

The studies in this series draw on the expectancy-value theoretical framework (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998) to examine the competence beliefs, values, and perceptions of task difficulty of 24,143 students across the eight countries. Competence beliefs were defined as expectations for success or the belief about how well each student thought she or he could do in each subject or upcoming task. Subjective task values were conceptualized in terms of four major components: attainment value or importance, intrinsic value or interest, utility value or usefulness, and the cost of participating in the subject.

Four key issues in the overall eight-country analysis as reported by McPherson and O’Neill (2010) were investigated: (a) whether competence beliefs and values declined across all eight countries; (b) whether perceptions of task difficulty increased across school levels; (c) differences in students’ rating of competence beliefs, values and task difficulty for music as compared to other school subjects; and (d) differences among boys and girls, and those students who were or were not learning an instrument or voice (either in or outside of school).

Across the lead article and individual country analyses, a variety of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and mixed-design ANOVAs were used to examine students’ cumulative mean ratings for each of the three motivation measures (competence beliefs, values, task difficulty). The within-subjects factor (school subjects) and between-subjects factors and interaction effects for school level, gender and music learning are reported for each country. Tukey tests were used for post hoc comparisons. Because of the large sample size, a statistical significance level of .001 was set in the lead article, but adjusted where necessary in individual country analyses.

Gary E. McPherson (research team leader)
revised periodically in order to meet demands for quality and development in a changing society. The MEST sets curriculum standards that are used as the educational foundation for classroom practice and textbook development (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2005). Although education is compulsory only through to grade 10, most Korean students continue through high school and college. The Korean education system consists of 6 years of compulsory elementary school, 3 years of middle (lower secondary) school, 3 years of high (upper secondary) school, and 4 years of university or 2 or 3 years of junior college. In addition to these schools, special arts high schools offer more specialized curricula in western music and Korean traditional music education for musically inclined students. Students who have high musical talent may be accepted at these arts high schools based on their middle school achievement scores and an artistic performance test.

South Korea has one of the highest education enrolment rates in the world (99.9% at elementary schools, 97.2% at secondary school and 82.1% at the university level) and demonstrates educational excellence through high PISA scores at the international level (MEST, 2007a). South Korea presently ranks third in public and private expenditure for education as a percentage of GDP (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2009). The dramatic rise in the quality and quantity of South Korean education has been paralleled by a similarly extraordinary growth in the country’s economy (see Park, 2003).

National placement exams. National placement exams are critical in the admissions and selection process for college students and are a top priority in South Korean high school students’ educational experience. As in Japan and China, individuals in South Korea have long equated success on competitive examinations with success, status and prestige (Wollam, 1992). Intense study routines are therefore commonly encouraged by South Korean parents who place extreme demands on their children to perform well academically, and who may even consider failure on a placement exam to be a disgrace to the family’s honour (Ellinger & Beckham, 1997; Wollam, 1992). It is not uncommon for South Korean high school students to spend over 12 hours a day studying, both in public school as well as with private instructors and in hagwon or ‘cram schools’ in order to memorize large amounts of information in preparation for test taking (Dickey, 2009; Wollam, 1992).

The South Korean emphasis upon standardized entrance exams has led to negative educational results, including extreme competition, lack of flexibility and diversity in educational curricula, and inequality in educational experiences for those who cannot afford private tutoring (Ihm, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2001; Park, 2003). In order to remedy these issues, the Ministry of Education eliminated high school entrance examinations in 1974, and now assigns students to high schools within a student’s residential district through a lottery system (Wollam, 1992). College entrance exams are still used and emphasized, however, with testing requirements that place extremely high academic demands upon students.

Under the present educational system, exam preparation in South Korea involves intense study schedules that do not afford the typical South Korean teenager with the same time or opportunity for after-school music learning that is more common in the western countries observed in this research. While after-school music tutoring is common in South Korea in preschool and elementary years, these sessions become focused on test preparation in middle school and high school years (see Ellinger & Beckham, 1997). Even those students who attend special arts schools must prepare for the college entrance exams, requiring a remarkable dedication to music learning in addition to studying core academic subjects. Of interest to this article, therefore, is the influence of testing requirements upon the perceptions and values of
music among South Korean students, in order to determine how the present educational system may support and/or impede music learning opportunities for Korean youth.

Music education in Korea

Korea is rich in musical culture, and the history of Korean music extends back many centuries. The most common types of music studied in South Korea today are western classical and traditional Korean music. Traditional Korean music, which has been orally transmitted from generation to generation, is a customary element of Korean culture and commonly accompanies major life events (Bowman, 2008; Noh, 2003). Western music, which was introduced to Korea around the 1880s, now also permeates Korea’s musical culture. As a result, western classical music is regularly taught in schools. Efforts have been made in the later part of the 20th century, however, to re-emphasize traditional Korean music and to broaden the music education curriculum to include other ethnic folk music as well (see Choi, 2007; Kwon, 2002).

South Korean music education in the latter half of the 20th century shows influences of Japanese, American and European music education, as well as Confucian principles (Kwon et al., 2006). Since Korea’s independence from Japan in 1945, South Korean public school music has experienced a number of modifications in response to government advancements, economic and societal changes, and developments in general education. In the past 60 years, music has played diverse roles in Korean society, as reflected through a number of curriculum periods (see Choi, 2007; Kwon et al., 2006). Music education in Korea was deeply related to patriotism from 1945 to 1960 (the first music curriculum period), and its emphasis was to instil moral values in South Korean society from 1960 to 1980 (the second and third music curriculum periods). Since 1980 (the fourth and fifth music curriculum periods), music education has emphasized aesthetic education, encompassing the study of the music itself as well as personal musical feelings and reflecting upon music. Two educational reform programmes were announced for the 21st century in 1995 and 2007, and most recent music curricula respond to world globalization by emphasizing music of diverse cultures as well as the use of technology.

South Korean music curriculum. Music education in South Korea includes various musical activities based on the following: (a) musical understanding in music learning; (b) development of music teaching methods and materials based on students’ abilities, needs and experience; (c) Korean traditional music and multicultural music repertoire; and (d) development of students’ creativity, cooperating ability and problem-solving ability. The training of high-quality music teachers is considered fundamental for effective implementation of the South Korean music education curriculum (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 1999). In recent years, South Korean music educators have been introduced to new pedagogical approaches as a result of efforts of many South Korean education scholars who have studied and/or taught in overseas universities. These scholars and music educators have adapted and applied Dalcroze, Kodaly and Orff methods, conceptual learning, comprehensive musicianship and aesthetic music education in music classes with the intent to improve students’ musical aesthetic experience, understanding, and creativity (Kwon et al., 2006).

The South Korean national music curriculum includes the common basic curriculum (grades 1–10) and the high school elective-centred curriculum (grades 11–12). Because music is compulsory in the first 10 years, students in grades 11 and 12 are able to elect music courses based on their musical interests and abilities (see McPherson & O’Neill, 2010, for a comparison of variability in grade divisions, music provision (compulsory vs. elective) and key transitions in
students’ educational experiences across countries involved in the eight-country mapping exercise). South Korean students receive 2 hours per week of music instruction in elementary school (68 hours per school year), 2 hours per week in the 7th grade (68 hours per school year) and 1 hour per week in grades 8 through 10 (34 hours per school year). Elementary music is, in most cases, taught by the general classroom teacher. Music specialists have been introduced to South Korean schools in the last few decades in order to reduce the workload of elementary teachers. However, many schools do not have specialist teachers, and most general teachers continue to teach all subjects.

All music classes in South Korean schools are general music classes. After students complete the required music courses, those who are more interested in music can continue to study an instrument or voice and/or join music performance groups, such as an orchestra, choir and band, as a part of special courses in after-school programmes or private training institutions and individual tutoring outside the schools.

The 2007 music curriculum was intended to further develop goals of previous curricula, including enriching students’ basic education, promoting self-directed learning ability and student-centred education, and increasing autonomy at the local and school levels (MEST, 2007b). According to Choi (2007), the more recent curricula in South Korea promote a large degree of autonomy to local schools, and allow each school to design and implement curricula and content according to local needs and interests. Furthermore, recent curricular developments allow teachers and students increased flexibility to select content and activities to fit with individual student needs.

A failed goal in South Korean music education. According to the Ministry of Education, the goal of music education in South Korea is ‘to provide experience of aesthetic qualities through a variety of music and musical activities, to develop the musical abilities and creativities with an understanding of musical knowledge and skills, and to acquire a fine musical sensitivity in life’ (MEST, 2007b, p. 145). A common belief among South Korean music educators and scholars, however, is that South Korea has fallen short of realizing this goal, despite numerous revisions to the national curriculum. We provide evidence for this failure below.

First, time constraints create a gap between what is expected in the curriculum and what is actually taught in the classroom. As public school music classes are afforded only 1 or 2 hours of instruction per week, music instructional time remains insufficient in comparison to courses such as those that are test driven. Therefore, although the music education content in the national curriculum was developed to meet a grade-level standard, in-school time does not permit full development of this content. Student musical development may therefore be more influenced by such issues as differences in student and teacher ability or by opportunities for after-school instruction than by the content of the public school curriculum.

Evidence of South Korea’s failed music education goals is also found in the highly competitive context of the college entrance examination system. Music education in schools receives less priority than other academic subjects such as Korean, English and mathematics, which are the subjects included in college entrance examinations. Given the considerable number of students who participate in musical activities after school, take private music lessons and regularly sing or listen to popular music, it is apparent that South Korean youth regard music as an important activity for their life. However, because entrance to the most prestigious colleges or universities is generally recognized to be of utmost importance in South Korean education and culture, teachers tend to focus on increasing their students’ ability to memorize and recall test-related information at the expense of other activities, including music.
Finally, South Korea’s failed education goals can be seen in the quality of music instruction in South Korea, which varies widely throughout the country. The dominant teaching method in South Korea is the teacher-centred lecture. Many teachers, especially in elementary schools, use multimedia programs that present the content of music instruction and simply require the click of a mouse to move to the next sequenced activity. In South Korea, music teachers who rely upon these multimedia programs are referred to as ‘click-music teachers’ (Seog, 2004). Some music teachers in elementary and secondary schools merely teach singing activities or have students play the recorder or danso (Korean flute), without providing more diverse teaching methods or resources to motivate students or help them gain a more in-depth understanding of music. Furthermore, although music teachers in South Korea commonly evaluate student music learning and ability by means of a written test, high school students are not tested on their musical knowledge in the college entrance examination, and the quality of the music class is therefore not typically a high priority.

Music education reform in 2007. As mentioned previously, the government designed a plan for educational reform in 1995 and then again in 2007 to align with the world’s emerging information societies in a period of globalization. In August 2007, the Presidential Committee on Education Innovation developed a comprehensive education plan in order to meet contemporary social concerns through educational expansion. The plan included goals, tasks, and policies with the intent to ‘promote learner-oriented education, enhance the autonomy and accountability of educational institutions, and increase diversity in educational provision’ (Presidential Committee on Education Innovation, 2007, p. 3).

The 2007 music curriculum addresses the above considerations by offering new guidelines that promote more in-depth and autonomous music learning. Specifically, the curriculum encourages (a) a wide range of musical activities for students in order for them to experience diverse music and to apply music to their daily lives; (b) student expression of music through the use of musical skills; (c) opportunities for students to understand musical concepts; and (d) experiences for active student engagement (MEST, 2007b).

The three-tiered music curriculum content consists of musical activities, musical understanding, and the practical application of music. The scope of musical activities includes (a) singing; (b) playing instruments; (c) composing; (d) moving; (e) reading; and (d) listening to western and Korean traditional music. The scope of musical understanding includes an introduction to the music concepts that are fundamental to western and Korean traditional music. The scope of practical application of music provides new content not included in the previous curriculum, and is intended to help students (a) develop a positive attitude toward music; (b) recognize the value of Korean traditional music; (c) perform music in and out of school; and (d) use music in their everyday, personal lives. The content of each scope includes national standards for what students should know and be able to accomplish in their music classes. The content standards apply to every student through to grade 10 and to students who enrol in music beyond grade 10 (MEST, 2007b).

The new music curriculum places a strong emphasis on diverse teaching and learning methods, including project teaching, cooperative learning and integrative learning (MEST, 2007b). In addition, music teachers in Korea are presently developing innovative music teaching methods, encouraging individualized learning, and using music technology in the classroom.

Current procedures for assessment of student learning are based on national music curriculum guidelines, which recommend various evaluation methods, including the use of performance assessment, observation, a written listening test and an online evaluation. The range and difficulty level of each assessment can be selected according to individual needs and
conditions of local schools. New textbooks and teacher manuals were developed to accompany the new national curriculum, and were intended for use in 2008 for grades 1 and 2, in 2009 for grades 3, 4 and 7, in 2010 for grades 8 and 10, and in 2011 for grade 9 grade (MEST, 2007b).

Method
Sample
A total of 2671 students from three elementary schools, four middle schools and four high schools located in Seoul, Incheon and Ilsan participated in this study. The schools were selected after meetings with graduate music specialists who taught in those schools and who volunteered to participate in the study. Schools were co-educational and represented the middle economic range. Gender distribution consisted of 54.58% female students and 45.26% male students (percentages do not total 100% because of missing gender reports from some students).

The questionnaire, based on the expectancy-value theoretical framework, was administered in December 2007 to whole classes from grades 5 to 12. The questionnaire examined students’ competences beliefs, values and perceptions of task difficulty (5-point Likert and rating scales), demographic information, musical involvement, and students’ perceptions of parental expectations. (See McPherson and O’Neill, 2010, for additional information on the methodological approach followed in this study.)

Because the data in this study were collected at approximately the same time that the 2007 educational reform was put into effect, it is highly unlikely that student responses would have reflected any influence from the new curriculum. Our study may therefore offer a baseline view of South Korean students’ motivation to study music, from which future research may be able to observe the influence of the 2007 reform.

Results
Involvement in music learning activities
Students’ self-reports of music learning (defined as learning music in or outside school, and learning a music instrument or voice) showed that 42.50% of the students perceived themselves as music learners (n = 1134), as compared to 57.50% who described themselves as non-music learners (n = 1537). The largest music learning involvement takes place in elementary school, with 62.30% of students reporting learning music, and the lowest involvement in high school, with only 25.40% of students identifying as music learners.

Of those students who reported themselves to be music learners, descriptive statistics suggest that 43.56% (n = 494) were learning music at school, 25.22% (n = 286) were studying outside of school, and only 6.08% (n = 69) were learning music both in and outside of school. Figure 1 presents music learners’ participation in music inside and outside of school across school levels. Based on non-music learners’ responses in the three levels, 54.59% (n = 839, and 24.78% of the entire sample) would be willing to learn music if they were given the opportunity.

Differences in students’ motivational beliefs
The three motivation measures of competence beliefs, subjective task values, and perceptions of task difficulty were examined using procedures of analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures. This procedure allowed us to examine differences in students’ perceptions
Developmental changes in subjective task values. The two-way repeated measures ANOVA (school subject × school level) used to examine differences in perceptions of value indicated significant effects of school subject, $F(5, 2667) = 639.68, p < .01$; school level, $F(2, 2667) = 231.79, p < .01$; and their interaction, $F(10, 2667) = 49.21, p < .01$. Results of the school subject effect indicated that the overall mean of students’ perceptions of value for Korean were significantly higher than for other subjects ($M = 3.94, p < .01$); mathematics and science were ranked second and third, respectively. Rankings across school levels showed that while mathematics was ranked first at the primary level, Korean was ranked first at middle and high school levels. P.E., music, and art were ranked as the lowest subjects in students’ task valuing, art being the lowest ranking among all subjects. Results of the school subject × school level effect showed an overall decrease in students’ perceptions of value across school levels (see Figure 2). Pairwise
comparisons revealed that South Korean students expressed significantly lower values for music, art, and P.E. than for Korean, mathematics, and science (adj. \( p < .01 \)). Music was ranked the second lowest valued subject in primary and secondary levels, and the third lowest in high school.

**Interest in music in school and outside of school.** Students’ interest in music in school and outside of school remained relatively stable across school levels, as compared to other school subjects. This finding stands in contrast to results from countries such as Mexico, China, the USA and Brazil, which showed an increase in students’ interest in music inside and outside school from the middle to high school level.

Trends for interest in each subject in school (school subject × school level) suggest an overall developmental decrease, \( F(2, 2667) = 176.02, p < .01 \). All subjects except music decreased significantly from school level 1 to school level 3 (adj. \( p < .01 \)). Music was ranked as the fourth most interesting subject in level 1, and was ranked second in levels 2 and 3. From level 2 to level 3, only P.E. decreased significantly, while Korean showed a significant increase, and was ranked first in high school (adj. \( p < .01 \)). Music, science, art and mathematics did not differ significantly in upper levels.

Trends for interest outside school also suggest an overall developmental decrease, \( F(2, 2572) = 104.73, p < .01 \). All subjects decreased from level 1 to level 2, but between level 2 and 3 only P.E. continued to decrease and Korean showed a slight increase. Mathematics, science, and art did not show a significant difference from level 2 to 3. Although music was ranked as the most interesting subject outside school in level 3, it was not statistically different from Korean.

**Developmental changes in competence beliefs.** The school subject × school level ANOVA model examining differences in students’ perceptions of competence showed significant effects of school subject, \( F(5, 2668) = 221.46, p < .01 \); school level, \( F(2, 2668) = 163.33, p < .01 \); and
Results of the school subject general effect show that students’ competence beliefs for Korean ($M = 3.64$) were significantly higher than for other subjects, while competence beliefs for art were the lowest among subjects ($M = 3.02$; $p < .01$). Based on the overall means, music was ranked as the second lowest subject (along with science; both $M = 3.24$). Despite an overall decrease in students’ competence beliefs across school subjects, rankings for music changed from elementary school (ranked as the second lowest) to high school (ranked as the third highest), suggesting the least decrease among school subjects (see Figure 3).

**Developmental changes in task difficulty.** The school subject × school level ANOVA model indicated significant differences among school subjects, $F(5, 2631) = 246.99$, $p < .01$; school levels, $F(2, 2631) = 354.89$, $p < .01$; and their interaction, $F(10, 2631) = 24.70$, $p < .01$. The two-way interaction revealed a significant increase in perceptions of difficulty from the elementary to high school level for mathematics, Korean and science (adj. $p < .01$, see Figure 4). The comparison of means for all eight countries (country × school subject × school level) revealed that South Korean students reported significantly higher perceptions of task difficulty for mathematics and science than students in any other country (adj. $p < .01$). Korean ranked second lowest of all subjects at levels 1 and 2, and the third lowest at level 3. Perceptions of difficulty for music, art and P.E. only increased significantly from elementary to middle school, but did not change significantly from middle to high school (adj. $p > .01$).

**Parent expectations of effort.** The two-way repeated measures ANOVA for students’ perceptions of their parents’ expectations of effort revealed a similar trend to students’ perceptions of task
difficulty. The significant school subject × school level interaction, \( F(10, 2507) = 21.65, p < .01 \), indicated a significant increase of perceived parent expectations for Korean, mathematics, and science across all school levels (adj. \( p < .01 \), see Figure 5), while perceptions toward art, music and P.E. increased significantly from elementary to middle school, but remained relatively stable from secondary to high school levels. While music was ranked as the third lowest subject in the primary level, it was ranked the lowest at the high school level.

**Discussion**

Rigorous tests and high-stakes examinations are not unique to the South Korean educational system. However, the particular preparation practices for these exams, as well as South Korean students’ significantly higher perception of task difficulty for mathematics and science than students in any other country, reveals an educational atmosphere that is laden with significant challenges for music education. Trends among South Korean student survey responses demonstrate the impact of high-stakes college entrance examinations, as well as the influence of high parent expectations for student success in rigorous academic subjects such as Korean, mathematics and science. These trends are discussed here in order to clarify their influence upon South Korean students’ competence beliefs and values for music learning.

**Influence of testing**

One of the most obvious influences that college entrance examinations may have upon music learning in South Korea is shown by the decline in the number of music learners between elementary school and high school. As stated in the introduction to this article, South Korean
students are afforded opportunities for after-school music tutoring in the elementary years, but secondary students typically use this time to study for college entrance examinations instead. With such a focus on test preparation, it is not surprising that students’ perceptions of the value of music also declined across school levels. These declines, along with our finding that South Korean students reported significantly lower values for music, art and P.E. than for the test-driven subjects of Korean, mathematics and science suggest that music is a lesser priority in the secondary level at the time when testing is emphasized.

The influence of high-stakes testing upon South Korean students’ musical involvement is also demonstrated by the relative stability of musical interest across school levels. This stands in contrast to other countries such as Mexico, China, the USA and Brazil, where students reported a higher interest in music learning in high school than in middle school (see McPherson & O’Neill, 2010). It should be noted, however, that South Korean high school students still ranked music among the highest subjects for interest inside and outside school, even if the interest in music did not show the same kind of developmental increase as other countries. The high ranking of interest in music as a subject, along with relatively stable reported interest over time, suggests that South Korean students have a notable interest in music learning, but it is likely that the emphasis on university entrance examinations in South Korea may minimize the potential for exploration or expansion of this interest.

**Parent expectations and student effort in test-driven subjects**

As described in the introduction to this article, South Korean students receive a tremendous amount of pressure from their parents to perform well academically. The demands that South Korean students experience in test-driven subjects, as compared to non-tested subjects, are demonstrated by the trends in students’ perceptions of subject task difficulty, parent expectations of effort, values and competence beliefs.

![Figure 5. Students’ perceptions of parental expectations for each school subject across school levels](image)
At the high school level, a considerable gap exists between test-driven subjects (i.e., mathematics, science, Korean) versus the non-tested subjects (i.e., music, art, P.E.) for perceived parent expectations of effort. This is explained in part by the remarkably high levels of task difficulty for mathematics and science and relatively low competence beliefs for mathematics and science in high school. Since these subjects are a part of the college placement exam, it is not surprising that students and their parents would want to expend effort in improving skills for subjects where competence is perceived to be weak.

A comparison of competence beliefs and perceived task difficulty in Korean language versus music, however, is revealing of the influence of testing upon parent expectations of student effort. Student competence beliefs for Korean are significantly higher than for other subjects, and it is ranked third to lowest in task difficulty at the high school level. The rank of Korean as the highest of all high school subjects in perceived task value, as well as its place as a subject on the college placement examination, help to explain why students believed their parents expected them to expend substantial effort studying this subject even when competence was already high. On the other hand, while music competence beliefs were third highest of all subjects at the high school level, and showed the least amount of decrease of all subjects over time, music was ranked lowest among all subjects in high school in perceived parent expectations of effort. This suggests that students’ beliefs regarding the effort their parents expected of them may be more influenced by task values and testing priorities than by an expectation to learn for the sake of developing competence.

**Implications**

South Korean high school students and parents place a tremendous emphasis upon school subjects that are included in the college entrance examination, which may undermine students’ values towards non-tested subjects such as music, art, and P.E. While the relationship between testing demands and relatively low values in music is not unique to South Korea, the extraordinary amount of time and effort that is dedicated to test preparation may lead to particularly troubling outcomes for music education in South Korean public schools. Implications from this research may provide some keys for promoting music learning within the South Korean educational context.

First, for music education to be taken seriously in South Korea, music must be perceived as a valuable pursuit. The South Korean emphasis upon academic excellence is an age-old part of Korean history and culture, and reflects a perceived relationship between academic performance and nobility of character. Advocacy efforts that demonstrate the utilitarian value of music may therefore help to demonstrate the influence of music study upon scholastic gains. Considering the importance of honour and character in Korean culture, however, it may also benefit music education advocates to emphasize the connection between music learning and character development that has been an element of Asian music philosophy in the past (see Hargreaves, Marshall, & North, 2003; Hendricks, in press).

Second, improving the quality of music instruction in South Korea may lead to greater appreciation for music learning in the schools. As outlined in the opening of this article, South Korean music education has, in many respects, failed to provide students with experiences that develop creative abilities, rich understanding and musical sensitivity. While music educators may neither be able to control the amount of testing attention nor instructional time that is allotted to their subject by school administrators, they can improve their own pedagogical practices by using a larger variety of teaching approaches and by providing students with a
richer array of musical activities to promote student creativity and engagement. Since the 2007 curriculum emphasizes the kind of musical expression, active engagement and diverse forms of music that we suggest here, we recommend future research with students who have gone through this new curriculum, in order to observe any influence it may have upon these students’ motivation to study music.

Finally, we have cited several scholars who have scrutinized the extreme emphasis on national placement exams in South Korea, and we invite such discussions to continue and advance toward administrative action. This article demonstrates the influence that an emphasis on testing achievement may have upon student values of music, as well as the limits it may place upon their voluntary participation in after-school music activities regardless of their musical interest. In the present educational system in South Korea, even those students who have dedicated themselves to music by attending arts schools are still hampered in the amount of time they can devote to music because of the demands placed upon them by national exams.

We encourage South Korean policy makers to consider means for focusing educational efforts upon autonomy, creativity and competence development, rather than on studying and memorizing for the sake of test achievement. Over two decades ago, the Korean Presidential Commission for Education Reform lauded the South Korean people for their ‘unique enthusiasm … for education’ (1987, p. 3), and their ‘burning desire … for education’ that has been ‘the major driving force for national development’ (p. 23). Perhaps envisioning how fruitful such educational zeal could be within a system that promoted individual creativity, the commission advocated educational reform ‘in the context of ensuring equality, excellence, autonomy, and individuality’ (p. 94).

Unfortunately, our research suggests that South Korean education, both within and beyond the domain of music, remains stymied within a ‘one-size-fits-all’ structure that is driven by placement tests and an obligation to achieve for achievement’s sake. We advocate continued discussions and further refinement of the present South Korean educational system, so that it might advance into one where ‘the issue will not be equity verses excellence, but equal opportunity for all students to achieve excellence in their special talents’ (Wollam, 1992, p. 52) – musical or otherwise.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by a grant from the Sounds of Learning Foundation (RFP 2.7). Preliminary results from this study were reported during a symposium (G. E. McPherson, Convenor) at the 28th International Society for Music Education World Conference, July 2008, Bologna, Italy. The authors would like to thank the lead researchers from each country for their collaboration and assistance (Patricia Gonzalez, Karin Hendricks, Liane Hentschke, Antti Juvonen, Bo Wah Leung, Adena Portowitz, Moonjoo Seog, Jiaxing Xie). We would also like to thank all the educational authorities, schools, and teachers for their cooperation, as well as the students who completed the questionnaires.

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