



A Critical Exploration of the Intersection of Korean Culture with the Policy of Affirmative Action for Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2024

I, Dahn Bee Park confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This study is one of the first to give a perspective on the current education system by a person with lived experience of acquiring a disability while attending a Korean university. With this insider knowledge and experience of Korean culture and its education system, I am well positioned to address the conflicting values regarding the current policy of affirmative action within the Korean education system.

South Korea has developed a distinctive economy in just 70 years since its independence from the colonial period (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). Its education system is highly regarded. However, there is a looming demographic shift, and South Korea now faces a rapidly decreasing birth rate and an ageing population, which is impacting on the education system – particularly at university level.

In 1995, South Korea introduced a form of affirmative action for students with disabilities when applying for university. This policy conflicts with many of the values deeply entrenched in South Korean culture, which are based on Confucianism and meritocracy (Chang, 2016; Ma, 2021). Through this research, I explored how these values can be seen to conflict with the policy of affirmative action, with its focus on increasing opportunities for more disadvantaged students, including disabled students, to enter university, whilst at the same time, addressing the growing gaps in numbers of students attending university. This raises questions around how aspirations around equity and inclusion align with entrenched social values.

In order to explore this, I applied a Critical Disability Studies lens to better understand the impact of affirmative action on students with disabilities in contemporary Korea. I explored their experiences, as well as those of the staff in university disability support centres and professionals working in this field. The analysis found that affirmative action for students with disabilities in the Korean culture highlighted a number of key issues and challenges, such as isolation, and/or the need to hide their disabilities. This research revealed that countries considering undertaking such action need to take into account consider the context of history, culture, and developmental progress.

Impact statement

This research was born out of my personal journey after acquiring a disability during my tertiary education at a Korean university. South Korea is a meritocratic society, well known for its focus on tertiary education. A form of affirmative action – the ‘Special Admission System’ has been applied to students with disabilities since 1995 but these policies, conversely, have led to students with disabilities experiencing negative impacts such as stigma. My personal experience and upbringing, as a disabled person within the Korean education system and culture led me to explore these challenges.

The few extant studies on this topic address identical research questions and conclude with the same responses. The majority of these studies explored only physical and attitudinal challenges, while research into affirmative action outside Korea tends to focus on racial issues. There are few studies considering the impact of policy development, grounded in an exploration of specific cultures and their history. When considering the distinct cultures and contexts of each country, there is a need to address the homogeneity of current approaches to research.

Adopting a Critical Disability Studies approach, this study aimed to reveal the impact of affirmative action on students with disabilities in Korean culture by using Constructivist Grounded Theory to explore the South Korean tertiary education system as a case study through which to identify and analyse the experiences of disabled students. This study specifically investigated how affirmative action in South Korea operates and affects the experience of students with disabilities in tertiary education in Korean culture. Three groups of interviews were conducted: students with disabilities, the staff at disability support centres and academic professionals.

Data analysis of the interviews revealed that the impact of affirmative action in a meritocratic society prompts students with disabilities to develop a negative disabled identity, hide their disabilities, and feel isolated from society. This study proposed that the cultural values of a meritocratic society conflict with the implementation of affirmative action, which aims to achieve ‘equity’. This study argued that the Special Admission System, ultimately, has a negative impact on students with disabilities. Furthermore, it has numerous negative side effects.

This study aims to make a contribution to the field by promoting the concept that the rights of students with disabilities should be considered and developed within the context of their specific culture, grounded in their own societal and historical norms. The results of this study, therefore, suggested that policymakers implementing affirmative action should consider a policy development grounded in culture and context. Furthermore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge and future research on persons with acquired disabilities. This research also suggests delving further into the intersectionality of each culture. In terms of societal impact, the findings suggested that society must change its attitudes towards persons with disabilities, not just for their own well-being but also towards a concept of co-existence, in line with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s suggestion for learning to live together harmoniously.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who supported and have been with me on this PhD journey.

I thank my supervisors: Professor Maria Kett, Professor Nora Groce, and Dr Nicole Brown. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and supervision, every time I made amazing progress on my research. I really appreciate you all.

I thank my research participants. Although I cannot mention you all by name due to ethical issues, my study could only be completed with your participation. I thank the student participants, each of you, for contacting me and sharing your stories. During the COVID-19 pandemic and because of non-face-to-face policies, I appreciated it would not be easy for you to decide to participate. I also thank the staff and researchers for being my research participants. Again, I appreciate each of you.

I thank my colleagues, especially those who are based in London. I thank Claire, who started the PhD study with me. Your support meant a lot to me. I also thank Israel. I also thank my best friend, Marzieh, who always encourages and supports me.

I sincerely thank my parents for believing in me and supporting me throughout my whole life. Thanks to them, I am here. I also thank my old friends and family for being a social support throughout my life.

Last but not least, I thank my God for saving me and leading me here.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

I begin this thesis with my personal experience of acquiring a disability while attending university in South Korea, and I describe how my experience of disability in the Korean culture has impacted me and motivated me to explore this topic. Korean society is meritocracy based, rooted in Confucianism, focused on education, and it has had a form of affirmative action when students with disabilities apply for universities since 1995. Affirmative action conflicts with the values of a meritocratic society, to address the value of equity.

As I am deeply involved in Korean culture and its society, and have experienced the Korean education system, I am well placed to address Korean national culture and its cultural norms and how affirmative action is accepted by Koreans. This is the unique contribution of this study. However, it is notable that no studies address this issue of how students with disabilities using affirmative action co-exist in a meritocracy-based society. Furthermore, throughout the thesis, I argue how affirmative action is misused in South Korea due to their decreasing birth rate and ageing population, which directly impact tertiary institutions. Although this study focuses on Korean environment, as I convince in this chapter, there is a distinct lack of interest and studies around this topic, and there is little progress not only in research but also policies around the world as few papers published from international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). More importantly, almost all studies in the world repeatedly address the same problems and arrive at the same suggestions. Therefore, throughout this research, I argue that research should have different directions based on each country's diverse intersectionality.

Thus, I explore this issue from the perspectives of Critical Disability Studies. This study aims to reveal how students with disabilities experience affirmative action and conversely, how affirmative action impacts students with disabilities in Korean culture.

Before presenting this study, I should mention that my experiences are a little bit different from usual tertiary students with disabilities because, presumably, it is not a common phenomenon to experience disability while attending universities as most students with disabilities got disabilities before their entrance to university. Therefore, I have both insider and outsider perspectives of disability. This is another point of unique contribution of this study. This study is a qualitative study, the literature review was completed from my perspective, I co-constructed the meaning of disability between myself and participants. I took a study of myself, as a part of the study.

Therefore there are some compelling reasons for this research. First of all, it is difficult to find evidence of actions that lead to a reduction in disability discrimination, particularly in tertiary education sector globally both in literature reviews and in the lived experience of disabled people, as most research repeatedly raise the same research questions and conclusion. I discussed this point in [1.6.2]. Secondly, there has been little research done by disabled researchers about how their country's culture and context has impacted their experiences of being a disabled person in that culture and context.

1.2 Rationale for this research: Reflection

1.2.1 Personal background before acquired disability

This research starts from my experiences of disability. My father is a person with disabilities, as he was affected by polio from six months old. He endured prejudice against persons with disabilities and stigmatisation in Korean society, such as the denial of offers from schools, and having numerous discriminatory experiences. So, I knew more than the average Korean person about disability and the experiences of persons with disabilities. In other words, even before I acquired my disability, I was exposed to the impact of disability in Korean culture and the prejudice within society. I was involved in the Korean education system, which is a competitive and volatile context (Lee, 2023). I fiercely studied in schools and attended private academies, preparing for and being tested in the Korean university entrance examination.

Policies about entering the university change frequently because the government strives to reduce private education. I explored this issue in Chapter Five in depth. Until high school, I had not seen many peers with disabilities. After entering university, I met a diverse range of peers who entered through various routes, but none had disabilities in my university. However, it may also be that I just do not remember them.

[1.2.2 Personal background after acquired disability](#)

In the summer of 2006, I was in the third year of my undergraduate studies at my university in South Korea. I decided to go to the United States of America (USA) to attend English classes. Just three days after I arrived, I collapsed on my way to the UCLA campus. I was taken to the emergency room and ended up having brain surgery for a cerebral haemorrhage in the right hemisphere (arterio-venous malformation). I have no memories of this time while I was in a coma. After I regained consciousness, I realised that I had acquired permanent left-sided hemiplegia. After returning to Korea, in agreement with my parents, one year after my surgery, I returned to university.

Physical challenges

Only after acquiring a disability, did I realise and experience the many barriers on campus, such as stairs with no handrails, the absence of ramps and other environmental barriers. I encountered many barriers on campus, and because it took around three hours to get to the university from my house, my mother took me to university every day. She took me to every lecture theatre; raised requests to every lecturer for support, such as extra time in examinations, and fought for me to be able to record lecture notes, due to the necessity of note taking independently after the lectures. She did all this for me because there was no official support from my university. I had no information about disability support. However, I was not officially registered on the national disability system, as I will explain below, and I did not have any idea about how to get support for my acquired disability.

It is only now that I know I might have been eligible to receive educational support from my university. However, more importantly, even if I had known of my

university's support system, I would not have received that support because at that time I was not registered with the national disability system. Universities only give support to 'entitled students with disabilities', and the 'entitled' means only persons with disabilities who are enrolled in the national system. This issue will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

The main reason I had not enrolled in the national disability system is the fact that I could not fully accept my disability. Presumably, one of the factors for this is grounded in my family's non-acceptance of disability. The experience and history of discrimination against my parents and grandparents caused my family to see disability as a misfortune and pain, which should be avoided if possible. Therefore, I did not register in the national disability system for a long time after acquiring a disability. Therefore, I did not receive the potential benefits of enrolling because of the social stigma involved in registering. However, there were few other advantages to being officially registered as a person with disabilities in Korea.

Attitudinal challenges and differences between two countries

When I was in the US, I did not recognise how severe my disability was. Most doors were automatic, and always there were ramps and handrails. People did not stare at me. However, when I returned to my country, I realised how severe my impairment was. People frequently stared at me and asked about my disability, directly and without any hesitation. It was not common to see persons, especially young persons with disabilities in the community, such as in schools and streets. More than 15 years have passed since I acquired a disability and maybe the situation has changed. However, I experienced a huge difference between the two countries, not only in the environments but also in the societies' attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

Before I acquired my disability, I thought I understood my father's experience and his disability. However, when I acquired my disability, I realised that being a person with disabilities in Korean society and culture is a completely different experience than from my perception of disability as a person without disabilities.

Though I had a difficult experience, I chose to continue at university to pursue further study and also to understand the reasons Korean society has a bias against persons

with disabilities. Simply put, I believed that if I had a higher degree, people would not so easily disparage me, and their bias could be offset. Therefore, I needed the courage to return to my university, which is one of the most highly ranked, and I knew I had to finish my studies.

I cannot say that every person who has acquired a disability during their 20s has the same thoughts and experiences as me. However, in my case, first and foremost, it was difficult to accept my disability as part of my identity. Although I returned to university soon after, this decision was never easy for me. Many of my peers whom I met in the hospital in Korea gave up and dropped out of their universities. There may be many different reasons for this, but as I described, the society and culture would be one of the variables that affected them. Scholars John (1989) and Côté (1996) argued that forming identity is linked to culture, and they emphasise the impact of culture on creating identity. In discussing the connection between acquired disability and culture, Charmaz (1995; p.660) stressed the 'changed body', the importance of the meaning of loss of body functions, and the consequent experiences in society. Charmaz (1995) also described how persons who acquire disabilities compare how their own bodies and their personal emotions are affected by society. All these writers emphasise 'culture' and its impact on individuals who acquire disabilities.

Concept of disability identity and disabled identity

There are differences between the concepts *disability identity* and *disabled identity*. A '*disability identity*' indicates characteristics as a group such as a 'deaf culture'. It depends on the cumulative self-perceptions of persons with disabilities (Galvin, 2005). Meanwhile, a '*disabled identity*' refers 'the effects of the onset and ongoing experience of impairment in relation to disabled people's self-perceptions' (Galvin, 2005; p.394).

1.2.3 My identity has changed: I have dual identities

While attending university in South Korea, I did not have access to any information or support available, such as a disability support centre. It is possible that I ignored or denied searching for the information since I did not want to accept the disability as part of my identity. This may be grounded in many aspects of my personality, which

has been formed over 20 years as a person without disabilities. Even now, I should say that I have not entirely accepted my identity as a person with disabilities. So, I have disability as one of my identities but, at the same time, I have an identity of a person without disability. This kind of experience was a driving force in my wanting to explore more about the topic to understand better ***what factors affect my with-disability identity.***

1.2.4 What factors affect my identifying as being disabled?

Darling (2022) argued that *when* a person acquires the disability is a crucial factor. She insisted that people who acquire their disability at a younger age tend to have more positive views about their disabilities than the older generation. I also believe that ‘when’ acquiring disability can be an important factor in building disability identity, reflecting on my experience. However, it is hard to find studies that focus on *when* a person acquires disability and its importance in affecting that person’s disability identity. Therefore, I explore the impact of the age and life-stage of acquiring disability in this study.

Furthermore, factors affecting disability identity may not be just during the time of acquiring disability. There may be other diverse factors that can affect the intersectionality of disability and the forming of a disabled identity. I would like to also argue – based on my own experience – that it depends on the society, and the specific cultures in which the person with disabilities is involved. I believe that there are differences in the impact of such factors due to the degree and type of disability, the region, universities, and attitudes of parents.

It is also hard to find studies of students with acquired disabilities in tertiary institutions. South Korea focuses heavily on tertiary education or, perhaps more precisely, on tertiary degrees. Thus, due to the lack of research on acquired disabilities, this current research has much to contribute to the knowledge in this research field. Therefore, I am interested in exploring the environmental factor of ‘culture’ on disability experience and identity. I believe it to have a significant impact. I adopt the lens of Critical Disability Studies in this research, which focuses on culture and intersectionality, and I focus specifically on the Korean culture.

The importance of exploring the experiences and thoughts of students with disabilities, is reflected in my experience of isolation at university and that I do not know about the experience and thoughts of other students who had entered universities with disabilities. I believe that the voice of students with disabilities should be explored for it to be reflected in policy and provision. However, it is essential to explore, through their own experiences and voices, how policies in relation to tertiary education affect students with disabilities, and how the public's perspectives towards these students impact them.

From reflecting on my own experience, I believe that no one can presume or understand the experience of disability except someone with a disability. So, I believe that the meaning constructed by myself as a researcher with a disability, with students with disabilities possesses an authenticity and validity that can only be constructed by our unique understanding. Thus, this thesis adopted Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 1995, 2014), which stresses the interviewees' experience: the interviewee and the interviewer constructing meaning together. Charmaz (2014) emphasised that through the co-construction process, and through the reflection between participants and interviewer, meaning will be created. She also argued that being reflective means having a view through the participants' lenses, not just adopting but interpreting their views. Therefore, this thesis reflects participants' perspectives as well as my own in interpreting their perspectives and beliefs through a co-construction process between the participants and me.

1.3 Critical disability studies

There are diverse models to explain disability. For example, the social model, which argues that society creates disability. Oliver (1990) contributed to altering previous viewpoints of disability, which prevalently focused on impairment, and attributed responsibility to individuals themselves. However, the social model has also been criticised for ignoring the impairment, which should be regarded as being central to the disability experience of the individual, and the impracticality of removing all barriers in society (Shakespeare, 2013).

In 2001, the World Health Organisation (WHO) released a revised model of disability, known as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), but this also has features to be criticised. Waddell and Aylward (2009) argued that the ICF model is not appropriate as a model for explaining disability because it does not take into account personal and psychological factors. They insisted that the ICF does not allow for differences between conditions and that it is more appropriate for disease classification than for disability. Moreover, Shakespeare et al. (2017) argued that the ICF may not be the best option to apply to people with long-term disease.

These various points indicate that although there are diverse models of disability, each model has different points of emphasis and weakness. I chose Critical Disability Studies as a method for my thesis because I wanted to emphasise the impact of the Korean culture on the context on persons with disabilities and the intersectionality of various factors (Shildrick, 2015). Schalk (2017) stressed that it is crucial to interpret people's diverse situations and positions. Likewise, Ben-Moshe and Magaña (2014) supported the argument that disability is a contextual issue. Critical Disability Studies allowed me to investigate the social, cultural and educational perceptions of disability, diversity work and anti-discrimination law (Shallish, 2015). Goodley et al. (2019) also insisted that two of the key elements of Critical Disability Studies are culture and intersectionality. They argued that:

What Critical Disability Studies has done is to welcome in a smorgasbord of perspectives drawn from inside and outside of the disability experience. (p. 974)

Goodley (2013) quoted Braidotti's (2003, p. 44) argument that, in addition to the two models of disability (the social model of disability and the biopsychosocial model of disability), there is another model, which emphasises intersectionality based on culture, and social and/or political background. Braidotti (2003) stressed that the body is constructed by multiple factors:

The body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed,

For Braidotti (2003), the body should be regarded as a 'cultural construction' (p.44). Jakubowicz and Meekosha (2002) concluded that:

Thus disability culture subsumes two ideas: the expression of disability within cultures, and the cultural expressions of people with disabilities. (p. 249)

Thus, Critical Disability Studies not only explores disability itself but also constructs disability (Flynn, 2022). Critical Disability Studies reviews disability not as a simple physical issue. Rather, it is viewed as the comprehensive result of cultural, political, and social conditions (Goodley, 2013). This is the reason Critical Disability Studies stresses intersectionality.

1.4 Intersectionality

The experience of students with disabilities varies because the lens through which every person views their experience is different due to various factors. It is the 'intersectionality' of impairment, gender, and socio-economic status that leads to differing experiences for students with disabilities (Crenshaw, 1989). A key point of grounded theory is the comparative approach, and it is closely connected to intersectionality. As Goodley (2013) stated:

Intersectionality is not simply about bringing together these markers but to consider how each supports or unsettles the constitution of one another. (p. 636)

This is the reason why intersectionality is necessary to consider for this study. Intersectionality affects every individual and intersects one's experiences.

To explain intersectionality in the disability field, Ben-Moshe and Magaña (2014) stressed that historically parents are not in a central position in the disability rights' movement because by including parents may weaken the voices of persons with disabilities. However, in the Korean context, disability protest has been carried out mainly by the parents of persons with disabilities, not the persons with disabilities themselves. This point will be dealt with in Chapter Three. It appears to be the result

of the culture of Confucianism. This example underlines the importance of understanding disability and the intersectionality of culture, and my rationale for adopting Critical Disability Studies as a lens to this study.

Another point this study aimed to address is that in the disability field there is limited research carried out by persons with disabilities themselves (Ben-Moshe and Magaña, 2014), which is also true in the Korean context. This is another crucial reason for this research to be seen as a contribution to knowledge, since this thesis reflects students with disabilities' own voices.

Goodley et al. (2017) pointed out that most of the research on intersectionality is about race. As I will explain in a later section of this chapter, the published research on affirmative action considers race issues, which illustrates that even in minority research, disability as a topic is marginalised.

Annamma et al. (2013) attempted to connect Critical Race Studies to Critical Disability Studies. They found that the same structure of discrimination shared. Critical Race Studies explores how race and ability are constructed in the society. As students of colour are not judged to have the same ability as white students, a segregated education setting is justified. Adopting their argument, from a discriminative perspective, students with disabilities are not viewed as competitive within the education system. This is the background to adoption affirmative action. However, Annamma et al., (2013) revealed the intersectionality between affirmative action and the targeted students as those who are White and who have higher socio-economic status. Thus, this study revealed that the fact that affirmative action for students with disabilities in higher education is co-constructed.

Although I experience disability myself, I wondered whether other students' experiences were similar to mine. It was possible that other students' experiences would be different due to the personal variability of disability and its intersectionality with culture. Additionally, as more than 15 years have passed since my experience of acquiring disability, there may be some factors that have changed. Other students' experiences and thoughts may differ from mine for this reason. Although Korean students are less likely to be faced with racial issues, other factors of intersectionality, would influence their lives. In this thesis, I suggested that the

university's location, such as whether a metropolitan or rural area, the type of impairment a student has, their level of social support, influence the lives of students with disabilities, and these factors are explored. Furthermore, this thesis considered other aspects of intersectionality, such as the role of parents, whether the disability is congenital or acquired, the degree and type of disability, which universities the students attended, their chosen majors, and their gender. I addressed the limited number of studies looking at these factors through the voices of the students with disabilities themselves.

The reasons for students with disabilities to attend university are various but may well be different from those of students without disabilities, and may also differ between specific cultures and societies, such as South Korea. Thus, it was beneficial to explore the factors which affected individuals with disabilities, such as how they felt they adapted to becoming disabled within a specific context. Moreover, I was interested in the intersectionality of disability for students in tertiary level education. In this research, therefore, I explored what factors affect, influence and intersect among South Korean students with disabilities at university.

Moreover, I suggested that my multiple identities as a person with acquired disabilities, a disability researcher, a woman, and a native Korean, positioned me in this research to explore in depth, how the many factors identified intersect within Korean culture and the result of this in society. I concluded with a summary of the factors that intersect within South Korean students with disabilities, grounded in the South Korean context.

1.5 Affirmative Action

In the US, affirmative action has become a system for guaranteeing diversity in tertiary admissions (Carter and Lippard, 2020). According to the research by Salmi and D'Addio (2021), one in four countries in the world has adopted a form of affirmative action in university admission. Warikoo and Allen (2020; p.2400) summarised affirmative action in higher education across the world as being of two types [see Table 1]. The first type they refer to as 'Early nation-building', and the second type as 'Promoting to reduce social inequality'. They divide the second type

into two sub-types according to their goals: ‘Address group-based claims-making’ and ‘Maintain meritocracy’s legitimacy’, and also according to the subjects: State/Institutions and Institutions.

In detail, the first type of affirmative action [aimed at unifying the nation] was adopted by many countries after their independence from colonisation. Warikoo and Allen (2020) found that countries which developed anti-colonialism also developed affirmative action. However, they argued that mimicking another country's policy risks reducing the impact of that policy, such as in the global trends to adopt affirmative action. There are also countries [for example, China] which are not affected by colonisation but due to their large territory need to unify, so adopt this policy. The second type of affirmative action aims to reduce inequality between groups, according to factors such as race, ethnicity or religion. The third type of affirmative action aims to maintain meritocracy as the socio-economic status, although it suggests the inequality of ethnicity is not class based.

Table 1. Types of Affirmative Action

Goals	Specific Goals	Implementation	Countries (examples)
Early nation-building		State	India Pakistan China
Promoting to reduce social inequality	Address group-based claims-making	State/Institutions	US Brazil Canada
	Maintain meritocracy's legitimacy	Institutions	France Israel

source: Warikoo and Allen (2020)

The Korean Special Admission System is neither a policy for nation building nor targeted at anti-racism. This is explored in further detail later in this thesis. The closest type is the second sub-type of the second type above, implemented by institutions, reducing inequality but aiming to keep a meritocracy. However, Warikoo and Allen (2020) did not include ‘disability’ in their analysis, and their whole-policy examples are mainly focused on race issues and, to a lesser extent, low socio-economic status, which may apply to students with disabilities. In general, as

discussed, the reason for adopting affirmative action varies between countries. Therefore, I argue that the Korean case is somewhat unique because in looking at its reasons for adopting affirmative action, its culture and history should be considered. Many countries have diverse forms of affirmative action, but their main target is the issue of race. Jayakumar and Adamian (2015) criticised affirmative action for being 'race-conscious' rather than 'racism-conscious' and Glasener et al. (2019) noted that:

Less attention has been devoted to how diversity is framed in specific college contexts where affirmative action has been dismantled. (p. 3)

They further argued that this should be viewed as a diversity issue and not as a specific issue, such as race. Okechukwu (2019) asserted that race is a socially constructed category. If such categories are socially constructed, then it is possible to regard them all as issues of diversity.

In the case of the US, Jayakumar and Adamian (2015) argued that meritocracy is the accepted norm in tertiary education, and people rarely even consider it as a matter of equity. They described how many (mainly White) members of the public see inclusion as 'a moral and a justice issue' (p. 26). Carter and Lippard (2020) talked about the 'colour blind strategies' in the US as White people oppose policies of inclusion of people of colour, 'due to the fear of loss' [of their current power]. Focusing on the race issue, Jayakumar and Adamian (2015) demonstrated the results of the range of intersectionality in societies, including in the education system.

In this way, affirmative action has been commonly implemented to address racial issues. However, the logic of the arguments for and against affirmative action may be applied for students both with and without disabilities. As Dolmage (2017; p.132) insisted, the design of affirmative action across the world is a matter of social justice and should be approached as a diversity issue.

Discussing disability as a diversity issue, Gale et al. (2017) argued that education policy should aim for broader goals, widening diversity and reducing inequality, not

just focusing on physically different bodies. Similarly, Hutcheon and Wolbring (2012) questioned the definition of 'normality', because they argued it is a changing concept based on culture. They criticised university [located in Canada]'s requirement for medical documents to support perspectives of disability as being a 'medical model', and argued that, in those situations, that particular identity of disability is one of the core elements which causes a power imbalance. They further stated that this kind of disability policy can weaken the students' perceived abilities, no matter what the policymakers' intention.

Denson and Chang (2009) emphasised that if we cannot convince policymakers of the necessity of addressing diversity, then we will fail to persuade them that affirmative action is pivotal. In other words, we need to show positive results from the implementation of affirmative action (Okechukwu, 2019). However, Okechukwu (2019) also made the point that this failure is due to a lack of guidelines from the government, so each university needs to develop a policy for itself. This is very apparent in the Korean situation.

Thus, the arguments for and against affirmative action can broadly be summarised as follows. Firstly, it is seen not only as a threat by privileged groups but also as 'reverse discrimination' (Okechukwu, 2019, Carter and Lippard, 2020), in countries that support a meritocracy, such as the US. Similarly, South Korea is hugely based on meritocracy, and this is the principal reason for conflict around affirmative action in Korean society. Burke (2020) argued that the issue of affirmative action is about 'fairness' – based on the concept of meritocracy (Young, 1961) – versus 'equality'. Furthermore, she stressed that this issue is about diversity, which is concerned with 'intersecting social differences' (Burke, 2020, p. 5). Secondly, Bollinger (2003) warned about the effect of affirmative action:

...All opportunity for individual evaluation and assessment of the candidate is lost... [and] for such an approach to work, de facto segregation would have to continue in high schools, which, given the purposes of such an approach, would be ironic in the extreme. (p. 434)

In other words, implementing affirmative action appears to be aiming for equality among social groups but, in fact, allows policymakers to ignore the development of other strategies for inclusion, and, moreover, it allows a policy of segregation even before entering higher education.

Studies, for example, Carter and Lippard (2020) on affirmative action primarily discussed policymakers or privileged people rejecting the adoption of affirmative action. However, Blume and Long (2014) showed that universities that do not implement affirmative action have a decreased enrolment rate of minority students. This shows that structural inequalities are rampant, and that, without those policies, minority students are hard to reach to the same extent as their non-minority peers. It is therefore crucial, when reviewing affirmative action in different countries, to consider the different cultures that may have led to those policies and their resultant impact.

In short, although affirmative action across the world appears to focus on race and – to a lesser extent – on social inequality, countries may face the same issues of segregating those for whom the policies aim to promote. Moreover, there are continuing conflicts between meritocracy and equality. Furthermore, studies in this area have the same limitations: firstly, it is hard to find affirmative action that focuses on disability and not race; secondly, studies do not consider each country's context and culture; thirdly, the results and impact of implementation of affirmative action in the disability field have not been studied.

1.6 Background to the research and research questions

South Korean society places a significant focus on tertiary degrees and on having the largest number of people aged 25-34 per total population who have a tertiary degree within OECD countries (OECD, 2020). However, there is limited evidence that the government of South Korea is interested in making tertiary education accessible to students with disabilities (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, 2022).

South Korea has a form of affirmative action when students apply for universities, mainly targeted at marginalised groups (for example, who have low socio-economic

status. This is discussed further in Chapter Four). Students with disabilities are one of the targets of that policy, but this group has a different background and history from those of other protected characteristics.

1.6.1 Affirmative Action in the Korean context

Ma (2021) defined affirmative action implemented in the Korean context as a quota system and a goal for the monitoring system. Korean affirmative action in higher education – the Special Admission System – can be viewed as aiming to reduce social inequality (Kim et al., 2009), aiding the admission process for minority groups in society, such as students with disabilities. Korea adopted this system for these students with disabilities as a policy based on law in 1995, from a historical background of discrimination. When students with disabilities in South Korea apply for universities, they have access to the Special Admission System. Striving for education equity for students with disabilities is a crucial issue, and students with disabilities in South Korea have, historically, been continuously discriminated against in accessing university, which led to the adoption of the Special Admission System. However, although this has been happening for almost for 30 years, and the policy's impact on students and Korean society is crucial, no study has yet explored this policy. When considering the policy of affirmative action in Korea, it is possible to see it as simply promoting the reduction of social inequality. However, as I argued in this thesis, more importantly is its role in revealing the background to inequality in Korean society. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the fundamental reasons which mitigate diversity in Korean culture. If the Special Admission System is implemented negatively, then the policy has a negative impact on students with disabilities and on their futures. It may, then, be the cause of repeated negative results for students with disabilities.

There has been deeply rooted discrimination against persons with disabilities in Korean society, which has led to enacted policies to represent them, such as the Special Admission System and the [Disability] Employment Quota System. Both these policies are elucidated in more detail in Chapter Four. As Bollinger and Coleman (2003) argued, Lee (2017) suggested that Korean affirmative action for persons with disabilities has the contradictory effect of encouraging discrimination,

despite its purpose of correcting discrimination. Lee (2017) argued that this phenomenon of Korean society is due to the issue of social agreement, in addition to continuous economic recession, which leads to conflict among social groups.

The divisive element to affirmative action in Korea has arisen in its implementation to focus on inequality, made with top-down approaches, without the public's agreement. One of the biggest problems in implementing affirmative action in Korea is its conflicting values with meritocracy, which is based on Confucianism, described in Chapter Three. Thus, affirmative action conflicts with the social norm, which accords with reverse-discrimination.

The Special Admission System was adopted but, as in the US, affirmative action in South Korean higher education has not been studied extensively. There are some studies on affirmative action in higher education, but a considerable amount of literature those studies has been published on students in all minority groups, not specifically students with disabilities.

Although there are up to a thousand students with disabilities entering universities every year in South Korea through the route of the Special Admission System (which has currently changed its name to the 'Social Integration Admission Process' according to official data (National Institute of Special Education, 2023), studies frequently showed that these students are struggling with adapting to the university environment, and some of them are even dropping out (Kim and Chung, 2015). However, authorities in South Korea are not tracking how many students have dropped out, nor the reason why, and there are only a limited number of studies that explore this issue both globally and in South Korea.

Moreover, research into the impact of implementing affirmative action (the Special Admission System) in South Korea for students with disabilities is almost non-existent. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to reveal the impact of affirmative action on students with disabilities. I demonstrate throughout this thesis that there are huge issues in terms of the effects of affirmative action for students with disabilities. I found that studies on students with disabilities in South Korea have mostly presupposed that '*students with disabilities have challenges in their university*

lives' and I asked research questions based on this supposition and, as a result, deduced similar conclusions.

However, in exploring the impact of affirmative action in South Korea, which puts so much value on education and educational degrees, has relevance since it reflects the inevitable social phenomenon of discrimination. Thus, in reflecting on the experiences of students with disabilities in South Korea, I focused on exploring the meaning of disability in Korean culture and its context, and on how affirmative action works within that culture.

This research focused on direct student experiences. Reflecting on my own experience of disability and tertiary education, I believed that there is a commonality of experience within the South Korean context and its culture. Therefore, this thesis identified the meaning of disability in Korean culture and its context. The research did not limit the types of disabilities experienced. Rather, it strove to find the commonality of experience of students with disabilities in the South Korean context.

The published literature in this field in South Korea forms a cohesive and common focus in their conclusions of dealing with current status and suggesting of removing physical and attitudinal barriers. Unfortunately, this is not limited to South Korean research but is seen across the world, although, as yet, not extensive. In the following section, I summarise the global trends in research in tertiary education. It is not limited to research on affirmative action; the keywords are broader and focus on students with disabilities.

1.6.2 Research trends in this field internationally

When exploring the broader global research trends on this topic, I repeatedly found that a limited number of studies deal with the barriers to tertiary education for students with disabilities. Previous studies have reported participation, restrictions to access and activity limitations (Kim and Chung, 2015; Moriña, 2017), which lead to a lack of reasonable accommodation, inaccessibility of information or curricula maladaptation. Studies also dealt with attitudinal barriers, such as inappropriate attitudes from the faculty, which have led to students feeling isolated (Moriña Díez et al., 2015; Lane, 2017).

When comparing literature on high-income countries and low-middle-income countries, many features differ, and the number of studies is also significantly different. There are fewer systematic support systems from the government or universities in low-middle-income countries for students with disabilities, and most of these are focused on the physical barriers to accessing education.

Internationally, there is a dearth of relevant information on tertiary education for students with disabilities from governmental and non-governmental organisations. This is also true in South Korea. In South Korea, there are the annual reports from the Ministry of Education [currently published by the National Institute of Special Education], but they contain few statistics and limited information. This is dealt with more deeply in Chapter Five. In short, overall, most studies argued the same issues and suggested the same conclusions. I, therefore, raised the question: What is the reason for this continuous pattern globally and specifically in South Korea? Every year, the same studies have been conducted, researching the same phenomenon, but it is hard to see substantial changes over the decades. It may indicate at least two issues.

The first may be tedious even to address. A lack of interest overall across the world. So, even though a few things have changed, the pace might be slow. Bunbury (2020) stated that this often arises because of bureaucracy, created through unsystematic delivery systems combined with lack of resources. However, I would like to address the second reason for the failure of current research approaches as the different cultural contexts of countries, grounded in different histories. Therefore, I asked the question, why then are the approaches that address the problem of discrimination all the same?

When narrowing down the focus in the Korean context, no studies have dealt with students with disabilities and the impact of affirmative action. There are a few studies that have dealt with affirmative action in university admission policies, but no study has analysed the grounded reasons for implementing affirmative action and how this policy progresses, nor have they considered the impact on students with disabilities in the Korean context. Hence, even if research into affirmative action is not limited to

this area, and the scope of research findings is expanded to cover a broader range, there are still not many studies in this field.

Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the impact of the Special Admission System on students with disabilities in Korean society. Furthermore, to explore the impact on students themselves, it is crucial to hear their voices. My research objectives and research questions are presented in the following section. As I am uniquely positioned in Korean context, being disabled, with non disabled experiences, I have disabled and non disabled perspectives, and so I have both objective/subjective perspectives. This is the contribution to knowledge. This research demonstrated the impact of affirmative action in the Korean cultural context and explained how the policy intersects within this culture for students with disabilities. From the perspective of Critical Disability Studies, I explored the understanding of deeply rooted values found in Confucianism and meritocracy and delved into how these conflicting ideologies intersect in this distinct context.

1.6.3 Research objectives and research questions

Research objectives

This study aimed to explore the meaning of disability in the Korean culture and its context. Through exploring the impact of policy, this study revealed the impacts of affirmative action on students with disabilities in the South Korean culture.

Research questions

- How does Affirmative Action in South Korea for students with disabilities work?
- How does Affirmative Action affect the experience of students with disabilities in tertiary education in the South Korean context?

The aim and research questions are clearly connected to the reason why I am adopting Critical Disability Studies. Critical Disability Studies regards disability as being based on a respective culture which intersects with the historical and social context of that culture. Therefore, Critical Disability Studies presumes that the perspectives on disability in each culture vary. It indicates that different approaches

might take different positions. Reflecting on these perspectives, this indicates that to solve issues for Korean students with disabilities, it is essential to understand Korean culture grounded in its history, in the future, and from these particular perspectives.

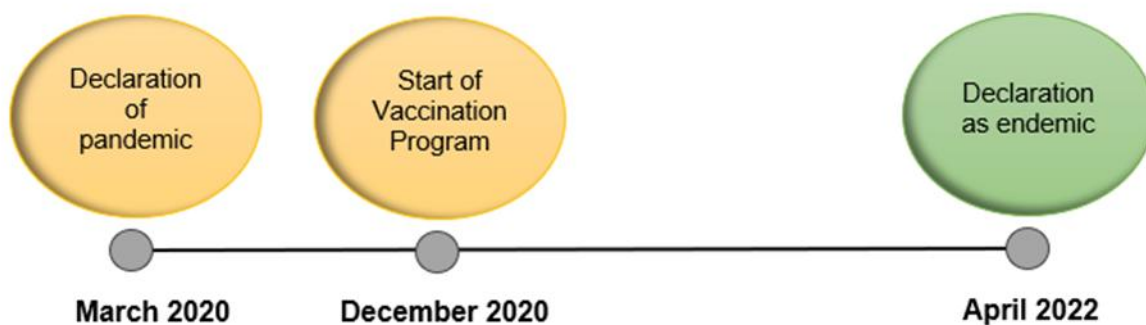
I addressed the Special Admission System in Korea, which is located at the centre of solving this issue. Although it has been almost 30 years since Korea adopted this policy in university admission, there is almost no analysis of the impact of this policy. Therefore, this thesis considered the position a policy comparatively within national and international circumstances. If the policy has been implemented successfully, then Korean society will have less discrimination towards persons with disabilities than other countries, and graduate students with disabilities should obtain diverse roles and hold various positions in society. However, the Employment Quota System (another affirmative action policy for persons with disabilities in employment, which I will describe in Chapter Four) still forces the hiring of persons with disabilities, and universities are often on the lists of companies with low employment rates of persons with disabilities. This clearly reflects that affirmative action in the university admissions policy, along with the employment policy, is not very successful. So, what is the reason for this failure? On a broader scale, what is the reason for this globally, where persons with disabilities continuously face discrimination. In attempting to uncover this issue, I believed that the direction of research was wrong. To be more precise, it has become discriminatory in itself so that the limited studies undertaken rarely consider affirmative action, or if they do, they target only racial issues, and the research on students with disabilities deals with external factors of physical and attitudinal barriers, perpetuating the difficulties students with disabilities face in being heard.

It is hard to find research on: (i) the reasons why in those countries which implement affirmative action for students/persons with disabilities there is still discrimination against them; (ii) whether countries have forms of affirmative action for persons with disabilities, and, if so, whether any investigation has been carried out into the reasons for policy failure; and (iii) whether there are any other approaches to resolving this continuous failure and these unchanging situations.

1.7 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my research

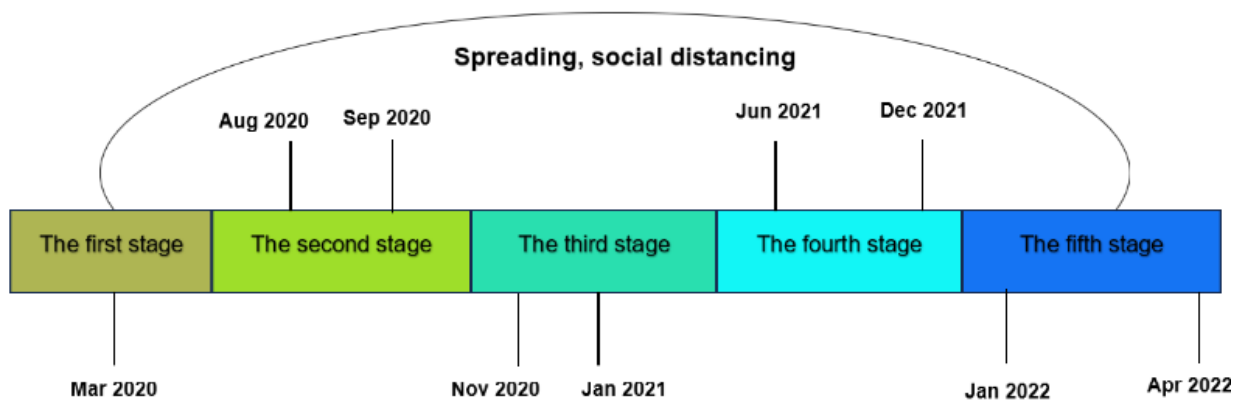
The final section of this chapter is about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my research. My research proceeded throughout the pandemic. From the beginning of 2020, the world was hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic officially in March 2020. Figure 1. is the brief timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic as published by WHO. I was based in London but had to return to South Korea, following UCL guidelines, and had to stay in Korea for two years, including during the fieldwork period. Below Figure 2. is the brief timeline and guidelines of the South Korean government.

Figure 1. Timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO)



source: COVID-19 pandemic <http://www.who.org>

Figure 2. Timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Korea



source: COVID-19 pandemic <http://www.snuh.org>

During the pandemic period, Korea had a policy of 'social distancing' from stage one to three, restricting social activities. Face-to-face contact was restricted by the government and also applied in education areas. All levels of teaching happened on an online platform, from primary level to tertiary level. University campuses were closed, and students could not see each other. For more than two years, mask-wearing and limited numbers of private gatherings were enforced by the Korean government (Lee et al., 2023).

1.7.1 Recruitment issue

These unexpected circumstances affected my study significantly. It was impossible to carry out face-to-face interviews. My fieldwork plan therefore had to be amended, and I faced numerous challenges with interviewing. Firstly, the 'ethical consideration' has been changed. To protect all interviewees and interviewer, all interviews were carried out via online platforms. Secondly, the plan for interviewing focus groups could not be implemented, and I had to do all interviews individually. I had difficulties in recruiting interviewees for individual interviews. As universities in Korea also delivered online lectures, there were no students on campus, which made it hard for me to identify interviewees. It gave huge challenges on my recruitment of participants. Every university was closed so, although I made contact with

universities' disability support centres to ask for help, they answered that, they could not be sure about the students who entered university after the start of the pandemic. It may have been the result of the pandemic, which severely limited all relationships, or it may have been caused by the lack of advertising of the disability support centres by the university or the centre itself.

Similarly, although my first intention was to focus more on first-year students, as it turned out, it was difficult to find them. Among the total of 17 interviewees, only one student was in the first grade, although he had already attended other universities, so his age was not representative of other students who had just entered university. Of the other students, three who were in the second grade, and four in the third grade were directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They all stressed that they had not had any opportunity to enjoy university life. Obviously, students who were in the third/fourth grade had much more experience than those in the first/second grade, which was certainly due to the pandemic and the effect of the restrictions it imposed.

Finally, the pandemic impacted on my data collection, so, with a limited quantity of data, I employed analysis to determine richer, latent meanings. Here, I explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through the research methods.

1.7.2 Online interviews in the COVID-19 pandemic

Interviews are the key for data collection (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Normally, such research would be conducted face-to-face. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, via Zoom. This sudden change in the interview environment may have affected the credibility of this research (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, to obtain rich data, I carried out individual interviews. It is realistically impossible to carry out group interviews in the middle of a pandemic, due to various challenges such as those of recruitment, building rapport, and so on.

Before the interview, detailed information sheets were provided to the interviewees, who were going to be asked to provide written consent. Once participants had submitted their written consent, the interview was able to take place. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, following the research questions outlined above.

The purpose of the interviews was to understand the experiences of students with disabilities in South Korea. As an initial step, a pilot study of two case study interviews was conducted. The initial interview guide derived from my literature review and personal experiences. Themes were then deduced from the pilot study. The students were invited and interviewed. The interview questions were continuously amended, developed while carrying out and analysing each interview, according to the students' specific situations, for example, university, gender, disability types, and degree of the disability (Charmaz, 2014).

As I mentioned, I intended to carry out focus group interviews as well, but, when the pandemic occurred, I could not proceed with this. Firstly, I faced challenges in even recruiting individuals. In hoping to carry out group interviews, I decided that rapport would need to be established in order for the participants to feel able to talk about their experiences related to disability. However, in the circumstances, almost none of the participants knew each other: students, parents of students with disabilities, staff, and the researcher group. So, I judged that it was not possible to proceed with the original plan, and I changed the interview plan to individual interviews only.

This necessity for online interviews, brought about by the pandemic, led to both advantages and disadvantages for the research. One of the advantages was that it allowed any concern about physical distance to be entirely dismissed. I could conduct interviews throughout the whole country. However, at the same time, again, it was not easy to build rapport with interviewees. Especially, with those whom I had never met before, it was difficult to draw out their stories, via Zoom. In most cases, however, my disability allowed the distance between us to be drawn a little closer.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

To address this research aim, this thesis was constructed following key aspects to my understanding. Adopting Critical Disability Studies, I was convinced that the methods of inquiry should be different according to each culture, and I have argued the reason why I describe the historical perspective as a methodology. Thus, in chapter Two, I will discuss my methodology and method for giving insight into this research. As a method, along with interviews, from Chapters Three to Five, I will

examine the current literature to enable readers to understand the Korean context: history, culture, disability and education. Through Chapters Six and Seven, I will present the result of the analysis of interviews. Chapters Four, Six and Seven will have discussion sections in addition to a chapter summary, where I analysed the results of interviews with the participants, combining the results of the literature review and adding to the discussion sections. Finally, Chapter Eight will summarise this research, state the contribution of the research, and suggest future research.

1.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explained the aim of this study, why my topic is relevant and important which is affected by my personal experiences of acquiring disability while attending Korean university. Studies around tertiary education for students with disabilities are limited, repeated and stagnant. I suggest that we need transition of the target of research: from the barriers to context and culture. Affirmative action for students with the background of minorities and the subsequent research is mostly targeted to race not disability. Thus, it indicates that in the minority field, students with disabilities in tertiary education is also out of focus.

I explored how affirmative action is underdeveloped in disability policy, how Korean society is highly focused on education, and how affirmative action to students with disabilities when applying for universities aims for equality of education, but that there is a lack of interest in this policy's impact. It seems to lead to the continued exclusion of persons with disabilities. Thus, through the lens of Critical Disability Studies, this study investigated the impact of affirmative action in Korean context. As a final point, I have explained how the COVID-19 pandemic affected my PhD research. In Chapter Two, I will explain the methodology and methods used for this research.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I discussed the importance of this research to better understand the impact of affirmative action as a policy in the Korean context to promote tertiary level education for students with disabilities. I introduced myself as a uniquely positioned Korean disabled researcher and described my original positionality in undertaking this study. In this chapter, I present how I chose the methodology for researching the topic of Korean culture and affirmative action, and the reasons for those decisions. First, I explain the methodology that I used. I present my ontology of interpretivism, and my epistemology of social constructivism, along with the reasons why I chose qualitative research. I discuss in depth the rationale for employing Constructivist Grounded Theory as the theoretical framework. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations for this study. In the methods section, I describe the processes employed for participant sampling and interviewing, data coding and analysis. I present the two methods of data collection used for this research in the review of the literature on the relevant areas to deepen my understanding of the topic and from the primary data collected during the interviews. I present the thematic analysis undertaken following the interviews. These themes are discussed in detail in Chapters six and seven.

2.2 Ontology and epistemology

The ontology of this study is one of interpretivism. As I argued in Chapter One, I believe that the meaning of disability for students with disabilities can only be drawn from the interviewees' lived experiences. Similarly, the meaning of affirmative action in the Korean context is more clearly understood from those who have experienced the impact of affirmative action to enter higher education. Furthermore, as a person with an acquired disability who has experienced the Korean education system, I bring a further dimension to the understanding applied to the data.

The constructivism of Charmaz (2014) views this world as a multiple phenomenon, putting more value on people's viewpoints and beliefs, than on methods. I also believe that the world consists of multiple realities, and every person's perception of this world varies in relation to every single phenomenon. Thus, through the interaction between participants and researcher, the knowledge required for investigating phenomena can be created, based on interpretation.

Throughout this research, I investigated how disability is understood in the South Korean context as well as what it means for students with disabilities using affirmative action to access the tertiary level of education. I positioned Critical Disability Studies as my perspective on disability, focusing on the impact of culture on the experience of disability. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the participants' perspectives and opinions of how Korean culture impacts on students with disabilities. This was the rationale for using a qualitative methodology in my research design.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005; p.3) argued that 'Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world'. Qualitative research starts with 'attempting to find the meaning of the problem' (Creswell and Poth, 2016; p.37), the qualitative approach also possesses a flexibility that quantitative research does not have when exploring the complexity of human experience, such as identity. Darling (2022) argued that identity is a changeable characteristic according to the society in question. Identity therefore is socially constructed, forged within influencing legal and political systems. Therefore, I explored how Korean society constructs the concept of disability, and disability identity, within its history and culture, as well as its policies. These explorations are grounded in the literature review undertaken. Thus, the epistemology of this study is one of social constructivism.

2.3 Social constructivism

To explore the multiple meanings of a social construct, research that analyses diverse interactions among actors in society and interprets participants' viewpoints is crucial (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Social constructivism combines well with interpretivism, which requires understanding the world and interpreting the

interviewee's viewpoint when analysing interviews. Constructivists focus on the cultural and historical context and position themselves where they can interpret society through their experiences.

Social constructivism is based on relativism. I believe that this world is constructed of multiple realities (Burr and Dick, 2017). Burr and Dick (2017) also stressed that the world is reproduced by language. Social constructivism is thus created by an individual's ordinary social interactions, which are grounded in a specific historical and cultural context (Burr, 2015).

I applied this understanding to my analysis. Based on my understanding of interpretivism, the meaning of a social phenomenon is experienced differently by everyone. This understanding connects to relativism by acknowledging the interpretation reached is constructed through interaction with the distinct social context. Therefore, the structure of Korean society will affect each student with disabilities differently, based on their own experience. Creswell and Poth (2016) argued that social constructivism views society as multiple realities and should therefore analyse the participants' perspectives. Furthermore, this connection illustrated the reason why I chose to investigate intersectionality and adopted a Critical Disability Studies approach. Charmaz (2014) asserted that subjectivity is essential to a society's being. Following her argument, researchers should consider their own perspectives in the research context if they believe that society is constructed by 'multiple, processual' factors (Charmaz, 2014, p.53).

As social constructivism aligns with a critical approach, it also fits well with Critical Disability Studies (Burr and Dick, 2017). Critical Disability Studies requires an understanding of the world through, and by interpreting, the interviewer's viewpoint when analysing interviews. Social constructivism aims to discover the meanings of socially constructed beings who intersect with each other in their daily lives in particular contexts and cultures. During this process, researchers can interpret their own thoughts. Therefore, I attempted to reflect Korean society's viewpoint from the framework of 'social constructivism', which in turn, justified investigating the factors in Korean society that impacted why students with disabilities find it hard to achieve

at the same levels as their non-disabled peers, and what factors affected their disabled/disability identity.

2.3.1 Disability as a social construction

As I introduced in Chapter One, the concept of 'disability' is not a fixed but rather a changing concept. Rather than viewing disability through the individual or medical model, I have considered diverse models, such as the social model, the biopsychosocial model and through the Critical Disability Studies framework. If disability is seen as a cultural phenomenon, it is then possible to interpret the reason for whether the implementation of affirmative action should similarly be constructed in the cultural context. Although affirmative action for persons with disabilities has been implemented in many countries, there is limited research on both the opinions of persons with disabilities on this and the impact of affirmative action on accessing education.

Korean society has very complex and unique intersectionality, based on its culture and history as well as the current social and political challenges faced. From an external viewpoint, South Korea might appear as simply a country eager for education in order for its population to achieve tertiary degrees, but from the viewpoint within, it can never be as that simple. Therefore, in constructing meaning from students with disabilities aiming for tertiary education, within Korea's cultural and historical context, and positioning myself within the interpretation reached in this research was essential and meaningful. Moreover, in applying the Korean context to the process of these students and focusing on affirmative action, I am researching phenomena that have never been studied from such diverse aspects. Based on my ontology of interpretivism, and my epistemology of social constructivism, this research investigated Korean society's culture and how it affected students' experiences, both directly and indirectly, in the context of tertiary education. Thus, this process resonated as a new approach and revealed the meaning of existing policies and laws affecting students with disabilities (Charmaz, 2014).

Moreover, since my ontology is interpretivism, I strove to reflect my participants' viewpoints and construct their meaning. Through the process of constructing, the

participant and I created meaning and knowledge. By interviewing students about their lived experiences, and interpreting the thoughts of diverse participants (students, staff, and researchers), I aimed to situate these contexts as mine. Only then could I construct the meaning of disability in the Korean context. I focused on investigating the meaning of affirmative action for students with disabilities in Korean culture, and how the policies in relation to them, grounded in their culture, history or developmental stages, intersected and affected the participants. Therefore, the methodology for this study is Constructivist Grounded Theory.

2.4 Ethical considerations

This project was undertaken as a *high-risk ethical review* due to the focus on human experience of my research, and the possibility of harm to the mental health of my participants from being asked to reflect upon and answer questions on a personal and sensitive topic as disabled identity. The following measures were the main precautions that I took to protect the participants: I produced a Korean version of the Participation Information Sheet, and Interview Guide, which I provided to all interviewees, along with the original English version, and I advised them to think carefully about participation. I made sure that participation was entirely voluntary.

I obtained the agreement of the interviewees to have recordings ahead of the interviews and explained that I would be using a pseudonym for them to protect their data. I confirmed that if they wanted or needed their guardians present at the interview that was entirely possible. None of them requested this. After finishing each interview, I shared the transcript with the interviewee, gaining their consent to use the content and asking whether there was any content they needed to remove. I interviewed students with Asperger Syndrome with their mothers, and I obtained the consent form from the mothers. See Appendix 3.

If interviewees did not want to be video recorded, I used only voice recording with their consent. I provided participants with contact information about how and where to raise a complaint, if necessary. I also ensured that they knew that all personal data was securely stored on the university OneDrive.

Four students out of a total of 17 wanted to use their real names. However, due to the ethical requirement to protect participants' personal information, I could not agree to this because, I had to protect these individuals. If I exposed their names, it would not mean that I am only exposing their names, but other personal characteristics such as *university* also could be disclosed. Within the Korean context, this could lead to public bias towards their universities. Although I refused their suggestion, because of their willingness to disclose their names, I had greater access to their disabled identity, as it was no longer hidden.

A further issue that I had to address in this process was that, in Korean culture, the use of pseudonyms is not common. It happens only in exceptional cases, such as in criminal investigation interviews. Similarly, in Korean culture, changing one's surname is not commonly accepted. Presumably, this is thought to be an impact of Confucianism, which holds a high value on one's ancestors. I will explain these cultural norms in Chapter Three. As most participants did not change their surnames, in this research, I only provided a first name and did not give a false surname.

2.5 Methods

In this research, two major methods were used for data collection. The first approach was by applying analysis to the literature review undertaken and the second entailed collecting primary data from participants with lived experience through conducting interviews.

2.5.1 Literature reviews

As I discussed in Chapter One, this study adopted a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, framed by Charmaz (2014), who sits within the second generation of grounded theorists. Grounded Theory originated from Glaser Barney and Strauss Anselm (1967) further elaborated by Corbin (1998), who merged positivism, looking for facts and logical truth, and pragmatism, understanding this through practical application, and the Grounded Theory reflects Glaser's quantitative background.

The first-generation of grounded theorists, Glaser Barney and Strauss Anselm (1967) had objective ontology as their perspective, and the second-generation of grounded theorists, such as Charmaz (2014) had subjective ontology. Thus the first and second generation have different perspectives on the approach adopted for completing a literature review. Glaser (1978) argued that the researcher should be separate from interviewees and should not be exposed to relevant literature ahead of the interview. Strauss and Corbin (1998) also argued that the researcher's position maintains objectivity; keeping distance. However, Charmaz (2014; p.523) argued that the interviewer and interviewee should interact with each other and construct meaning together, and this process cannot be neutral; subjectivism, not objectivism. So, she takes another approach, named Constructivist Grounded Theory (Alemu et al., 2017).

Glaser and Strauss (2017) suggested to novice researchers that the literature review should not be carried out ahead of the interview to avoid viewing the world through the existed lens so that avoiding contaminated the categories, they urged to focus on data itself. However, Charmaz (2006) asserted that it is impossible to exclude thoughts on their understanding of the literature since the researchers themselves are already exposed to theories in this world. Grounded theorists assume that society consists of and is constructed by multiple realities (Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz believed that we ourselves, our data collection method and analysis are all form the components of this constructed world and that the theory constructed by the researcher includes the interaction with the surrounding environment and it is the sum of this that becomes the subject constructed. Moreover, from the perspective of Critical Disability Studies, this understanding led me to delve into the intersectionality of Korean culture and disability, and complete a literature review ahead of the research. The rationale for this is described throughout the next three chapters, as I explain the relevant research background.

The literature search included various materials and secondary data sources, including reports, papers, websites, books, and articles. The keywords used were started from: 'Students with disabilities', 'Disabled students', 'Experiences', 'Challenges', and/or 'Higher'/'Tertiary'/'Post-secondary education', and expanded to 'Korean Culture', 'Confucianism', 'Meritocracy', 'Korean history', 'Education fever'.

'The results were categorised, reviewed, and analysed. Google Scholar and SCOPUS, and UCL libraries, were searched. In terms of the South Korean papers; Google scholar, DBPia, KISS, SCHOLAR were mainly used. The keywords were the same in Korean and English. The recent ten years of studies were intensively searched, except for exploring historical literatures. The criteria for inclusion of existing research were relevance to the subject of this research and alignment of outcomes and recommendations. As the Constructivist Grounded Theory aims to use consistent analysis with research, while the research proceeds, the keywords were also expanded and refocused. During the research, I found additional domestic articles from internet press releases.

In the following chapters, Three to Five, I adopted a broad-to-narrow approach to classifying the results. Therefore, I utilised the scoping review method for my literature review. A scoping review maps the relevant literature within a broad field (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005, Pham et al., 2014). The purpose of this scoping review was to identify gaps in the existing research. Thus, this approach differs from a systematic review, which begins with specific research questions and designated methodologies (O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). Given my positionality as a Korean researcher who acquired a disability while attending a Korean university, I sought to employ the scoping review as a means of exploring how students with disabilities are perceived within Korean culture. As a result, through mapping the body of literature, I aimed to identify current research gaps in existing fields. As O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015, p.86) noted, a scoping review may encompass 'literature mapping', 'conceptual mapping', and 'policy mapping'.

Thus, I present the literature review by organising the findings according to three key criteria based on the scoping review. First of all, in Chapter Three, I aimed to explain broadly Korean history and its cultural background to provide an understanding for readers about what Korean culture is and how it is grounded in its history. The reason why I took a historical perspective was to show how Korean history impacts the current education system and students with disabilities. In Chapter Four, I narrowed down the historical review into Korean perspectives towards disability, so I discussed the meaning of disability in Korean culture, with a specific historical review of students with disabilities. This provides the readers with an understanding of how

disability is understood and holds meaning in Korean culture, with attention to the impact on persons with disabilities. Finally, in Chapter Five, I looked at the current Korean education context in detail and explained the gap between students with and without disabilities. Therefore, the three chapters of literature review aimed to provide an understanding of the background to the experience of current students with disabilities in Korea. Furthermore, I positioned myself in this research and I reflected on how I understand and gain meaning from the literature.

2.5.2 Interviews

The second approach I explored was collecting data on current students' experiences through interviews. The interview was conducted in two stages: an initial interview and a focused interview. Grounded theory is suited to intensive interviewing because of its open-ended format, permitting continual analysis during data collection (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) argued that methods should be decided following formulation of the research questions, arrived at through undertaking the literature review. Based on my research questions, I believe it is appropriate to investigate the current student's experiences through in-depth interviews.

The following questions formed the core structure of the interviews undertaken.

- i. What are the features of disabled/disability identity for students with disabilities in South Korea?
- ii. How does affirmative action affect the identity of students with disabilities in South Korea?
- iii. How does Korean culture impact students' identity?

I explored these questions through the concept of intersectionality of diverse factors that affect individuals. For example, the question: 'How did your disability affect your choice of university and your major?', was further explored with the participants by discussing factors such as familial socio-economic status, societal norms, and/or governmental policy.

2.5.3 Sampling

Sampling strategies and selection criteria

In adopting Constructivist Grounded Theory for this study, I considered the possibility that it may attract fewer interviewees due to the nature of the intensive individual interview. Moreover, using grounded theory, I struggled to set a definitive sample size when writing the research plan. Studies argued that for qualitative sampling, the important factor is 'saturation' (Suri, 2011). For example, it is suggested that only when the sample size reaches data saturation, can the researcher stop the data gathering (Alemu, 2017). According to Morse (1994), 30 to 50 interviewees are sufficient for grounded theory interviews. Creswell and Poth (2016) argued that 20-30 could be enough to get saturation. Charmaz (2006) also argued that 25 would be reasonable for a small project. In short, the sample size would vary depending on when saturation arises.

Mason (2010) concluded that sample size reflects the research purpose, and is arbitrary. Therefore, although this study originally approved as a sample size of up to 50 students from tertiary environments, based on the previous literature as the maximum, I aimed to stop collecting when I experienced data saturation. Guest et al. (2006; p.75) stressed that three points for saturation: interview structure, content, and participant homogeneity. For reaching saturation, semi-structured interviews would be more helpful than unstructured ones. If the research requires specific qualification for participants, the sample size for saturation would be smaller (in this study, I limited participants' qualification as students with disabilities experiencing/experienced Korean university within Korean culture, and restricted within certain regions, and others). The last requirement of interviewee's homogeneity can be saturated when I address the homogenous characteristics of interviewees in Korean culture.

I strove to collect rich data rather than just aim to have plentiful numbers of participants. So, I chose participants who applied for the interviews who expressed their personal motive, as well as met the criteria of individual characteristics such as gender, disability, or universities.

There are around 400 universities in South Korea. It is possible to ascertain the number of students with disabilities by individual university via public data (Higher Education in Korea, 2023). This provides principal data such as the number of students with disabilities, the number of male/female students with disabilities, and the number of students who entered through the Social Integration Admission Process (changed from Special Admission System from 2021). However, as I discussed in Chapter Five, there is no report from the government that compiles to the data relating to students with disabilities.

Three kinds of sampling strategies were carried out: purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and theoretical sampling.

Sampling result

Since Constructivist Grounded Theory encourages analysis during the data collection, I carried out analysis during the interview process and continuously amended the participant target numbers as I thought I needed. The total number of interviewees was 29. In the initial interview, I decided to interview seven students with disabilities and two mothers whose children have disabilities and are currently attending universities. Thus, the total number of participants in the initial interview was nine. I presented detailed and different interview schedules of the initial interview in Appendix 6. During and after the analysis of initial interviews, I deduced themes from the initial interview. As a following step, I processed the focused interviews with three groups: students with disabilities, staff of disability centres, and professionals. In the students group, a total of 14 students with disabilities were involved. Among 14 students, six students who were involved in the initial interview joined again. These students were those who agreed to initial and focused interviews at the recruiting stage of the initial interview. This is based on my choice of methodology, constructivist grounded theory, and themes that can be developed by in-depth interviews. I presented detailed information on the interviewed students in Table 2. At the same time, staff who work for disability centres were a total of two and a total of ten professionals accepted my interview invitation and joined the interview. I presented detailed and different interview schedules for the initial and focused interviews in appendixes seven, eight, and nine. I give their details below.

Students with disabilities: a total of 17

Target students were students who had disabilities currently attending Korean universities, recently graduated or who had dropped out from universities. Initially, two different recruiting methods were used: asking for help from disability support centres and snowball sampling. Later, two additional methods were used. Asking two already known students to participate in the pilot study and posting on a social media platform. When I posted the recruitment on the internet, I disclosed my name, university, and contact details, including my mobile phone number. It was a dangerous decision in retrospect, as several interviewees told that '*your action was too dangerous*'. However, at the same time, it helped me to be seen as a reliable person, as they searched me at online browsers, and made decision to join the interview.

Key features in the sampling of students with disabilities

In the initial sampling, I focused on intersectionality. Firstly, it was aimed at a wide geographical target, across the whole country. Secondly, I tried to carry out the sampling across all types of physical and mental disabilities, excluding internal organ disability. This was mainly because it is not easy to find interviewees from those sectors of disability [internal organ], so it would be difficult to research the meaning of disability for them compared to those with other types of disabilities. I interviewed one participant with kidney disease (one of the legally admitted disability types in Korea as the term of 'kidney disability'), however, I felt that she had no recognition of a disabled identity, although she is enrolled in the national disability system. Thus, although someone has long term or chronic health condition, may enrol in disability system, they may be unlikely to regard themselves as *disabled* but rather to *have impairment*. Thirdly, this sampling was not limited to the official disability types, according to Korean law. So, the sample may include students whose disability is not admitted legally, but they nevertheless experience challenges because of their disability, I strove to include them. Fourthly, I aimed to include in the sampling those who attend less highly ranked universities and alternative forms of university, as well as the prestigious universities, in order to research the meaning of disability across the spectrum of university types and ranking. For each impairment type, I aimed for

at least two students to be recruited for reliability. Lastly, sampling was aimed to achieve a gender balance.

In the first period of recruiting and carrying out interviews, I did not mention my own disability. I was not familiar with disclosing my disability to a broader public. As I explained in the introduction, I do not have a positive disabled identity, and I did not want to post my disability in public places. The second reason was that I was not sure whether it would be helpful for building rapport. However, in a few interviews, I realised that the participants were still, like me, in agony about disclosing their disabilities and their experiences. Thus, when I told them about my disability experience, it helped my participants and me build rapport and tell more stories. So, after a few interviews, I revised the interview invitation letter, revealing my disability, and it worked: disclosing my experience definitely helped to build our relationship and rapport. This complex relationship with identity as a disabled person in Korea is explored throughout this thesis but specifically in detail in Chapter Six.

Target participants for this research

Since this study aimed to research the experience of students with disabilities in South Korea, the target was students with disabilities who have experienced tertiary education in South Korean universities. The second target group was those who had already dropped out or who had considered dropping out from university because this is a key factor in revealing the barriers faced by students with disabilities.

The recruitment for each group varied according to the progress of the interview and analysis. Although I failed to recruit this second target group, who had already dropped out or who had considered dropping out, two students dropped out from their universities during the interview period. One student's reason for dropping out was discriminatory administration and this data is included in my analysis.

Range of impairments in the target student group

As already discussed in the introduction, compared to those of many other countries, South Korea's legally defined types of disability are limited. Students with unusual disability types, which are not recognised under South Korean law, may struggle with adaptation. This does not mean that these students are blocked from entrance to a university, but they might not be supported by law, so they have to prepare for

entering university and university lives wholly by themselves. This is a separate point to address throughout the thesis, while addressing the negative impact of the Special Admission System.

This research did not limit disability types to those acknowledged as constituting a disability under South Korean law, because, as seen in a systematic review undertaken by my colleagues and I (Park et al., 2020), it showed that over a ten-year period, 2010-2019, in 174 articles, only five types of impairment: physical, visual, hearing, intellectual, and autism, have been studied (99.4%). That is, either students who have other types of disabilities are excluded from university or have not applied to enter university. If this research were to limit the types of impairment, then the sample would be too small. Furthermore, it might not be able to reveal the commonality of students with disabilities. More importantly, this research aimed to reveal the commonality of findings about students' experiences in the Korean context, focusing on culture not on individual opinions. So, I was open to reporting on all types of disability and levels of disability and interviewed a student with mental disability but who refused to register with the National Disability Register (*Yeoseon* female, fourth-year student who was not registered with the National Disability Register, and had mental health condition, acquired after entering university).

Dealing with the power imbalance

Social constructivism is concerned with power relationships. Burr (2015) stressed that inequality of individuals' position in the world, gives rise to power inequality and that this gives rise to the intersectionality of different sectors of society and individual positions. Thus, in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, a power imbalance could occur. Therefore, in this study, in order to protect the interviewees, three different methods were used.

Firstly, the information sheets stressed that interviewees could withdraw their agreement to participate at any time up until four weeks after the interview. Secondly, on the information sheet, there was information about where to raise complaints. Thirdly, because of the characteristics of Constructivist Grounded Theory, the interviewer and interviewee made meaning of the interviewee's

experience together. It would have been impossible to put forward only my own opinions. Rather, the thoughts of students were included and confirmed.

The interview questions were slightly customised to each student; however, the questions at the initial interviews were aimed to broadly ask the following:

Sharing experiences of your disability before entrance to university

- What was your motivation for entering university and studying at tertiary level?
- How did your disability affect your choice of university and your major?

Sharing experiences of your disability while you have been attending university

- What support did you receive from the university / fellow students / your family / others?
- What were the barriers you faced?
- How would you describe the university life that you experienced?
- How do you see disability affecting your university life?

Thinking about Korean law and policy

- How do you see Korean law and policy supporting students with disabilities?

Zoom was used as the platform from which to conduct the interviews, because Korean universities mostly use Zoom as a tool for online teaching and learning and any online meetings, so participants were very familiar with Zoom, especially since the beginning of the pandemic. The length of time for the initial interview varied among individuals, but normally lasted between one and two hours.

Sampling criteria

Proposed sampling strove to meet the balance between these groups:

1. students with disabilities who entered university through a special selection route and those who did not use a special selection route
2. students with different types of disability
3. students from universities in diverse locations
4. students of different genders

The recruiting process

Recruitment was done through maximum variation sampling. This strategy aims to identify heterogeneity of the samples from shared patterns (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). Thus, I aimed to post details of the recruitment in, and for reliability to recruit at least two students from, each region equally. This was to regulate the recruitment size. This not only means the 'region' but also includes 'high-ranked' and those not. I explained this point in Chapter Five, with the phenomenon that top-ranked universities are all located in Seoul. At first, details of recruitment were posted in just a few universities. However, this planned recruitment did not lead to a big enough sample, therefore a wider sample was gathered from further planning.

The recruitment process had four different stages. Firstly, I contacted students with disabilities who I already knew. Two such students took part in the pilot study interview. Secondly, I contacted a few disability support centres and asked them to post details of the recruitment. This was possible because the contact details of all disability support centres are available on their websites. However, it was hard to find the interviewees that I wanted. Only one student with disabilities was added through this route. Thirdly, I posted details of the recruitment on the social media platform, *samjangsa*, and created my own Facebook account where I posted details about the recruitment. A few students with disabilities who had seen these postings contacted me, three students with disabilities decided to be involved through *samjangsa*, and two came from the Facebook route. Lastly, via snowball sampling, seven students with disabilities and two mothers of students with disabilities were recruited.

A few more students contacted me, but as my sampling strategy was *purposive sampling*, I did not accept all of them, but selected interviewees according to my purpose in interviewing them, such as their degree of disability, their university, their region, and so forth.

As I describe in chapters three to five, as the literature argues, I believed there would be differences according to those different factors and so I aimed to collect data equally representing each, as well as gender.

I originally planned proportional sampling, so I aimed to extract interviewees from each administrative district, because I thought there would be differences according to region, such as metropolitan areas versus rural areas. South Korea's administrative district is broadly divided into ten [*Seoul, Gyunggi-do, Gangwon-do, NorthChungchung-do, South Chungchung-do, NorthJeolla-do, South Jeolla-do, NorthGyeongsang-do, SouthGyungsang-do, and Jeju*]. I failed to collect data from *Jeju*, but, with the exception of that region, I was able to collect data from each region, until my data reached saturation. I reclassified the region of the university into four categories as Metropolitan, Urban, Rural, and Cyber university for avoiding identification.

Since the Korean disability rating system is based on medical criteria, I thought that a few students might have more severe issues than their legal disability level accounted for, so I strove to include students with a mild disability rating. I found that one student, *Junjae*, had a legally mild disability rating but actually experienced a severe disability. His official disability level was decreased to mild from severe two years after his first assessment. This 're-assessment policy' also happened to me, downgraded my disability level 'severe' to 'mild'. All assessment criteria are medically based. So, I asked questions about this during his interview, but he had little recognition of this issue. Except for this student, I could not find students with legally mild disabilities, but having severe disability conditions. Therefore, I decided to exclude those who had minor disabilities after those initial interviews.

Most of the students who replied to me when I asked their reason for joining the study as: 'I just want to tell my story [about disability] to somebody.' All students were struggling with their disability and disabled/disability identity, and it demonstrated that there was no place where they could talk about their issues of disability. This led me to reflect on '*Why they are not able to find places to talk about their issues?*' '*Why they want me to hear their stories?*'. I further discussed these issues in chapter six.

I now outline information about the students. For their protection, I can only reveal broad information, such as the region where the university is located. Furthermore, because, in my opinion, the disability types and degrees recognised by Korean law

have limitations, I will provide additional information about their impairment, such as cause and diagnosis.

1. *Woojae* is a female student with a hearing disability. Her disability seems to be congenital, but the cause is unknown. She does not use sign language, nor hearing aids, but this does not indicate that she has a mild disability. Her official disability level is severe. She attended mainstream schools before entering university and received an offer from her university via the Special Admission System. Her university is in metropolitan and is one of the top ranked. She is 27 years old, and a fourth-year student. Her major is public administration, and her graduation was postponed because she was preparing for the national civil service examination. (As described in Chapter Five, it is common to postpone university graduation, when certain jobs or certifications are applied for)
2. *Jinho* is a student with a hearing disability. He explained that he obtained his hearing disability when he was very young and was affected by otitis media, a condition of the middle ear. He has a mild level of disability and wears a hearing aid. He is 22 years old, a fourth-year student. He entered university through the Special Admission System. His university is in an urban area, and he is majoring in engineering. He said that only a few universities offer the Special Admission System route for his major, and this was challenging.
3. *Taesun* has a diagnosis of schizophrenia, the symptoms of which first appeared while he was attending high school. His disability is officially registered in the national disability system as a 'mental disability'. In Korea, 'mental disability' is on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act list and is regarded as being severe. When I undertook the first interview with him, he was attending a cyber university in his first year and was majoring in English Literature. Before our second interview, he had dropped out of his university. He explained that the reason was that he had had two previous experiences of entering and dropping out of universities. He thought that university was not helpful for his life and that getting a career and earning a salary would be better for him. He is 26 years old.
4. *Byeol* has been registered as having a physical disability at a severe level. His disability is caused by spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). He is 24 years old. His university is in metropolitan and is one of the top ranked. He is in fourth year at

his university, majoring in psychology. He received an offer via the Special Admission System. He attends his university with his assistants and his mother, who drives him in her car and takes care of him throughout the day.

5. *Dawon* has a congenital disability with a brain lesion of unknown cause. She has impairment in motor function only. She is a wheelchair user and has a severe level of disability according to the Korean legal system. She is 21 years old, a second-year student, majoring in the department of Korean literature. She entered her previous university through the Special Admission System, but she dropped out from that university between our interviews, and she transferred to another university. This was because of experiencing disability discrimination at her previous university. Both universities are located in an urban area, near her house.
6. *Misun* has had one arm since she was born. She has worn a prosthetic arm from very young age. Her disability is severe, based the legal definition in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. She is 24 years old and in her fourth year of study. Her university is one of the top ranked, and she is majoring in both English literature, and 'environmental science, ecological engineering'. She entered university through the Special Admission System.
7. *Ain* has cerebral palsy. She uses a wheelchair and has a severe level of disability. She entered university through the Special Admission System, but, during her interview, she mentioned that it had not been necessary for her to apply for that route, because she realised that her peers who entered via general selection had similar scores to her own. She is 23 years old and in her fourth year of study. Her university is located in a rural area. Her majors are administration and social welfare.
8. *Woojin* is a wheelchair user, registered as having a brain lesion disability, at a severe level. Her disability is described as an 'acquired' one, according to medical doctors' opinions, but of unknown cause. She is 20 years old, in her third year at one of the top-ranked universities, located in metropolitan. She entered university via the Special Admission System and is majoring in sociology.

9. *Yeoseon* has a mental disability acquired after she entered university. So she did not enter via the Special Admission System. She presumes that her precise disability type is bipolar disorder, because since she has been taking medication for bipolar disorder, the symptoms have reduced. However, she cannot be sure, because she refused to register on the national disability system and has not had a chance for it to be assessed precisely. She is 26 years old but, because of the symptoms of disability, she has had to pause her study repeatedly, and still attends university. She is a fourth-year student. She is interested in a career where she can change societal perspectives towards persons with disabilities. This came about after experiencing disability. She likes her major, which is in life and environmental science.
10. *Won* is in his fourth year at his university, located in metropolitan, and is majoring in sociology. He has a visual disability, of a severe level. He attended mainstream schools throughout his whole education before entering university. He founded a union for students with disabilities in South Korean universities and took on the role of chairperson for two years. He entered the university via the Special Admission System.
11. *Ri-Ahn* is a blind student with a registered severe level of visual impairment, caused by retinopathy of prematurity. She attended general preschool with her twin sister, who has no disability, but was the subject of discrimination from the teacher. After that, she attended special schools for the blind students for her whole education until she went to the university. She is a third-year student in her university, majoring in Korean language and literature. She is 20 years old. Her university is located in urban. Since for, the major she wanted to apply for, only limited numbers of universities operate the Special Admission System, she said that she also had to apply to some special education universities. [I will deal with this issue in Chapter Six].
12. *Jae-hyeon* is a student with acquired visual impairment caused by leber hereditary optic neuropathy and the level is severe according to legal definition. His disability appeared when he was in middle school, and he had to transfer to a special school for the blind students, due to the lack of support from the general

school which he attended. He entered his university via the Special Admission System. His university is located in a rural area, he is a second-year student, and is majoring in special education.

13. *Junghyun* has Asperger Syndrome. All people with autism are regarded as severe level according to the Korean legal definition. I carried out an intensive interview with his mother. He is in his second year of university. His university is rurally located and he is majoring in a subject related to transport. Due to protection of the interviewee, I refer only broadly to his major.
14. *Suhyun* has Asperger Syndrome, which is classified as a severe condition. I carried out an intensive interview with his mother. His university is located rurally, a third-year student, but it is an alternative, rather than official university, and is specifically for students with autism and has a vocational focus. Due to protection of the interviewee, I refer only broadly to his major.
15. *Hyun* acquired a spinal injury while engaging in military service, when he was already a tertiary student. Therefore, he did not use a special selection route. His disability level has been downgraded from severe to mild. He is in his fourth year of university, majoring in law. He is 23 years old. He said that his interest in his career has changed after experiencing disability. His university is in urban.
16. *Junjae* acquired his disability of brain lesion, caused by a brain tumour, when he was attending high school. He has permanent left-sided hemiplegia and is currently using a cane. He attended his high school via online classes and applied to his current university via the Special Admission System. His university is in urban. He is a third-year student, majoring in physics. Although he depends on his cane to walk, his legal level of disability was downgraded from third [severe] to fifth [mild], when he underwent the medical reassessment.
17. *Nams* has had dystonia from a very early age. He has a legally defined severe degree of physical disability. When he did the interview, he was already of recent graduate status and worked for a disability support centre in his university as a member of staff. He entered his university via the Special Admission System and majored in public administration. Although he works for the university as a staff member and shared experience with his clients and students, he undertook this

interview as a recently graduated student. His university is located in urban area, and he formed a disability union in his university when he was a student.

Table 2. provides a summary of the student participants' information. Here, I describe the details of interviewees, along with the interview stages. The names of students are all pseudonyms.

Table 2. Descriptive Details of Interview Participants (students with disabilities)

	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Region of university	Disability Type	Detail Of Impairment (Cause and Diagnosis)	Disability Level	Number of Interviews
1	Woojae *	Female	Metropolitan	Hearing impairment	Unknown cause	Severe	2
2	Jinho*	Male	Urban	Hearing impairment	Otitis media	Mild	2
3	Taesan*	Male	Cyber	Mental disability	Schizophrenia	Severe	3
4	Byeol*	Male	Metropolitan	Physical impairment	Spinal muscular atrophy	Severe	2
5	Dawon*	Female	Urban	Disability of brain lesion	Unknown cause - Impairment of motor function	Severe	2
6	Misun*	Female	Metropolitan	Physical impairment	One arm (congenital disorder)	Severe	2
7	Riahn	Female	Urban	Visual impairment	Retinopathy of prematurity	Severe	1
8	Junghyun	Male	Rural	Autism	Asperger syndrome	Severe	1
9	Suhyun	Male	Rural	Autism	Asperger syndrome	Severe	1
10	Ain	Female	Rural	Disability of brain lesion	Cerebral palsy (congenital disorder)	Severe	2
11	Woojin	Female	Metropolitan	Disability of brain lesion	Acquired, but unknown cause	Severe	1
12	Yeoseon	Female	Urban	Not registered	Bipolar disorder	Not known	1
13	Hyun	Male	Metropolitan	Physical disability	Spinal burst fracture	Mild	1
14	Junjae	Male	Metropolitan	Disability of brain lesion	Brain tumour	Mild	1
15	Nams	Male	Urban	Physical disability	Dystonia	Severe	1
16	Jaehyeon	Male	Rural	Visual impairment	Leber hereditary optic neuropathy	Severe	1
17	Won	Male	Metropolitan	Visual impairment		Severe	1

* those who took part in both the initial interview and a focused interview

Staff of disability support centres: a total of two

The second target group was the staff of disability support centres. To gain rich and meaningful data, two members of disability support centre staff agreed to participate. These two staff members work for universities which have a lot of students with disabilities compared to most universities in South Korea, as the intake of students with disabilities is skewed to just a few universities, and these two staff members are involved in one of those.

I cannot give detailed information about these staff members because so few universities admit large numbers of students with disabilities, and further detail would make it possible to identify which university they are involved in.

Both of these interviewees are involved in general tasks with students with disabilities. Both had more than ten years' experience in the work. I already knew both of them, and they have a rapport with me. I contacted them individually and directly. Both accepted the interview invitation.

Table 3. Study Participants (staff of Disability Support Centres)

Name	Years of experience	Roles in the disability centre
Jin	12 years	Overall
Sumin	13 years	Overall

As I briefly mentioned, in addition to these two staff members, one other who was also entitled to be referred to as a 'recently graduated student' joined the disability support centre as a staff member (*Nams*, a male student with dystonia, classed as severe). He talked about his experiences, including his university education and working at a disability support centre after graduation. However, I concluded that his experience was much more relevant to the experience of a student because he had only just joined the disability support centre as a member of staff, so I decided not to include him in the staff interview list. My analysis of his interview, however, also contains his experience after graduation, as an observer of students with disabilities.

Professionals: a total of ten (six professors; three directors working in the disability field; one teacher)

I undertook interviews with ten other professionals in the field. Six of them were professors at universities; three were directors in the practical field; and one was a teacher. I decided to interview these professionals because of the following criteria. The title 'professor' itself demonstrates considerable expertise. Some of them work at universities that have a greater intake of students with disabilities than most. The titles 'director' and 'teacher' also infer expertise in this specific field. Those in the position of director worked, respectively, for a non-profit organisation, a disabled persons' organisation, and an internet press organisation related to disability. So all were in positions related to the disability and education fields. I also interviewed a teacher with disabilities. This may seem to be unrelated to tertiary education but, for the same reason as choosing the directors of the organisations, I selected this person in order to explore the structural problem in Korean culture. This teacher's interview was conducted in a written form. I delivered questions and received responses via Word files.

All the contents of these interviews were analysed, and I later quoted some of their references both directly and indirectly. Among these ten professionals, six have their own disabilities, and half of these are acquired disabilities.

Some interviewees were referred by other interviewees, so I contacted them through social networking routes. I tried to contact the directors of the organisations via snowball sampling. So, I sent a direct message from *Facebook Messenger* or *KaKao Talk Messenger* (a popular Korean social network message platform). A total of ten interviewees were found through these methods and agreed to participate.

Table 4. Descriptive Details of Study Participants (professionals)

	Name	Career	Speciality	Years of experience	With Disability
1	Ti	Director of Nonprofit organization (NPO)	Disability researcher/activist	20	Yes
2	Pieta	Professor	Intellectual and developmental disabilities	31	No
3	Jihoon	Professor	Assistive technology	32	Yes
4	Jay	Director of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPO)	Disability researcher/activist	3	Yes
5	Gye-hyun	Teacher	Special education	7	Yes
6	Seol-Hon	Professor	Special education (physical)	32	No
7	Junho	Professor	Disability researcher	23	Yes
8	Paul	Professor	Social welfare policy, social security including for persons with disabilities	25	Yes
9	Sungjin	Director of internet press	Special education/disability activist	22	No
10	Jinwoo	Professor	Special education	12	Yes

2.6 The initial interview and data analysis

As briefly described earlier, seven students and two parents of students who have Asperger Syndrome were involved in the initial interviews. The initial interviews took place from 22nd November 2021 to 25th January 2022. The students' disability types and university regions were varied, as briefly described earlier.

Transcription

To avoid any ethical issues, I employed the automatic transcription, *Naver Clover*. Although this assistive technology helped the transcription, the results may not be 100% accurate in the language captured. Therefore, once the transcriptions were downloaded, I checked for any errors or lack of clarity and listened to the recorded files, repeatedly correcting errors. During the process, I ensured accuracy, including emotional utterances and silences. For example, pauses and laughter were reflected in the transcription. After that, I shared the transcription with the interviewee, double-checked with them, and asked about any part of the transcription he/she wanted to be removed or corrected. 'Member-checking' refers to the process of checking the reliability of interviewees themselves. Through the cooperation between interviewees and the interviewer, it is possible to co-construct the meaning of disability, which is needed for member-checking. Throughout this process, rapport with interviewees could be built. This process helped me to familiarise myself with the material, including very minor issues, so it was helpful when I began the coding.

The coding process

I used the Nvivo 13 programme for analysis and data coding. Careful sampling and recruitment of participants led to data collection, and this continued until a time when no new data was found after the focused interview: data saturation. One of the key elements of grounded theory is the constant comparison approach. Through constant comparison, I identified key themes linked to intersectionality.

Incident-to-incident coding and constant comparison

Grounded theorists often carry out *incident-to-incident coding* (Charmaz, 2014). The crucial process while performing coding is the constant comparison between codes.

Memo-writing is also one of the essential components in the analysis of grounded theory. In this research, memo-writing was also carried out constantly during analysis. In Constructivist Grounded Theory, the interviewer and interviewees' reflections should be noted during every process. In this process, memo-writing played a pivotal role. While I took initial interviews, I took notes and compared interviewees from their personal characteristics such as their disability types and

level, the period acquired disabilities, to experience upon disabilities, their aim to enter universities. Below Figure 3. is the example of memo-writing after initial interviews.

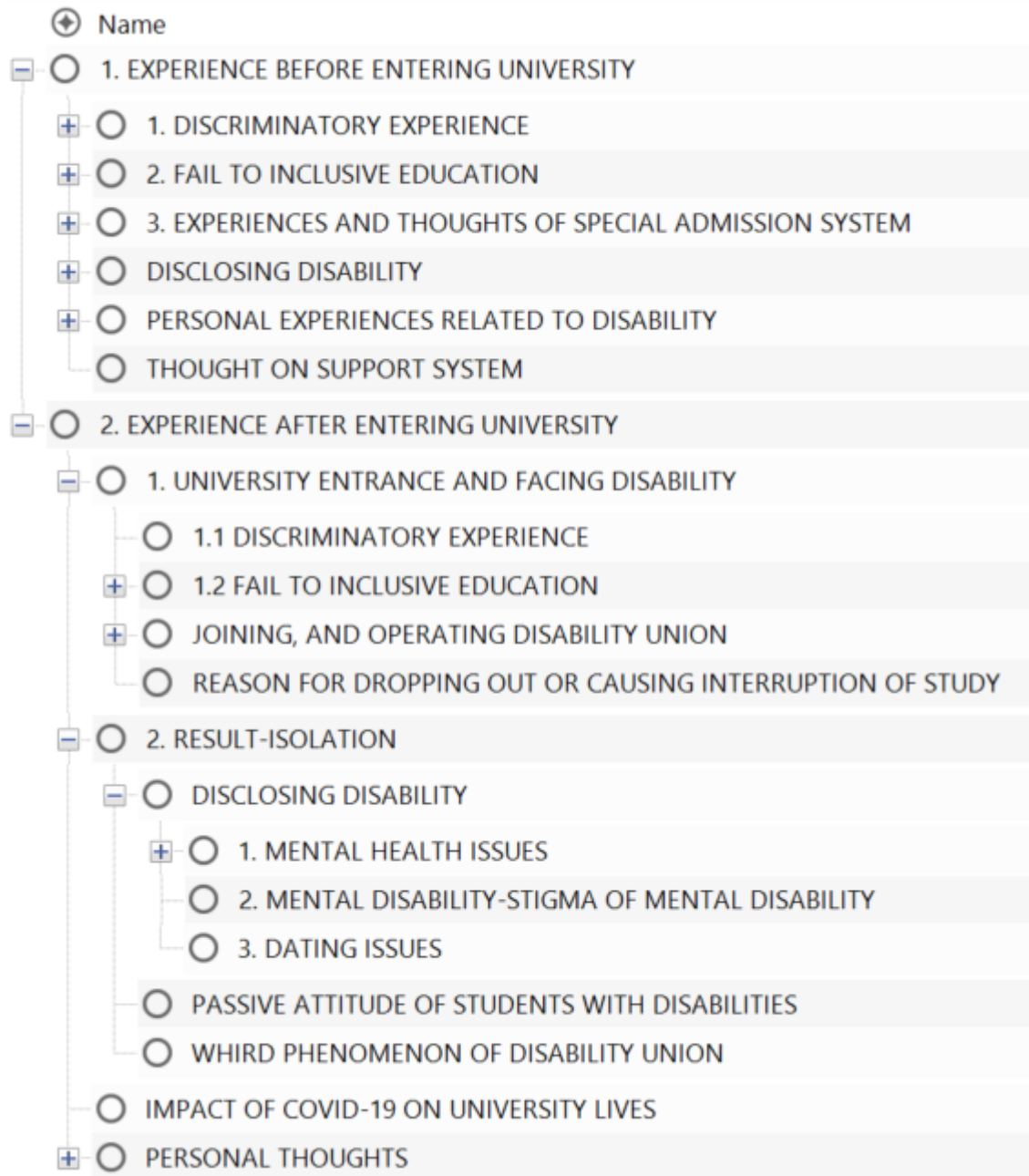
Figure 3. Box 1. Example of Memo-writing [after finishing initial interview]

Among seven interviewees, at least three of them [Woojae, Dawon, Misun] said that after entering universities, they realised their disability hugely and felt confusing and negative images on their disabled bodies...Why this phenomenon happens? What is the reason for the gap between before and after entering university? It can be caused from suddenly involved in 'bigger society'. And the connection is 'Special Admission System'. Then, what is the meaning of disability to them? What is the meaning of tertiary degree to them? 'what' students with disabilities experience? 'how' they experience? and 'why' experience? They experience discrimination.. But why do they not fight against discrimination from their universities, schools, societies, and policies?

When I completed the initial interviews, I found there are relationships between the special admission system and students' disabled/disability identity. Therefore, I confirmed the topic of my focused interview as 'special admission system' and how this policy has an impact on students and creates their disabled/disability identity. Analysis in grounded theory allows the researcher to collect and code data concurrently. Thus, I could instantly correct or change my position and, therefore, the result of the theme while collecting data. Comparison is one of the essential elements of grounded theory from the very beginning of the analysis. Charmaz (2014) argued that, during this process, the researcher can discover social phenomena. Figure 4. indicates the themes from the initial interview.

Figure 4. Initial Codes

INITIAL CODES



Initial interviews revealed that students with disabilities cumulatively experienced discrimination until entering universities. A number of students did not have experience with peers with disabilities, who have similar disabilities of them.

Through processing the special admission system, a few of them experienced discrimination. However, since the entrance processes generally allowed them to easily access higher level of universities. It may be one of the factors that make students not to protest against the society and public.

2.7 The focused interview and data analysis

The focused interview process started on 1st February 2022 and lasted until 23rd February 2023. Six students, who had completed their initial interviews were involved in the focused interview process and eight new students. Thus, a total of 14 students with disabilities, two staff of disability support centres, and ten professionals were involved in the focused interviews. Constant comparison and analysis of these interviews, and the interviews with members of staff of disability support centres and other professionals were carried out concurrently.

Meanwhile, as briefly referred to in the information about the student interviewees above, when the initial interviews were carried out, all the students were attending university. However, when the focused interviews took place, among those previously interviewed six students, two students had graduated (*Jinho* and *Woojae*, who both have a hearing disability), one student had transferred to another university (*Dawon*, a wheelchair user), and one student (*Taesun*, who has schizophrenia) had dropped out of his university.

I felt a greater rapport with those who took part in both the first interviews and the second. I could draw more stories from these students. My questions focused the interview and were concentrated on their disabled identity and my critical reflection was applied. I asked them how entering universities using Special Selection System affected their disabled identity and university lives. Applying Critical Disability Studies, the second interviews were more targeted to the impacts of Korean culture, politics, and society to their disabled/disability identity. Below Figure 5. is the example of memo-writing during focused interviews.

Figure 5. Box 2. Example of memo-writing [during focused interviews]

Comparison with interviews Byeol [second interview], versus Woojin.. both attend high ranked universities but their perspectives of their disabled body are different as negative and positive. What is the central reason? I found their parents have different attitudes towards their children's disability from comparison between Byeol and Woojin's parents ... What is the grounded reason of this? Why does refuse admission to the university of education still happen in Korea? The more interesting thing around this maybe this: Why students with disabilities cannot ? do not? protest against discrimination? It maybe caused from the route they used when entering university.. Rethink how competitive the university entrance is in Korea.. why do students with disabilities have less effect compared to their non-disabled peers? How does the social condition of requirements of having a tertiary degree operate on students with disabilities? Does this show different features between the ranking of universities they are attending?

Figure 6. indicates the deduced themes from the focused interview.

Figure 6. Focused Codes

FOCUSED CODES

- ⊕ Name
- [-] ○ 1. ISOLATED STUDENTS, MERITOCRACY AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
 - ⊕ ○ 1. AFFIRMATION ACTION IN KOREAN CONTEXT
 - ⊕ ○ 2.1 THE PHENOMENON OF MISUSE OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND LIMITATION
 - ⊕ ○ 2.2 MISLED POLICY NEGATIVELY AFFECT STUDENTS DISABILITY IDENTITY
 - 2.3 GROUNDED REASON
 - ⊕ ○ 2.4 FOLLWING RESULTS
 - CHANGE THE DIRECTION_HAVE TO FORCE THE RIGHT OF EDUCATION
 - LIMITATION OF LAW, POLICY
 - REALITY OF SOUTH KOREA IS CHANGING
- [-] ○ 2. CULTURAL NORMS
 - ⊕ ○ 1.1 CONFUCIANISM
 - ⊕ ○ 1.2 CONFUCIANISM AND CONFORMITY
 - ⊕ ○ 1.3 HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL NORMS- ABLEISM
 - ⊕ ○ 1.4 CURRENT KOREAN YOUTH'S TREND
 - ⊕ ○ 2. FAIL TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY
 - ⊕ ○ 3. INTERSECTIONALITY (KOREAN SOCIETY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES)
 - ⊕ ○ KOREAN CONTEXTUAL PROBLEMS_ STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' DISABLED IDENTITY

From the focused interview, themes were deduced as two major categories. The first theme is *Isolated, meritocracy and affirmative action*. These themes are describing students with disabilities, the result of affirmative action and its negative effect on their identity. The second theme is *Cultural Norms*, hugely grounded in Confucianism culture. This value appears in the phenomenon of the heavy focus on high-ranked universities, in ableism, the historically unstable status of Korean peninsula, and compressed modernization. The result of analysis indicated that Korean society is hugely influenced by Confucianism, but likely to be affected by recent historical events, for example, the Korean War, being under dictator military government, or Compressed modernization to overcome national crisis. The result of these specific

values in Korean society has resulted in the failure of cultural diversity and an acceptance of difference.

These factors are deduced from culture and history, thus explained by the rationale applied to this study, through the lens of Critical Disability Studies. While describing the themes in Chapters six and seven, I present how intersectional identities coalesce around these two themes, for example, gender, or experience of acquired disability.

Issue of translation: Korean to English

In this study, translation from Korean to English was done after all the analysis was finished. This is because, if the translation had occurred earlier, the precise meaning of the codes and themes may have been affected due to the differences between the two languages. Several problems could have occurred if I had carried out the coding in English from the first stage. Firstly, it could have affected the meaning of sentences and codes, since the structures of the two languages are entirely different from each other. In Korean, the theme would come at the end of the sentence. So, this could cause a problem in identifying themes accurately. Secondly, for example, in Korean, the subject is often omitted, whereas this may not be possible in English. Since I am Korean, I can recognise the omitted subject, or the meaning of a pause, but if I had translated to English first, then, I might not have been so responsive to the original phrases. Thirdly, language itself contains important implications, such as culture and history, within it as demonstrated in previous chapters (Charmaz, 2014). Considering all these factors, I translated from Korean after all the coding was finished.

Charmaz (2014) recommended that a gerund should be used in coding but, because of the differences in characteristics between English and Korean, I believe it is better to use a noun. There were a few sensitive words to be translated, such as, 'students with disabilities can cruise through university admissions', or words describing the university entrance procedure in Korean universities, such as 'early action' and 'regular decision'. The translations of these words referenced in Korean official documents and relating to these themes were double-checked by a person who is bilingual in Korean and English, who experienced Korean education system.

The stages for reducing the gap between concepts

I analysed data from initial and focused interviews and deduced themes from data. Throughout above processes, I organised and reduced the gap of the concepts in three stages. These are theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting.

1. Theoretical sampling

While conducting interviews with students with disabilities and concurrently doing an analysis of interviews, I finalised that the 'special admission system' is placed at the centre of the problem, how it makes students to have internalisation of discrimination. For further exploration of the intersection between the special admission system and Korean culture, I proceeded with theoretical sampling.

In Constructivist Grounded Theory, during the process of theoretical sampling, it is essential to decide what types of data to collect, to know when to end the collection, and to know when data saturation has been reached (Alemu, 2017). Charmaz (2014) argued that you can use theoretical sampling both in the early stage and in the later stage. This further develops the notion of subjectivity within the process of ground theory (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Thus, I also conducted interviews with staff of disability support centres and researchers as described above Table 3. and Table 4.

This sampling strategy refers to collecting data while focusing on categories and features. It can be used for explaining and justifying the categories chosen (Charmaz, 2014). This sampling strategy relates to the development of theory and concept. Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to focus on their data. I further conducted interviews with students with disabilities and professionals. I interviewed *Won*, who made a national disability union for university students with disabilities (visual disability, male, fourth-year, severe) and *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability), *Sungjin* (director of internet press on disability, male, 22 years experience) and *Jinwoo* (professor in special education, 12 years experience, male, physical disability). *Figure 4.* and *Figure 6.* show generated codes from initial, focused, and theoretical sampling and interviews. I wanted to confirm if it is correct result from analysis and if it reaches saturation.

Throughout the process, memo-writing [figure 3 and 5: box 1 and 2] helped the process, since it shows the gaps between concepts and what is needed for reaching saturation.

Analysis of the contents of students' interview and those of staff of disability support centres and all the professionals was carried out at the same time. The professionals shared their opinions on this issue. The deduced themes were presented in Figure 4. and Figure 6. During the interviews, while undertaking constant comparison, I also asked interviewees about these deduced themes, and they shared their thoughts on them.

2. Theoretical saturation

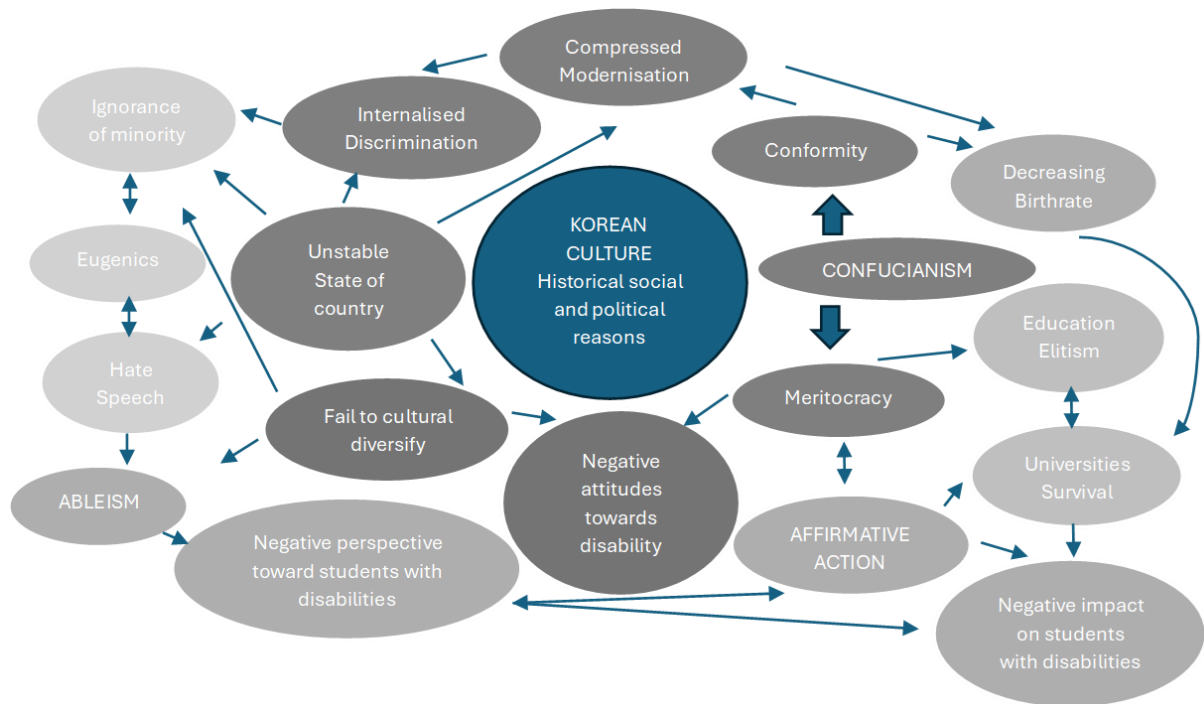
Theoretical saturation is shaped by theoretical sampling (Bowen, 2008). Theoretical saturation means that the categories are fulfilled, and no new properties happen through the comparison of the properties of patterns (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2018).

Glaser (2001) argued that saturation cannot be viewed as a simple concept; theoretical saturation means not just that no more of the same patterns can be seen, but it clarifies comparisons between patterns. Both through theoretical sampling and interviews at the same time, I continuously compare the patterns of properties as well as strove to find the proof from the literatures.

3. Theoretical sorting

Sorting allows researchers to create and define connections, and memos can help with theoretical sorting. The crucial point is to make a consistent comparison of memos. I drew a diagram for sorting deduced categories. Below Figure 7. shows one of diagrams when I did theoretical sorting.

Figure 7. Diagram of Theoretical Sorting



In short, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation and theoretical sorting helped and allowed me to construct categories and themes. The literature review helped me to support and confirm my findings. The data collection for confirming the findings was carried out broadly from pieces of literature, mainly articles from various sectors related to the themes, from websites, or extracts of articles from newspapers, which can be found online. Finally, I can confirm that these findings are completely new, and yet to be researched.

2.8 Methodological Limitation

This study was carried out by interviewing and focusing on students with disabilities who are experiencing or have recently experienced tertiary education institutions. This means that it has limitation in that the participants had already entered higher education. In other words, because of the target group, it could not reveal the impact on those who have failed to reach or even not attempted to reach the level of tertiary education, for example, those whose disabilities are too severe to reach this level of education, or those who have the lowest levels of socio-economic status and cannot aim for higher education, or those whose disability is not on the list of disabilities entitled to affirmative action, so they either cannot receive support from the

government or they do not even realise whether they have a disability, due to the limitations of the disability policies.

My research involved female students, and I strove to meet the gender balance when I recruited participants. Although I tried to understand the reality of education for female students, I admit that, within my participants, there were already certain biases. My interviewees were those who had already entered universities, so it might be impossible to understand from this study how education is limited for women, and female students with disabilities' inability to access education.

2.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed my methodology and described the methods that were used in this research. Regarding the ethical considerations, no conflicts of interest arose between the participants and me during the interviews. From the sampling, I discovered several factors: firstly, the fact that only limited types of disabilities in students can be found, which may reflect certain values of Korean society and will be further explored in the following chapters. Only one student who has not registered on the disability system participated in this project (*Yeoseon*, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, **not registered**, fourth-year, female). Throughout this study, I discussed the negative impact of the Special Admission System in Korean culture, also I addressed how this student *Yeoseon*, not registered, could not get support from the policy because she is not legally entitled to get support. Secondly, most students, especially those who attend high-ranked universities, used affirmative action when they entered university, whereas some of those who attend relatively low-ranked universities did not use affirmative action. This may indicate that the Special Admission System is used mainly for a certain level of universities and will be explored in detail later in Chapter Six. Thirdly, those who acquired disabilities, both students and professionals, were likely to have an interest in a career in a disability-related field and, in the case of professionals, they have changed their career to one in a disability-related field (for example, *Jihoon*, professional, male). This is also the case for some students, as briefly referred to *Hyun* (acquired a physical disability during military service, male,

fourth-year) and *Yeoseon* (mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, **not registered**, fourth-year, female). This indicated that acquiring disability has a huge impact on persons formerly without disabilities and is discussed when reflecting on aspects of disabled identity in later chapters.

To understand how the themes were deduced from the interviews, it is crucial to analyse the historical and cultural background of Korea. Therefore, from chapters three to five, I explain features of the Korean culture and how they impact on the lives of its people.

Chapter Three: Korean history and cultural background

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I described the methodology of this research and methods which were used. As a method of this research, in the next three chapters I have reviewed and analysed the relevant literature to this research. For understanding Korean students with disabilities' experiences, it is pivotal to understand their culture and cultural norms, and how these affect students' experiences.

While reviewing the literature, I situated myself within the text and strove to recall memories about Korean history and culture, imagining as if I were in that era with my current disabled body.

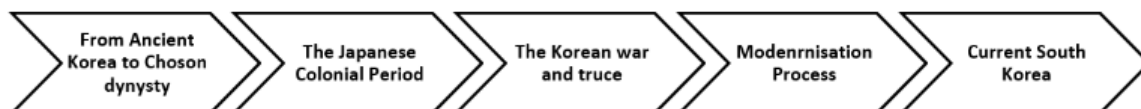
I adopted Critical Disability Studies emphasis on intersectionality and culture and through the literature reviews, I aimed to address aspects of Korean culture, and history and how they impact individuals currently living in Korea. Therefore, I explained how disability has been intersected in Korean culture through its historical events, focusing on the continuous crisis of colonisation, the Korean War, rapid developmental goals, and overcoming national poverty. I positioned myself in the literature to explore the impact on persons/students with disabilities and considered which values should be taken and which should be forsaken. Finally, I considered how this unique history pervaded Korean social norms. I should mention that I realised that I am involved in Korean society, so it takes time to distinguish even whether I am affected by Confucianism Korean culture and to identify its nuanced impact on my reasoning.

In this chapter, I broadly divided the historical period into five [from ancient Korea to Choson dynasty; The Japanese colonial period and independence; The Korean War and the impact of truce; The compressed modernisation process; current era], referenced by scholars (Yang, 2004, Buzo, 2022). Finally, I discussed how Korean history and culture affect minority groups and how the culture impacts people's perspectives towards affirmative action and minorities. At first, I briefly introduced a

historical flow around Korean peninsula, divided into five periods, focusing on recent eras. Figure 8. shows a brief timeline.

3.2 Background to Korean history and culture

Figure 8. A Brief Historical Flow of Korea



source: Yang (2004), Buzo (2022)

As shown in Figure 8. the first era of Korean history that I explored is ancient Korea. I started with an explanation from this period, because I needed to address the impact of Confucianism, especially on education, and one of its key values: meritocracy. From the second era, I focused on the recent periods. The second era is the Japanese colonial period, followed by the Korean independence process (1910-1945). The third era is the Korean War (1950-1953) and the period of compressed modernisation, and the values which have had considerable impact. Throughout these periods, I described how key values have been formatted and impacted on the Korean public's perspectives of persons with disabilities, such as collectivism, ableism, and the focus on education, and how these historical processes have resulted in the value of Confucianism. Finally, turning to the current era, I explored the phenomenon of a demographic shift in South Korea which resulted in Korean universities struggling financially, and how these changes affect universities' use of affirmative action.

3.2.1 From ancient Korea to Choson dynasty - The history and culture of Confucianism in Korea

Confucian society began in 541-479 BC in China, and it influenced especially East Asian countries, such as Korea (Jung, 2018). Korean society is hugely influenced by Confucianism, and it can be found in current cultural norms, and societal values

(Lew et al., 2005; Na, 2015; Jung, 2018). The following Table 5. shows a brief timeline of the history of Korea, and Table 6. is a brief history of Confucianism in Korea. The territory of Korea has changed continuously and, at certain periods, such as *Koguryo*, was much bigger and covered some parts of current China. This means that this brief summary of history should not be regarded as showing a complete picture.

Table 5. A Brief Summary of The History of Korea

Period In History	Countries
4c – 6c	Three Kingdoms (Silla, Koguryo, Paekche)
6c Silla 668–935]	United Silla
918-1392	Koryo Dynasty
1392-1910	Choson Dynasty
1910-1945	Japanese colonial period
1945-1953	Liberation and division, and the Korean War
1953-	South Korea

source: Peterson (2009), pp.303-311

Table 6. A Brief History of Confucianism In Korea

Period of Confucianism in the Korean peninsula	Countries
108 BC to AD 313	Documented in Lolang (modern Pyongyang, currently North Korea)
4c – 6c	Three Kingdoms (Silla, Kogoryu, Paekche)
6c Silla 668–935]	United Silla
918-1392	Koryo Dynasty
1392-1910	Choson Dynasty
1910-1945	Modified in Japanese colonial period
1945-1953	Liberation and division, and the Korean War
1953-	Current cultural norm in South Korea

source: Yang and Henderson (1958), Ryu (2010), Lee (2020)

Confucianism has a long history on the Korean peninsula. However, I was interested from *Choson* Dynasty, which was under Japanese colonial rule to explain the impact of two crucial concepts of Confucianism, meritocracy and filial duty. One key aspect of Confucianism is meritocracy. Confucius stressed continuous studies will lead people to happiness (Śleziak, 2013). The Confucian-based *Choson* Dynasty (1392-1910), which was in place just before the modern state of Korea was formed, provided the opportunity of social mobility to everyone (except the *Cheonmin*, the lowest class) who took and passed the civil service exam. Thus, even during the *Choson* Dynasty, when Korean society had social classes, they had a certain degree of egalitarianism, through the policy of testocracy. There were two officially sanctioned social classes in *Choson* society: *Yangmin* - ordinary people who included the upper classes, and *Cheonmin*: the slave class (Hiroshi, 2008). If candidates passed the exam, their social status was officially upgraded (Lee, 2008). In short, passing the exam was a way of guaranteeing the potential of equality of opportunity for increasing socio-economic status for those from lower classes.

Meritocracy in South Korea

The concept of 'meritocracy' was formulated by Young (1961), who suggests that achievement can bring reward, depending on individual results. Meritocracy allows people of certain abilities who put in a certain effort to justify the result of certain achievements (Chan, 2007; Bell and Li, 2013). Connecting to the Korean historical context as introduced right before, the Korean meritocratic context can be seen to arise from this value system. Therefore, the implication exists that people can be judged on merit alone, rather than with other factors being comprehensively considered. Furthermore, meritocracy may be used to justify inequality of results. In Korean meritocracy, there are broadly two definitions. Firstly, scholars such as Chang (2017) argued that in the Korean context, meritocracy is closely connected to Confucianism as a means of progression and improvement of prospects such as through the opportunity to take and pass the civil service exams. The 'exam-based resource allocation' programme (Shin, 2012, p. 66) also stems from the Confucianism tradition. When reviewing Korean history, it is possible to infer the effect of Confucianism through the immense pressure on parents for investment in

their children's education, helping them to achieve a higher educational level and grades, which in turn leads to a more highly ranked university, better paid jobs, and higher status. Chang (2017) argued that this is a method by which parents can increase their economic and educational capital. He criticised Korean meritocracy as society's distorted inheritance. Secondly, Na (2015) questioned whether this Confucianism-based culture originated from the *Choson* dynasty culture. Rather, she stressed that recent historical events, such as the Japanese colonial period, have hugely affected Korean society. She believed that the impact of Confucianism intersects differently in *Choson* before and after they were colonised by Japan. When considering intersectionality, I contend that this latter opinion is more trustworthy as it is grounded in how the different historical events intersect in different cultures.

A different conceptualisation of meritocracy is proposed as 'Credentialism' (Collins, 2019), which refers to entrance to a specific social class only allowed for those who already possess certain characteristics of that class. It is a similar concept to meritocracy, but focuses on the level of education and degree rather than on education itself. According to Moon and Choi (2019), it can be seen as 'class reproduction through education' (p. 179) and serves as a function of the closure of society. This function of education allows education to become an instrument of social control. Furthermore, according to the National Assembly Futures Institute's report (2021), a distinguished feature of Korean meritocracy compared to Western countries' concept of meritocracy is 'continuing competition', which emphasises continuing efforts to achieve a higher degree in education. The report also argued that the gender gap in entering a tertiary institute has disappeared, and now there are higher numbers of female students entering tertiary institutes. However, this report only analysed the gender gap, so it did not show gender differences in students who have disabilities or come from different regions, for example.

Currently, while everyone (in theory) has an opportunity to go to university, education products do not have equal value, nor does every graduate from any university get treated equally, as severe gaps exist between universities (Chang, 2021). This will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Following the abolition of the class system, Korean culture may be thought of as one of egalitarianism (Kim, 2016), but this has

also become one of the reasons for the rise in the phenomenon of 'education fever' in the achievement of success through earning high ranked university degrees. 'Education fever' refers to the high motivation and energy that parents devote to the education of their children (Kim et al., 2005). Chang (2017) argued that Korean Confucianism underlies the concept of education fever, and meritocracy is the key parameter shared between Confucianism and modernity. Thus, higher education in countries based on Confucianism universalises the opportunity for tertiary education, and this enables access to a higher class. This phenomenon comparing students with and without disabilities is discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

In summary, therefore, according to scholars such as Chang (2017) and Na (2015), meritocracy, based on Confucianism, is the main reason for investing in children's education for Korean parents. Thus, Confucianism has impacted education in Korea. Shin (2012) argued in his study that the apparent enthusiasm for education in Korea is a result of the historical legacy of Confucianism. Confucian society was characterised by a meritocracy in which people took exams and became part of the ruling classes, which has caused education fever. This, in turn, has engendered competition among the more highly ranked universities in Korea, both in terms of their exam results and in the students they admit. This has led to another closed society.

I concluded that the development of tertiary education can be explained in Korean society's unique historical context that may be defined by industrial and/or cultural norms. The unique phenomenon in South Korea is that education is the key factor for development and the driving force to boost the economy.

In terms of Korean modernity and Confucianism, there are two different opinions. Scholars such as Kim, S.J. (2011) and Hiroshi (2013) interpreted the effect of Confucianism as positive. They attribute more value to Confucianism than to the effect of the dynamics of the Korean civil movement. However, scholars such as Chang (2017) and Kim, E. (2017) found more reasons for the specific style of Korean modernity from the perspective that Korean modernity is one of the cultural differences. Chang (2017) inferred that Korean modernity is Confucian modernity.

Meanwhile, many scholars (for example, Lee, 2007) argued that Confucianism was

introduced to Korea in the Unified Shilla period [4c-6c] but emphasised its value in the Choson Dynasty, modified in the Japanese colonial period. Ryu (2010) explained that at the beginning of the 19th century, before the Japanese colonial period, the main ruling class in Choson was *Yangban* [the social ruling class and part of the *Yangmin* class] and *Yurim* [Confucian scholars in Korea]. During the colonial period, Japan considered that it was essential to use Confucianism as a method of rule in Korea. If Japan could reveal rationale of colonizing Korea through Confucianism, which was ideology of Choson society, Japan could utilize Confucianism for their colonial rules.

Japan strove to ensure that the women's role in Choson society was that of supporting men. Japan emphasised the women's role in supporting their children's education. Thus, women's education is not for women themselves but is focused on raising children. Well-educated women can take more responsibility in their role as mothers. Although Japan's aim was to make the Korean woman '*a wise mother and good wife*', at that time Korean society was not yet modernised, so Japan failed to ensure this stereotype of women. However, it is possible to understand why the responsibility for raising children with disabilities was natural for women in Korean society. Korean Confucianism and the stereotypes of women were reproduced by Japan, as a subculture (Lee, 2020). These negative aspects of Korean culture have existed and been emphasised until the present day and have impacted the Korean attitude towards students with disabilities being supported by their mothers.

I have briefly introduced a key value of Confucianism as meritocracy. The other key value of Confucianism is *hyo*, filial duty. Scholars (for example, Lew et al., 2005) argue that the greatest value taken from Confucianism is *hyo*, the value of filial duty, which necessitates taking responsibility for family above all else. This is linked to the concept of ancestor worship in Confucianism. In a Confucianism-based society, such as South Korea, raising children well is considered to be one of the most important duties, because individuals are believed to be remembered forever through well-raised children. Thus, a human being's biological limitations can be overcome through their children. This is a key mechanism of Confucianism which emphasises *hyo* after death, through the concept of ancestral rites (Lew et al., 2005).

Confucianism believes that well-raised children can be demonstrated by their being

well educated, and one of the easiest ways to prove their being 'well educated' is through achieving a high level of tertiary degree. Lee (1989) talked about this Confucian influence on education. However, it does not extend to women in Confucian society (Lee, 1989). Thus, Korean Confucianism has led to women being affected negatively in Korean society (Buzo, 2022).

Lew et al., (2005) also argued that Korean capitalism is grounded in Confucianism. These scholars posited that the sense of filial duty is internalised by Korean society [it is a dominant cultural norm], and this value of familism is a key factor in boosting the economy. Korean filial duty based on Confucianism results in the success of Korean capitalism because Confucianism regards country in the same way as family. Lew et al., (2005) explained this as a religious desire for the memory and reproduction of one's ancestors. One of the key concepts of Confucianism is that of King-Teacher-Father; they are the same (Lee, 2007). This value is linked to collectivism (Lee, 2007; Chang, 2017; Kim, 2017). The concept of family in Confucianism is not limited to 'family' but expanded to 'society' as Confucianism does not divide the family into society (Lee, 2007).

Collectivism

As discussed, Yang (2004) suggested that values such as collectivism and education fever contribute to the economy of Korean Confucian culture. Korean Confucian culture has aspects of collectivism and familism (regarding the nation as a whole family), which are important when people face a crisis. For example, when South Korea faced the 1997 International Monetary Fund (IMF) Asia Financial Crisis, Korean individuals gave their private gold to financial institutions (for example, banks) voluntarily, as a form of sovereign debt coverage. This can be explained by familism that is based on Confucianism (Yang, 2004).

They also stressed that the importance of university ties makes the individuals who earned a university degree bind those alumni into their society. Jung (2018; p.7) argued that the biggest difference between Western and Eastern universities is one of culture. Specifically, she suggested that the major cultural differences are the entrenched school and university ties, expanded to the [academic] job market, which

also indicates collectivism. This characteristic can be told as 'a distinctive academic lineage over generations'. A part of this culture may come from Confucianism.

However, Jung (2018) also recounted that when the Korean government planned to integrate public universities, the government faced the universities' rebellion due to the violation of their autonomy. There is a belief that educational institutions should have independence from the government. This means that although the public knows that students with disabilities have fewer opportunities for education, and that the Special Admission System has been enacted for equality of educational opportunity to be grounded in Korean culture, the government cannot force universities to give offers to students with disabilities. As previously described, this is also a result of the high rate of private universities.

According to Kim (2017), Confucianism emphasises the importance of education in controlling an individual's emotions and body in a way that raises them as moral beings. Thus, this is linked to the characteristics of conformity, which can be linked to collectivism. Yang (2004) and Campbell (2015) stressed that Korean culture commonly has characteristics of collectivism. The word for 'our' (*uri*) is commonly used even when talking about personal relations and things, such as 'mother'. In the Korean language, 'our (*uri*) mother' actually means 'my mother'; 'our (*uri*) house' refers to 'my house'. However, Brown (2011) explained that although the government emphasises the homogeneity of culture in Korea, it is a divided nation created through the concept of collectivism.

Collectivism and persons with disabilities

In Hofstede et al.'s (2005) research on culture, especially their analysis of cross-culture, they developed a model of five dimensions to explain the concept of nation: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long-term orientation versus short-term orientation. Each dimension is described to explain each country's cultural differences, grounded in perspectives on relativism. Hofstede (2011) stressed that dimensions aim to help us to understand comprehensive reality. To substitute his dimensions to Korean culture, for example, according to Hofstede, a society such as South Korea may attribute more value to 'collectivism'. Further, Lim et al., (2000) argued that South Korea is

more inclined to have a 'long-term orientation' because of its unstable national status within its own people. It may not want to face uncertainty. Lim et al., (2000) explained that this is the reason for 'difference' not being accepted in Korean society. Thus, South Korean people perceive people who act differently or hold differing values as a potential risk to their way of life. If we broaden this concept to the whole of Korean society, this implies that it is not easy to coexist with persons of a different ethnicity, persons who are LGBTQ+, or persons with disabilities (Rashid, 2021).

Kim and Kim (2010) agreed with Hofstede et al., (2005) that Confucianism and collectivism are two of the key values in South Korean culture, although their effects could be different for every individual. Thus, a pivotal characteristic of South Korean society can be explained as the likelihood of group action, based on collectivism. It is, therefore, possible to understand how, in that society, persons with 'difference' are treated as 'other' with negative connotations.

Korean society is highly stratified, primarily but not exclusively based on age and social status. It is well known for having an 'honorific-humble language system' (Brown, 2011; Kim, 2021), which means Korean language raises the status of the listener and lowers that of the speaker (Brown, 2011).

This language system has various distinctions, such as subjects and objects, and everything is interdependent with language: titles, greetings, and designations from the smallest sector. From family to the largest sector, society. Yoon (2004; p.190) explained that Korean culture is grounded in 'social relationships pertinent to the honorific system', which means that language reflects this cultural norm in society. The language system shows the complexity of relationships between speakers and listeners, their ages, or social status, and these relationships are based on hierarchy.

According to Baek (1985), the traditional Korean language system has a long history, even before the arrival of Confucian culture. Kim (2021) explained that this culture is rooted in Confucianism within the history of the rice farming system. This system was based on village-level collaboration in order to ensure good harvests, and for this purpose, a hierarchical structure based on age was established for efficient production.

Yoon (2004) stressed that the honorific language system, which is grounded in

Korean traditional values, has issues of intersectionality with the newly adopted Westernised culture in contemporary Korean society, such as democracy brought about by a history of achievement and protest against military dictatorship and gender equality. Indeed, some scholars such as Brown (2011) or Kim (2008) explained that these characteristics of Korean society, grounded in Confucianism culture and social norms, allow society to be a more closed society. Irvine (1998) concluded that the language is grounded in convention and requires a comprehensive understanding of Korean culture and history. Modern Korea reaches out to international society to spread its culture through contemporary concepts such as K-pop or K-drama (Lie, 2012). Lie (2012) explained that the internet allows the 'Korean wave' to spread.

The factors I have described combine to reveal the distinctive nature of contemporary Korean society. They are linked to codes of honour based on Confucianism, and Korea's unique traditions (Zhu, 2001; Song, 2014) grounded in filial duty and in-group homogeneity. The Korean language subtly intersects with the Confucian culture (Zhu, 2001). However, as in many other countries, the characteristics of Korean language used has different features depending on its subjects. For example, there are disparaging terms that are targeted at persons with disabilities, which I describe in Chapter Four, and at women (Lee, 2007; Lee and Lee, 2019), LGBTQ+ persons, and persons of colour. These are all subjects that are mostly ignored socially, possibly grounded by the negative impacts of Confucianism. There are many studies on Korean discriminatory language in relation to persons with disabilities (Lee, 2009; Yim and Lim, 2010; Lee, 2011; Seo, 2013). This may reflect the degree of social interest in persons in minority positions (Kim, 2017). However, all research investigates the current phenomenon, not the origin of this phenomenon. Heo (2016) argued that the expression of discrimination is about the subject of discrimination and is not just a matter of language.

3.2.2 The Japanese colonial period and independence

The current unstable political status of Korea is another area for discussion in terms of its historical background. Shin (2006), a scholar who argues for Korean nationalism, claimed that although the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity' are obviously

separate, in South Korea these two concepts are not different but rather regarded as having the same meaning.

When Korea was struggling under Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), something was necessary to unite its people. Shin (2006) argued that when social Darwinism came to Korea in the 19th century, it was not related to racism; rather, it emphasised imperialism and nationalism. To fight against imperialism, Korea needed to stress nationalism and collectivism. Therefore, for Korea, a sense of shared blood and ancestry was essential. Thus, Japanese colonisation played a role in boosting nationalism in Korea. Many Korean independence activists emphasised 'the same blood' and 'the same ancestors', which led to a distinction from Japan. Ethnic nationalism in Korea began when Japan strove to expand its colonies (Campbell, 2015).

This kind of Korean 'shared-blood' characteristic is also based on Confucianism (Han and Han, 2007), which is one of the pivotal values that compose their driving force to reach Korean modernity. Thus, Korean modernity is based on collectivism. In Western countries, individualism is regarded as a modern concept; on the contrary, in Korea, individualism is regarded as a negative meaning (Shin, 2006, p.13). [Although Korea has seen a distorted form of individualism in contemporary young South Koreans, as I will describe later in this chapter]. Still, Korea is divided into two, South and North, and the threat of war has led South Korea to embrace collectivism as a valuable means of security.

Shin (2006) stressed that Korean history and culture have played a significant role in nationalism. Although Shin (2006) did not apply this argument to persons with disabilities, it is possible to apply it to persons of minority groups as Korean history has emphasised both collectivism and nationalism, this has allowed a weakening of diversity in society.

Another point for discussion is Korea's process of modernisation. From 1905, the *Choson* Dynasty held the Unequal Treaties with Japan, which led to the Deprivation of Diplomatic Rights of *Choson*, allowing *Choson* to reform many things without people's consent, for example, the 'Kabo reforms' (1894–96). In 1894, the abolition of the class system took place; it was not carried out with people's consent but

happened because of external pressure (Lee, 2006). The majority of reform processes were carried out without the agreement of the people. These top-down approaches may be another factor that has weakened cultural diversity in Korean society.

Key values in Korean society and how they create an excluding culture

In the previous section, I presented the history of Korean culture and how, from the impact of Confucianism and other historical threats, the key values in Korean society were formed such as collectivism. These can be summarised as nationalism, ableism, in-group homogeneity and conformity, and the importance of education (Yang, 2004). From here, I explain how each of these concepts contributes to the excluding nature of the Korean culture for persons with disabilities. Each holds separate values but is seen to intertwine in Korean culture to reinforce the non-acceptance of being different.

Nationalism

Yang (2004) believed that nationalism often emerges when a nation is colonised. According to Robinson (2014), Korean nationalism emerged in the late 19th century, when the country faced a crisis of aggression from outside. It continued through the Japanese colonial period. Koreans' attitude of excluding other people who have different characteristics may also derive from their ethnic nationalism, connected to other historical events. A study by Campbell (2015) showed that Korean youth demonstrate a wider perspective on 'who can be regarded as Korean' than their parents, but that this perspective may vary according to which countries foreigners come from. The study concludes that Korean culture has different perspectives of those foreigners who come from high-income countries and those from low-middle-income countries. This can be attributed to racism or to Korea's grounded perspectives towards minorities, such as persons with disabilities. These Korean attitudes may vary according to different Korean values. For example, if a person with disabilities is rich, in a highly paid profession, or has a highly ranked tertiary degree, those variables may positively ameliorate the person's prejudices towards that person.

This extreme notion of nationalism was seen by many scholars (for example, Park, 1992; Park et al., 1993; Lew et al., 2005) as grounded in Confucianism and influences how the family within Korean culture is valued. Furthermore, Lew et al., (2005) argued that 'education', which is seen as an insurance for a family's perpetuity reflects Korean familism and in turn, nationalism. Collectivism should be viewed in the same way, because the 'family' is perceived to only survive as a group. Therefore, in understanding Korean culture, from national identity to the importance of family honour, the concept of conformity is prominent.

In-group homogeneity and conformity

All these experiences and values contribute to South Korean society not having a tolerance of diversity. As discussed, South Korea has continuously experienced crises: during the colonial period, the division of nations during the Korean War (1950-1953); and it is still in a truce state, under an anti-Communist regime. It was also under a dictatorship from 1961 to 1988 and suffered from the IMF financial crisis from 1997 to 2001. These factors forced Koreans to follow conformity and may have been affected by the Japanese colonial period (Lim et al., 2000). Lim et al., (2000) asserted that, for people who have experienced losing their country, the country itself can be justified to exist for their people. They also pointed out that the basic unit of nationalism in South Korea is the family, not the individual. Likewise, Shin (2006) explained that:

Accordingly, when there exists a deeply shared sense of ethnic unity, it is likely to produce strong pressure for in-group homogeneity and conformity to an essentialized identity like the abstract notion of Koreanness. (p.158)

Shin (2006) concluded that, because of ethnic conflict, South Koreans may put less importance on other values when defending themselves. Lew et al., (2005) also argued that, in Korean society, support for expanding welfare remains at the lowest level. This is because of the unstable Korean peninsula status and domestic pressure [such as unemployment rates or an ageing population]. Thus, welfare or support for persons with disabilities is likely to fall behind in priority, and persons with disabilities in South Korea remain in minority positions. Although most countries

experience a similar phenomenon, this varies greatly between countries, and therefore, the complex socio-economic position of persons with disabilities in different countries is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Ableism

During colonialism by Japan, the vision of rebuilding Korea was as a 'normal, healthy, independent, masculine, patriarchal, and monoracial state' (Kim, 2017; p.32), Concerns of disability were focused on cure and improvement, and the concept of eugenics emerged. After independence and the Korean War, persons with disabilities were not regarded in terms of homogeneity with persons without disabilities, along with other cultural or ethnic characteristics (Kim, 2017). This perspective was not only found in the Korean context. It relates to the concept of ableism, according to Dolmage (2017) and referred to

situating disability as bad and focusing on that stigma, [and] positively values able-bodiedness (p.7).

In the following chapter, I will describe how the concept of ableism reflects students with disabilities in Korean society. In critical reflection, while reading the literature, I can see how meritocratic values, collectivism, ableism and nationalism all played a part in how I viewed my failure as myself being less worthy and less capable when I acquired my disability.

Eugenics in South Korea

The emergence of eugenics and the eugenic culture (Galton, 1883) substantially affected Korean society. The purpose of eugenics, as described by Galton in 1883, was the improvement of the human species. Although the original purpose of this ideology was principally not perceived as unethical, it spread widely to many countries, from Germany, and the US, and as a result of the enactment of immigration law, to Japan (Shin and Jeong, 2019). Applying a modern perspective, its abuse and misuse changed the implications of being pregnant and giving birth.

Eugenics came to Korea during the Japanese colonial period, in the form of the *Study of ethnic improvement*. However, after the independence of Korea, eugenics remained as a principle in policy, such as reflecting in policies, grounded in the law. I

will explain it throughout this section. Although eugenics justified the aggression of Japan, Korean social leaders welcomed the concept and played a role in spreading it.

Kim (2005) argued that eugenics had already existed in Korea in the early 1920s, but it had developed in the 1930s, through scholars such as Lee Kap-Soo (1889-1973), who went to Germany to study in the 1920s and, during this period, experienced eugenics. After he returned to Korea, he went to Japan to study for a PhD. During this period, Kap-Soo was able to study eugenics in depth (Shin and Jeong, 2019). For example, he stressed the necessity for the sterilisation of persons with leprosy. Shin and Jeong (2019) identified the background of Lee's argument as nationalism, elitism, and progressivism, which focuses on development and science.

Shin and Jeong (2019) interpreted this as the impact of Japanese culture, which carried on the practice. Allowance of sterilisation of persons with leprosy, which was finally enacted in law in 1948 with the condition that it was allowed

if you or your spouse has leprosy, or there is a risk of passing it on to your descendants.

Eugenics led to the enactment of the Mother and Child Health Act in 1973, which aimed to enable legal abortion in extreme cases when the foetus showed evidence of disabilities.

Kap-Soo continuously argued for the enactment of eugenics in the National Eugenics Act, and there is conjecture that the reason why he did so was the impact of Japan. At that time, most of the public had very little knowledge of this, which is the crucial reason why eugenics was able to spread. Shin and Jeong (2019) stressed that nationalism, elitism, and eagerness for the development of Korea at that time in the Korean peninsula allowed Kap-Soo to expand his argument.

Although South Korea is currently experiencing a demographic cliff, in the 1960s-70s, the Korean government strove to regulate population growth, a move which was aimed at economic development. It was also connected with a modernisation project (So, 2020). The government proceeded with the plan to regulate the population with reference to Japanese eugenics (Takashi, 2019). This project aimed not only at a

decrease in the total population but also at improving ‘the quality’ of the population (So, 2020). According to So (2020), in the 1970s, when the government planned to regulate the birth rate, it also strove to enact The Mother and Child Health Act in 1973. The Mother and Child Health Act was based on Japanese eugenics law but advocated even more severe measures. This act aimed to avoid the necessity for abortion, which had occurred secretly, but it allowed exceptions in extreme cases, which would help with Korean modernisation. This law allowed abortion when the foetus showed evidence of disabilities, specifically if the parents had genetic learning or physical disabilities. For the first time, the original content of The Mother and Child Health Act had the authority to force persons with disabilities to be sterilised. Following a process of continuous revision, however, the content forcing abortion or sterilisation was abolished. However, the current version of The Mother and Child Health Act, Article 14, still allows abortion legally when the foetus has a disability or impairment. Article 14 still includes the term ‘eugenic’.

3.2.3 The Korean war and the impact of truce

After independence from Japanese colonisation in 1945, South Korea was under US control from 1945 to 1948, which had an effect on the South Korean education system by assimilation of the US system (Yang, 2004, Chae and Hong, 2009).

The Korean war between South and North Korea occurred in 1950, due to the conflicting ideologies of liberalism and communism. This ended in a truce in 1953. One of the impacts of the Korean War was the practical abolition of the class system, as Koreans had to leave their hometown and settle in other regions (Cumings, 2005). After the war, South Koreans felt strongly about anti-communism. South Korea has almost nothing left; industries had almost all been destroyed (Yang, 2004).

As the Korean peninsula remains in a state of truce, large sums are still used for the military budget, justified through the constant fear of attack from the North. This state of fear leads to a sense of instability that demands all men, except those who have disabilities, must enter military service. In considering how persons with disabilities are impacted, according to Buzo (2022; p.194) argument, not just because of the

impact on the military budget, South Korea has to view everything through the 'distorting prism of military implications'. These circumstances may implicitly contribute to the perspective of persons with disabilities in Korean society as holding less importance and being outside the collective good, as they cannot contribute to South Korea's security in emergency circumstances if the war happens again.

3.2.4 The compressed modernisation process

After the Korean War ended, the following governments strove to focus on urban development rather than rural areas. The essential element that could lead to success was still education (Choi and Lee, 2017; Buzo, 2022). Those who gained degrees from high-ranking universities could still be officially regarded as the elite.

Lee (2007; p.1) argued that putting great value on education was one of the driving forces of Korea's economic growth. He stressed that the most challenging part of the rebuilding process was the lack of natural resources, which remained mainly in the North Korean territory, as well as the unstable political and social situation. This is supported by many other scholars such as Yang (2004). Thus, the country focused on education, in addition to industry, in 1960-1970, for boosting the economy.

According to Dahlman et al. (1987), Koreans also demonstrated their efforts to learn skills from other countries. Lee (1989) stressed the contribution of the achievement of tertiary education and explained that there are two key directions involved in this striving for education: from within Korean society and that from outside.

Following continuous military governments, where physical ability was prioritised as a means of addressing the unstable status of the country. In the name of economic development, continuous dictatorship controlled the government, which required the Korean public to collectively, overcome their national crisis of anti-communism and escapism from poverty (Buzo, 2022).

Following the post-war period, South Korea's economy dramatically improved. According to official data, GDP in 1960 was \$2 billion; it had increased by 2022 to \$167.33 billion (Korean Statistical Information Service, 1960, 2022). Shin (2012) argued that the development of the economy has a correlation with improved tertiary education. Specifically, to modern South Korea, education is a crucial value in

ensuring their country overcomes poverty. For example, this was stipulated in the document from the World Bank in 1973 when Korea was loaned a fund for investing in education to eradicate poverty instead of establishing infrastructure such as building roads (International Development Association, 1973). Shin (2012) argued that, for example, in the 1960s, when Korea was largely focused on labour-based industry, the second revolution of that era, only a primary level of education was required and necessary in society. However, this shifted with changes in the third revolution, with the internet, and an increase in the number and spread of universities occurred in Korea.

3.2.5 Current era and the value of education

In this section, I explore how the modern education system in Korea materialised. Education in Korea has traditionally been used as a means of acquiring increased social status, which not only affects individuals' but also families' upward mobilisation (Lee, 1989; Nahm, 2011; Jung, 2018).

According to Park (2015), the modern Korean education system was founded in 1894. From that period, there was educational expansion. Indeed, even after the end of the *Choson* period, through the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) and after the Korean War (1950-1953), education has played a crucial role in enabling Korean citizens to gain improved social status (Nahm, 2011). Education can therefore be seen as an economic tool used by the Korean government to focus on developing its human capital, due to the lack of natural resources (Oh, 2008). In this context, education and academic background became causally linked to socio-economic status (Oh, 2008).

After the end of the colonial era, the number of tertiary education institutions in Korea grew significantly, from 19 in 1945 to 408 by 2020 (Park, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2020). Those who earned tertiary degrees increased from 19.8% of the total population in 1997 to 52.8% in 2022 (Statistics Korea, 2023). This phenomenon resulted in the majority of universities being private universities. Chae and Hong (2009) explained that Korean education fever allows this unique phenomenon. For instance, in 1980, the number of community colleges was 128 in total, of which 36

were public, and 92 were private. However, by 2022, out of a total of 143 community colleges, only nine were public and 125 were private (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2022, p.17). In terms of universities, in 1980, out of a total of 85, 20 were public, and 65 were private. By 2022, out of a total of 190, the number of public institutions had decreased to 35, whereas private universities numbered 155.

Although the 16th [2003-2017] to the 18th Korean governments [led by presidents, meaning not specifically Republic] had invested continuously in universities that were located in other than metropolitan areas, the result was not successful, which could not lead to strengthening educational competitiveness of universities in other locations (Choi and Lee, 2017).

Moreover, since the 1980s, an increased number of South Korean students have had the opportunity to achieve a tertiary education degree (Kim and Park, 2010). This was further encouraged by the 14th government led by the president Kim Young Sam (1998-2003), which allowed increased expansion of universities under the policy of the 'universalisation of tertiary education' (Yoon et al., 2003). However, university entry has remained a central issue in Korean society, because students do not just value 'getting a degree' but are eager to have the best quality degree. This means that students compete to attend the top-ranked universities (UNESCO, 2018).

Along with Korea's development, which suffered from regional inequality, universities also reflected this and were centred around metropolitan areas rather than in isolated rural areas. This fact and the low number of public universities make it hard for students with low socio-economic status to access tertiary education (Chae and Hong, 2009). All these factors can influence the polarisation of people from different socio-economic status. Koo (2007) pointed out that, in Korean society, it is harder to acquire or maintain the status of middle class due to various factors: education level, globalisation (access to English lessons), connection with people in education, and local ties especially. Therefore, the modern education system in South Korea acts to maintain elitism in society, reinforcing the inequity of access and barriers to socio-economic growth for all sectors of society. In short, current Korean education intersects with various factors such as socio-economic status in addition to regional inequality, which may act to reinforce inequality in society.

3.3 Korea's failure to achieve cultural diversity

All the factors discussed in previous sections affect the low level of acceptance of cultural diversity in Korean society. There is also a trend in Korea of showing less empathy with North Korea, despite the fact that they are from the same nation. According to Campbell (2015), Korean youth think less about the necessity for unification or that the countries were originally the same. Increasingly, for young people 'my country' means only South Korea. Campbell (2015) studied the fierce social atmosphere in South Korea, which forces young people to survive in the education and job markets. They see their identity as South Korean, and despite the diverse issues that surround them, their identity imbues nationalism.

Young people in South Korea in the 1980s were voluntarily involved in the democratic movement, Campbell (2015) saw as being the result of enlightenment. However, the resultant low birth rate has become a reality for current Korean youth culture. Cho (2021) reported that among Korean youth there is even a joke which defines giving up three things: dating, marriage, and giving birth. In this reality, there are numerous factors of intersectionality such as education, finding a career, financial situations, and cultural issues based on Confucianism. Lee (2012) pointed out that the requirement for women's status in marriage to remain according to traditional Confucianism creates a barrier to marriage for women, such as expectation of having the main role of caring children. More importantly, it is seen that even though both women and men work and earn salaries, housework and caring for a baby remain traditionally the women's role (Lee, 2012). This traditional gender role expectation may also affect women with disabilities, which leads to double discrimination, although it is hard to find studies on this.

From the period of the IMF crisis from 1997 to 2001, over the past two decades, an unstable job market had an impact on young people getting married (Yoo and Hyun, 2010; Choi and Min, 2015). From the early 2000s, economic growth in South Korea noticeably began to slow, and led to youth unemployment rising. Additionally, the cost of private education increased significantly, and housing prices skyrocketed during this period (Lee, 2019). However, in terms of the impact of this on values, as discussed, the values of traditional female roles still have not changed hugely (Lee,

2012; Im and Park, 2014). All these factors intersect and result in the low marriage rate and low birth rate. Cho (2021) argued that this matter is not just a matter of youth but has to be approached as a complex issue that permeates Korean society. This is discussed in Chapter Five in depth, focusing more on education, and Chapter Seven, focusing on students with and without disabilities through their voices.

However, once again, although there is plenty of research on young people and the issues they face, it is hard to find studies about youth with disabilities and whether they face similar issues. This is discussed further in Chapter Seven, which contains the results of the analysis of interviews. Furthermore, as I will discuss in the next section, the demographics of Korean society are shifting.

3.4 The demographic shift of a decreased birth rate and an ageing society and its impact on universities

According to Statistics Korea (2023), in 2022, the rate of reproduction in South Korea is 0.78%, whereas life expectancy at birth has gradually increased from 76 in 2000, to 84 in 2021. According to the World Bank data (2022), the population growth rate of South Korea in 2022 was -0.2%. The low birth rate needs to be addressed in a variety of ways because it could lead to complex issues, such as gender distribution, work and equality, and caregiving roles and responsibilities (Cho, 2021).

This demographic shift directly affects universities' survival. According to Ko (2023), the number of students on four-year university courses has been continuously decreasing since 2014. Ko (2023) predicts that from a total of 142 million students on four-year university courses in 2021, there are likely to be between 69 million and 83 million in 2045. This is a decrease of around a half. The recruitment fulfilment rate for freshmen in Korean universities also shows a decrease: in 2010, the total rate was 98.9% whereas in 2022 the rate had fallen to 96.3% (Korean Educational Statistics Service [Korean Educational Statistics Services], 2022, p.93). This decline means universities will face a financial crisis and must devise ways to solve this.

3.4.1 Universities' struggle to survive – A polarizing trend

Financial support for universities from the Korean government began in the 1990s (Chae and Hong, 2009). Although many countries (representatively the US) provide funding to only public universities, the South Korean government supports private universities as well, which may lead to financial difficulties for the government (Chae and Hong, 2009). South Korean universities mainly rely on students' tuition fees, subsidies from the government, and donations (Chae and Hong, 2009). However, this structure also legitimates government intervention (Lee, 1989).

Thus, decreasing numbers of students directly affect universities' income.

Furthermore, the Higher Education Act, Article 11, forced universities not to increase their tuition fees. Since 2007, universities have not raised tuition fees exceeding 1.5 times the average consumer inflation for the three immediately preceding years. If they increased their fees, they would receive penalties from the government. This negatively impacts, both directly and indirectly, their income to the point that they are now struggling to survive. From 2023, some universities have started to increase their tuition fees, despite the fact that they might face penalties from the government.

Conversely, to be supported by the government, universities must produce certain achievement results according to government policy, which is seen to directly allow universities to reduce their admittance diversity (Chae and Hong, 2009, Shin, 2005). Compared to many countries where universities have expanded due to deregulation from government control, in the Korean context, public opinion in favour of higher education achievement is the biggest motivator to narrow their admittance criteria. Thus, this university expansion policy led to educational inequality. Firstly, the government policy requires funding mostly for private universities, limiting students who have low socio-economic status (Chae and Hong, 2009). Secondly, this could result in greater regional inequalities, as Chae and Hong (2009) have pointed out. When this decrease in diversity in universities happens following public demand for more higher education, due to the decreasing population, it will inevitably lead to focus on metropolitan areas, leading to greater social challenges. This is also implicit in the widening gap between highly ranked and lower ranked universities.

This phenomenon is not new. Universities, especially private universities and those not located in metropolitan areas, have been struggling financially due to the decreasing numbers of students. Many newspapers have reported that professors themselves have to be involved in recruiting prospective students from high schools. For example, in 2009, professors in some universities encouraged students by visiting high schools and giving presentations to attract students to their universities (Bae, 2009). In 2017, this phenomenon was even more severe. According to Ju (2017), one private university paid salaries based on the 'sales performance' of professors.

This phenomenon shows a polarisation between regions. No (2023) emphasised that this phenomenon did not occur in universities located in metropolitan areas, nor in five local cities. This indicates that there is a considerable bias in favour of city universities over those in rural regions.

Thus, the government planned to reduce the student quota for universities but has now changed its position to one of more openness, and it gives universities autonomy in this. The crisis for local universities is closely linked to the phenomenon of centralisation in the metropolitan areas. Thus, diverse factors closely intersect with each other.

One way for universities to increase their finance can be through admitting foreign students. The Ministry of Education strove for the internationalisation of higher education in 2005 through the 'Study Korea Project' ('05-'12), which was a result of international policy as well as of higher education globalisation (Nam, 2012; Kim, 2016). Lee (2012) discussed this phenomenon in relation to the demographic cliff and Korean universities' globalisation policies. However, the unexpected the COVID-19 pandemic blocked the influx of international students. A newspaper recently reported that not only universities, but local government was also involved in attracting international students (Choi, 2021).

Another way for universities to meet their budgets, as shown in the official data, is by increasing the practice of admitting students *without affecting their allowance*. Universities are able to earn more tuition if they can attract as many students as possible using the route 'without affecting universities' allowance'. Especially in

private universities, this is a feature of their survival, and they now give more offers to students who apply for the route 'without affecting the *university's allowance*'. According to the data of the Korean Educational Development Institute (2022), in 2000, the number of students who entered universities through this route was 14,473, and this increased to 23,911 in 2022. This increasing feature of the number of students who entered universities through the route '*without affecting their allowance*' demonstrates that universities are facing huge financial challenges. I will further explain in the next chapter, Table 9., however, to briefly introduce here, the special admission system for students with disabilities is located *without affecting their allowance*. Throughout the thesis, I explored how affirmative action for students with disabilities leads to Korean universities giving offers to students with disabilities; for many universities, it is used as misuse. Continuing this argument, I now explain universities' trend to establish customised majors for students who have autism and intellectual disabilities.

Universities' new target: Students with autism and intellectual disabilities

It was not an official plan for universities to change their targets to focus on students with autism and intellectual disabilities. However, in the last two decades, there have been media reports that universities have created new majors that target those students. For example, in 2009, a university offered a major only for those students with these disabilities (Chung, 2023). According to Chung (2022), at least four universities have created and operated a major for students with autism and intellectual disabilities.

However, Park (2020) has argued that there is discrimination in those universities, such as referring to the students in terms of the type of disability that they have, and other infringements of human rights. This clearly shows that perspectives towards students with disabilities have not changed. Some universities may '*use*' students with disabilities to try to overcome the threat of non-survival.

According to Yang (2023), the curriculum for students with autism and intellectual disabilities is customised to these students, for example, speech training and communication skills. Although these skills are important, it is doubtful if we can regard these programmes as 'higher education' and not a 'lifelong education'. It will

be further shown in Chapter Four that changing circumstances have affected the revision of the Lifelong Education Act and the reorganisation of the Lifelong Education department in the Ministry of Education.

3.5 Summary

Korean characteristics have been affected by various factors throughout history. Moreover, especially in the late 19th century to the 20th century, numerous events that caused them to struggle with survival, such as being colonised, the Korean War, and national poverty with survival threats, allowed people to regard themselves as in a desperate condition. As mentioned, this situation led to their thoughts on the key to escape from this condition, education, which continues its impact until the current era. Throughout this historical process, Korean society believes that everyone can succeed if they work hard. This also indicates that in Korean society, the concept of '*equality*' is acceptable, but the concept of '*equity*' is yet to be accepted. This issue is addressed in the next chapter when I discuss the laws and policies impacting persons with disabilities.

Korea's challenges from its colonisation by Japan and the impact of the introduction of eugenics had a negative impact on Korean views of persons with disabilities. The Mother and Child Health Act has also contributed to Koreans' viewpoint that persons with disabilities are worthless or to be dismissed. According to the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (2020, p.382), in response to the question posed to parents of a child with disabilities about whether the decision to terminate a pregnancy was the decision of the mother or not, the answers indicated that the decision was to be made in response to the suggestions of other people in 100% of cases.

The processes described comprehensively show their intersectionality in recent Korean history. The importance and meaning of education to Korean society is not just as 'education' but it is directly linked to the understanding of survival. It is deeply rooted in Confucian culture and seen in the importance of education. Moreover, the impact of this Korean social context boosts competition and efficiency and the exclusion of minorities, such as students with disabilities.

Therefore, based on the historical and cultural factors discussed in Korean society, the public's perspective towards affirmative action for persons with disabilities may be that persons with disabilities should also be involved in the competitive education system. Education reflects Korean history, as well as the value of meritocracy, and allows equality but not equity. Therefore, it may give rise to the opinion that affirmative action is an unfair practice and is thus seen as reverse discrimination.

As I have discussed, Korea needed to develop its economy rapidly, and to make this possible the authorities focused on mass productivity targets, which meant that persons in minority positions did not attract attention. It is therefore necessary to think about how this situation impacted persons with disabilities. I further described how the current and continuous truce state of Korea also gave rise to ableism. These are all complex factors that affect the way in which the Korean public interacts within their society and with those policies that are grounded in everyday culture and history.

In short, Korean society needs to reflect on its culture, as a society needs its values and history. The factors that have given rise to Korea's current circumstances cannot be understood as individual phenomena; rather they intersect with other diverse factors that, in so doing, affect their history, culture, and developmental stage, and result in such events as the demographic cliff, the crisis in universities, and the youth trend towards polarisation. To survive in this society, persons with disabilities may have to choose whether to fight against the public or compromise with the public/governmental policies. In Korean society, the competition for admission to university is fierce (discussed in Chapter Five), and the policy is grounded in an unequal education market. If education policy suggests affirmative action, not aimed at 'equity' but 'equality' for students with disabilities, and if it helps them to enter higher ranked universities, then how many students and their parents would not accept affirmative action but further fight for 'equity'?

In this chapter, I described Korean culture based on its history, how it has been formed, along with corresponding historical events. What I showed in this chapter is how history and culture are importantly rooted in people's thinking. Continuous challenging events have led people believe in nationalism, collectivism, and

education as crucial values to focus on. I addressed the ways in which these values have impacted Koreans' perspectives towards persons with disabilities.

In the next chapter, I discuss culture-based Korean society and the impact of Korean culture on the public's perspectives of persons with disabilities, and on laws and policies.

Chapter Four: The meaning of disability in Korea

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I broadly outlined Korean history and culture. Through reviewing the history, I explained what values are embedded in Korean society. Confucianism-based meritocracy, which connects to collectivism and conformity impacts how the modern education system has come about and is maintained. The recent Korean history has taught us in Korean society, why ableism exists, and through all these processes, how Koreans strove to overcome their crisis by promoting the value of achieving an education. This chapter will narrow down its focus to address the meaning of disability and how affirmative action functions for students/persons with disabilities in contemporary South Korea.

In South Korea, disability policy garners limited attention among other major priorities, such as budget spending. South Korea has one of the smallest budgets for the disability sector among OECD countries. According to OECD data on social spending and the definition of minority groups (2023), the average budget for all OECD countries is 21.1% of GDP, whereas South Korea spends 14.8%. OECD argues that policies intersect for each sector of society and thus affect all individuals. Taking into consideration the previous discussion in Chapter Three and this OECD argument, South Korea's support for persons with disabilities must be viewed in its historical, societal, and political context. Thus, before exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in this chapter, I looked at Korean disability policies and their impact on persons with disabilities, especially focusing on their impact on students with disabilities. Understanding the perspectives on disability grounded in culture and society has an important meaning as it allows us to comprehend the results from the interviewees later.

Firstly, I introduce a brief history of education for students with disabilities from a global perspective as well as in South Korea. Then, I discuss what 'disability' means in Korean society by reviewing its laws and policies. I describe disability policy in South Korea following a brief introduction of the process of achieving disability rights. I then move on to an examination of affirmative action for persons with disabilities in

Korea. I introduce two major policies of affirmative action for persons with disabilities. These are the Special Admission System for students with disabilities when applying for universities (now known as the social integration admission process) and the Employment Quota System, which applies to job seekers with disabilities, along with companies' duties. I briefly review this policy [Employment Quota System] in addition to the special admission system because these policies are closely linked to each other and cumulatively impact negatively to persons with disabilities. I summarise the impact of this later in this chapter and continue to discuss it in Chapters Six and Seven. I explore the impact of affirmative action in Korea, focusing on students' experiences in the literature. Finally, I discuss the implications of this chapter and the gaps in the literature.

4.2 Tertiary education for students with disabilities from a global perspective and research trends in this field

Amongst its many functions, education is seen as a 'social safety net' that can prepare individuals for systematic and ongoing self-development and provide the tools for social adaptation for people vulnerable to discrimination (Lee, 2008). Tertiary education, particularly, plays an important role in raising the capacity of students for entry into society (Park, 2015). Over recent decades, the rate of completion of tertiary education in OECD countries has increased to reach over 40% of the population (OECD, 2019).

However, globally, there is limited data on the tertiary education achievement of persons with disabilities, and only a few countries offer precise statistics (OECD, 2011). For example, the OECD 2011 report indicates that, in Norway, a high-income country, one in four (25%) persons with disabilities achieve a tertiary degree, whereas over 33% of people without disabilities gain a tertiary degree. Furthermore, a recent paper reported that in low-middle-income countries, the completion rate of tertiary education for students with disabilities is 1.8%, whereas for students without disabilities is 3.7% (Thomson, 2020).

The right to equal opportunity in education is crucial. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by 184 countries,

including South Korea, emphasises equal opportunity for education in Article 24. Meanwhile, Sustainable Development Goal 4, set by UNESCO, aims to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2017; Thomson, 2020). The goal sets out the provision of learning environments for all students, including vulnerable groups (Lamichhane, 2015). It also aims to improve the quality and outcomes of education (UNESCO, 2018). Specifically, Goal 4.3 targets quality education, including tertiary education, and Goal 4.5 that guarantees resolving gender gaps and access to education and vocational training for vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017).

Positive experiences in universities are essential for the socio-economic development of students with disabilities since their time at university prepares them for transition into society, rather than just acquiring knowledge and skills in their field of study. University education is an early adulthood experience and could be regarded as a microcosm of society (Graham and Lafayette, 2004; Pascarella, 2006).

Unfortunately, students with disabilities are not supported enough in their tertiary education. This is not only the case in South Korea, but globally. Studies in the United States reveal that students with disabilities are far less likely to attain recognised tertiary education certificates compared to students without disabilities, due to the challenges faced during their time at university (Heindel, 2014, Dolmage, 2017). Further studies revealed that students with disabilities in the United Kingdom have historically been excluded from education (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Gibson, 2012). This stems from an inaccessible environment (Goode, 2007), including physical barriers and other kinds of lack of support, such as a shortage of note-takers (Goode, 2007) and attitudinal barriers (Kendall, 2016). In summary, students with disabilities have either not been supported at all or support has remained at a minimal level.

Various factors, such as the reasons for considering progression to tertiary education, difficulties in applying for admission and completing the course should be considered and researched comprehensively. Persons with disabilities require support to ensure the same level of access as persons without disabilities.

Therefore, policies are needed to minimise the gap between these two groups (UNCRPD article 24). However, as previously presented in the literature, numerous studies have attempted to explain research, which presents the same research questions and the same suggestions, which indicates that a change in research direction and consideration of the culture and context of each country is required. In the next section, a history of South Korean tertiary education access policies for persons with disabilities is presented.

4.3 A brief history of education for students with disabilities in South Korea

Before the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1948, there was almost no specific education for persons with disabilities other than the *Pyeongyang gwangmyeong maeng* – a school for blind and deaf students founded in 1935 and based in *Pyongyang*, which became part of North Korea in 1948 (Lee, 2011).

After the establishment of South Korea in 1948, according to studies (Kim et al., 2009; Kwak, 2009), continuous governments that ruled South Korea excluded persons with disabilities from recruitment to government jobs such as in the civil service, teaching, or any other job for which the government was the employer, and only provided support and access to a few ex-service members (Lee, 2011).

Students with disabilities were not a focus for policy or provision. For example, in the 1970s, it was mandated that before students took middle or high school examinations, they had to undergo a physical examination. This was because the government was military based, and due to the conflicting ideologies of democracy and communism in the Korean peninsula, and the threat of war, those identified as having a disability were often excluded (Kim, 2005). Even if they passed the written test but had a zero score in the physical examination, students would receive an overall 'pass' score, which meant that only a few institutions gave them offers (Kwak, 2009). However, for many students with disabilities, even if they managed to pass the exams, there were no facilities in schools or universities, so most students could not attend. At that time, the majority of students with disabilities lived at home with their families, and it was considered the responsibility of the family to support those students attending school (Lee, 2011, p.119). This exclusion applied to students with

all types of impairments and continued throughout the education journey up to university and the national civil service examinations necessary for public officers to be employed by the government (Lee, 2011). There is limited data from this era and only piecemeal articles in newspapers, as there were no studies addressing these issues in the 1970s and 1980s (Kwak, 2009).

Those lucky enough to receive several offers from universities were able to choose their university based on the level of the support services offered. This is seen to lead to successful graduations. However, they were failed to be hired as public officials because of their disabilities. They could pass the written test but were often excluded when they underwent a physical check-up at the final stage (Kwak, 2009). This history indicates the political bias Korean society applied to persons with disabilities in an attempt to remove them from public life (Kwak, 2009). This situation only changed in 1995 after the establishment of a relevant anti-discrimination policy (Kim et al., 2009), which is explained later in this chapter.

4.4 The meaning of disability in Korea

Throughout recent Korean history, persons with disabilities faced discrimination from society, enduring discriminatory language, and exclusion from schools, universities, and job markets. School curriculums did not consider students with disabilities, so these students could not receive systemic support. As explained in the previous chapter, the historical and cultural background had an impact on the views held towards persons with disabilities. A meritocratic culture leads individuals to believe that *equal* opportunity is the best way to achieve *equality* but this does not necessarily lead to *equity*. Furthermore, as previously described, the continual crises faced by the Korean peninsula emphasised the culture of collectivism, which contributed to ableism in Korea. All these cultural factors in Korea gave rise to the public perspective of people with disability as being 'unfortunate', 'to be pitied', and 'incompetent'.

Worryingly, according to Park et al., (2021), who analysed newspaper articles in South Korea covering a period of 30 years, changes that came about from the 1990s, expressed the prevalent viewpoint that people with disabilities should be the

target for aversion, segregated or dependent. However, in the 2000s, positive images began to appear, such as of people with disabilities being valuable citizen members. However, they concluded that, despite newly enacted laws and policies, prevalent negative images still exist.

Negative images of persons with disabilities can also be implicit in the words used about them. There is the stereotypical language that disregards persons with disabilities. For example, *byeongsin*, a slang and swear word, is widely used when a person acts stupidly, but its original meaning is a sick or 'disabled' body. These kinds of words were handed down from the distant past. This simple example indicates the commonly held Korean view of persons with disabilities. In other words, in Korean society, denigration of persons with disabilities has been a widely accepted concept. When considering that the Korean language is grounded in honorific words, as I discussed in Chapter Three, this reflects how society traditionally disparages persons with disabilities.

4.5 Disability policy in South Korea

In this section, the Korean disability law and policies related to persons with disabilities are reviewed. Through reviewing the laws, I explain the perspectives of contemporary Korea on disability.

4.5.1 Laws and policies

Woo (2011) explained that after independence from the colonial period, until the 1970s, the main target of acts in relation to persons with disabilities were those affected by the war, such as injured and traumatised soldiers, although offered little compensation. In 1981, the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons, South Korea enacted the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act as a fundamental law for persons with disabilities. This coincided with democratisation, along with the demand for persons in minority positions to have a voice. These improvements were enabled through events such as the Seoul Paralympics (1988), at which the government promoted the revision of the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. Lee (2004) explained that Korean disability law improved mainly through the enactment of the Welfare of

Disabled Persons Act and Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, but the perception that progress arose from the authorities rather than from the achievements of persons with disabilities themselves does little to elevate the status of persons with disabilities in society.

4.5.1.1 Basic laws and special laws

The principal laws relating to persons with disabilities in South Korea

In order to place current policies and practices in context, it is important to review the relevant laws, the legally admitted disability types, and the disability rating system applied. The Welfare of Disabled Persons Act and the Anti-Discrimination against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act are considered to be the basic acts of law for persons with disabilities, and the remaining laws are considered as special laws (Woo, 2011; Yun, 2018).

South Korea's Welfare of Disabled Persons Act¹, 1981, Article 2 (1) defines persons with disabilities as follows:

[A] person with a disability means a person whose daily life or social activity is substantially hampered by physical or mental disability over a long period of time.

However, Article 2 (2) defines only 15 types of disability assessed by medical criteria. Lee (2004) described the characteristics of the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act as following the medical model of disability.

In the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2007, Article 14 ensures that schools and universities make active efforts for persons with disabilities not to be disadvantaged.

Article 2 defines disability as follows:

A disability which is a basis of any discriminatory act prohibited under this Act means a physical or mental impairment or loss of

¹ The English translation of the law is used as it is on the website of the Ministry of Government Legislation

function that substantially limits an individual's personal or social activities for an extended period of time.

However, within this Act, discriminatory behaviour has limited levels of punishment, compared to some countries [such as the US, remedy due to discrimination is handled by the court] that have an anti-discrimination law to protect persons with disabilities. In 2001, a newly established organisation, the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea was established and it allows persons with disabilities to report discrimination without going through the courts, but because of opposition to it, the maximum punishment level is limited as a 'corrective order' [The Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies For Persons With Disabilities Act, Article 43]. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea is placed under the jurisdiction of the president, so it has limited independence from the president's control (Kim, 2017). Yun (2018) criticised the fact that there are conflicting articles between the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act and Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act as Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act limits the types of disability to 11, while the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act views the definition more broadly. This consideration is continued when I discussed these and other relevant acts particularly related to 'education and students with disabilities' in detail in Chapter Five. Here, the description focused more on the education policy area.

[4.5.1.2 Laws for students with disabilities](#)

The previous section outlined the principal laws for persons with disabilities in South Korea. From here, I describe other laws that particularly relate to access to education for students with disabilities along with their historical background. The Special Education Promotion Act, enacted in 1977, was the result of a top-down approach to legislation. Authorities from the Special Education Association and the Special Education Research Institute enacted laws and policies that did not include the views of persons with disabilities or their parents. This was because parents of students with disabilities had no right to speak (Kim, 2005).

After the enactment of the Special Education Promotion Act, special education² was finally included in the concept of public education. However, this law only focused on primary to middle school children and does not have any articles regarding tertiary education (Kim, 2005). It has also been argued that preschool children or adults with disabilities who missed out on education opportunities are being discriminated against (Lee, 2011).

The first policy that included tertiary education was approved by the Government of Korea in 1995. The 'special admission system for students with disabilities' was a government policy that enabled universities to accept students with disabilities without affecting their recruitment allowance. It was written as procedural guidance and was not a legal requirement. At that time, the extension of opportunity for persons with disabilities was one of the election promises of the President of South Korea, Kim Young Sam (the 14th president (1993-1998)). Furthermore, South Korea was preparing to join the OECD and was required to improve issues of social welfare (Lee, 1995; Nam, 2006). The focus of the policy was on facilitating students' special admission (Kwak, 2009). Thanks to the introduction of this policy, increased numbers of students with disabilities could enter universities. Moreover, alongside the expansion of categories of disability types in 1989 and 2000 and the policy of universalisation of education, students with autism and intellectual disorders were now, by law, able to enter universities. Following these changes of inclusion of legal types and universities' challenge of lack of numbers of students accelerates universities' target changes to students with autism and intellectual disabilities, as introduced in Chapter Three. This policy has to be seen in the context of the falling birth rate as discussed in Chapter Three.

The Special Admission System, which enables access to tertiary education for students with disabilities, has been the focus of discussion by the Korean government and disability societies, which differ in their opinions. A study by Park (1994) criticised the Special Admission System because it does not help students with disabilities improve their skills. In fact, some students felt under pressure to

² Article 2 of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act (the latest version of The Special Education Promotion Act) defines the term 'special education' as education realised by providing a curriculum suitable for the characteristics and special education-related services prescribed in subparagraph 2 to satisfy the educational needs of persons eligible for special education.

catch up on their studies as well as deal with the associated societal stigmas (Kwak, 2009, p. 63).

One study argued that students with disabilities struggled with their university lives because, even though the system had given them access to institutions, they experienced limited support from their university (Cho and Park, 1998). This study reported that over 90% of the students complained of discomfort resulting from inadequate support services.

Although the law still needed to improve, it had some positive results. There was an increase in the number of universities that were allowed to offer places to students with disabilities, as well as an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending tertiary education institutions. However, this policy's approach was also 'top-down', not 'bottom-up' (Kwak, 2009).

Finally, in 2007, following numerous rallies by parents of persons with disabilities, enactment of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act 2007 was approved (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2013). This new legislation was the result of a 'bottom-up' approach. However, it was not the result of the students with disabilities' movement but of their parents' actions. This phenomenon may be grounded in Confucianism in Korean society, which allows parents' voices for their children but not the voices of the children themselves.

Therefore, under the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act 2007, the right to tertiary education was newly enacted and obligations for the provision of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in universities were set down. A summary of the key legal frameworks enacted to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in education sets out the changes over the past 50 years in Table 7.

Table 7. Key Changes in Policies for Tertiary Education for Students with Disabilities

Year	Name of Act	Target of Act
1977	Special Education Promotion Act	Primary through to middle school students
1995	Special admission system for students with disabilities	Tertiary level, but not an act but a policy
2007	Act on Special Education for Persons with Disabilities	Expanded the target to Tertiary level

Source: Ministry Of Government Legislation

In the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Articles 29-35 regulate the support provided by tertiary education institutions for students with disabilities. Article 30 stipulates the necessity of a disability support centre and its role; Article 31 sets out what is considered to be reasonable accommodation which the university should provide. However, this new legislation was not easy to enforce in universities (Kwon and Kwon, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Three, most Korean universities are private and therefore, universities were able to decide to whom they gave admission offers. However, due to the changing demographics, which impact the number of university admissions, the South Korean government strives to address the imbalance by revising two major acts: the Higher Education Act and the Lifelong Education Act. These, along with four other special laws relating to persons with disabilities are outlined below.

The Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act has an article relating to equality of access to education. The admissions policy for students with disabilities as a form of affirmative action has been grounded in the Higher Education Act since 1995. The Ministry of Education employed the Special Admission System for students with disabilities, as the policy for those applying for places 'outside [the university's] allowance'. However, due to the social crisis of the decreasing birth rate, along with a bottom-up approach demanded by the Union of Students with Disabilities and National Solidarity for the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, the Higher Education Act has been amended. From 2021, it is the duty of the government to ensure that

universities give 15% of their offers to students in minority positions including those with disabilities.

The Lifelong Education Act

The Lifelong Education Act, Article 2 defines lifelong education as:

All types of systematic educational activities other than regular school curriculums, including supplementary education to upgrade educational attainment, literacy education for adults, occupational education for ability enhancement, humanities and liberal education, culture and art education, and citizens' participation in education.

This infers a legal entitlement to all kinds of education for all, including persons with disabilities, as this law includes sections especially for this minority group.

In 2016, the references to lifelong education for persons with disabilities in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act were moved to the Lifelong Education Act (Yun, 2018), so the Lifelong Education Act has become a more important act in terms of education for persons with disabilities. After a long process, the revised act was ratified in 2016, and enforced by law from 2017 (Kim et al., 2016).

Despite the efforts made to update the Lifelong Education Act, Baik and Kim (2019) stressed the necessity of removing duplicate roles in different governmental departments and building, instead, a support system that works across departments. Kim (2016) also criticised the fact that the revised Lifelong Education Act does not contain the various opinions of the diverse interested parties. The Lifelong Education Act will be explored further in the next chapter, in terms of its relevance to the current status of affirmative action in universities.

The Guarantee of the Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act

An important act relevant to this study is the Guarantee of the Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act. This law was newly enacted in 2014. Parents of persons with autism and intellectual disabilities contributed to the

enactment of this law, and many Disabled Persons' Organisations, operated by parents of persons with disabilities, played a role (Song, 2017). According to Song (2017), this act consists of two broad parts: the guarantee of rights (from Article 8 to 17) and support plans and services (from Article 18 to 29). The act coincides with the demographic cliff described in Chapter Three. Article 26, Lifelong Education for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, refers to the rights of persons with developmental disabilities to access education.

There are three groups of persons with developmental disabilities indicated in Article 2 as targets of this law. The first and second groups are those persons with autism and intellectual disabilities. The third target is defined as:

Other persons prescribed by Presidential Decree as those who have considerable impediments in their daily lives or social lives because of lack or significant retardation of ordinary development.

Thus the Act appears to have broadened its target but, currently, the *Presidential Decree* has defined no further actions. Song (2017) stressed that this intention is not only limited to this act, but should be applied across the various acts, and this is a result of the argument about extending the definition of what constitutes 'disability'. This issue of the range of the target population of these acts is discussed in the conclusion of this study.

The Promotion of Convenience for the Disabled, Senior Citizens, and Pregnant Women Act

This act, enacted in 1997, clarifies the duty of installation of facilities for diverse minority groups, including persons with mobility issues, who face barriers to using transport.

The Building Act

Another relevant law is the Building Act. Article 64 has been amended to include the necessity of providing lifts if the building is taller than six floors. However, this only applies to new buildings; it does not apply retrospectively. Thus, if a current building, such as a university building, is inaccessible, it is challenging to try to force the institution to install lifts, and this may negatively affect students with disabilities.

Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities

Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities does not specifically refer to students with disabilities, but it has relevance to the Special Admission System, so it is appropriate to introduce it briefly. This act was enacted in 1990 for the employment of persons with disabilities. Lee et al., (2010) argued that this law should be regarded as a 'special act'. In Article 2, 'the definition of persons with disabilities' covers not only the persons who are protected under the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act but also veterans as defined in the Presidential Decree, Article 3:

A person who meets the criteria for disability ratings that classify him or her as a person wounded in action under Article 14 (3) of the Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Honorable Treatment of and Support for Persons of Distinguished Service to the State (including cases in which aforementioned provision applies mutatis mutandis pursuant to Article 8 of the Enforcement Decree of the Act on Support for Persons Eligible for Veteran's Compensation).

Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, Article 27 [State and Local Governments' Obligation to Employ Persons with Disabilities], and Article 28 [Business Owners' Obligation to Employ Persons with Disabilities] obligate the state and local government as well as companies to hire persons with disabilities.

The policies outlined above, in cumulation, indicate that each law ascribes a slightly different definition of disability. However, although each law has a different definition of disability, the foundational law underlying them all is the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. This Act identifies 15 types of disability no matter how each act's purpose is different. Therefore, scholars in South Korea argued that the concept of disability in the country is still following the medical model, the view of disability as a subject for cure (Cho et al., 2020). This leads to unmet needs of persons whose disabilities are not listed and therefore not accepted as a disability within the

confines of the law. The complexity and, in turn, the difficulty of implementing disability law in South Korea is presented in the following section.

4.5.1.3 Implementation of Disability Policies in South Korea

Three government departments mainly implement disability policies; the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Employment and Labour. As the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act is regarded as the foundational law, the majority of policies that target persons with disabilities follow the types of disability listed in this Act.

Legally admitted disability types and degrees in South Korea

In 1981, the enacted Welfare of Disabled Persons Act guaranteed persons with disabilities rights (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013). However, it limited disability to five types of impairment: physical, hearing, visual, speech and intellectual. In 2000, the list expanded to include autism, mental, renal, cardiac and disability of brain lesion. Facial deformity, stoma, liver, epilepsy and respiratory system impairments were added in 2003. It is worth noting that these additions are almost wholly medical in nature and apply to dysfunction of internal organs. Currently, there are, therefore, 15 types of impairments listed, as seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Legally Admitted Disability Types in South Korea based on Welfare of Disabled Persons Act

Year	Number of Types	Legally Admitted Disability Types
1981	5	physical, hearing, visual, speech and intellectual
2000	10 (5+5)	autism, mental, renal, cardiac and disability of brain lesion
2003	15 (5+5+5)	facial deformity, stoma, liver, epilepsy and respiratory system

Source: Welfare of Disabled Persons Act/ Ministry of Government Legislation

The meaning of 'legally admitted' is that only persons with disabilities included in the 15 types of impairments listed can be supported by the Korean government. If

persons with disabilities are not legally admitted, then they cannot receive support. This system thus allows the exclusion of persons with other disabilities. For example, a student who had Tourette's syndrome was denied being able to enrol on his disability in his county office. This was because Tourette's syndrome was not on the list of legal disability types in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. The parents filed a lawsuit and finally prevailed at the Supreme Court. Tourette's syndrome is now on the list of mental disability, although not admitted as one of the types of disability (Korean Supreme Court, 2016Du50907) (Lee, 2021; Kim, 2022).

The disability enrolment system is based on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, Article 32., which stipulates that an assessment must be carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the staff of the National Pension Service, and medical specialists of each type of disability. However, this system of medical assessment to determine disability status is criticised as it reinforces the reductionist view on disability (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2013). This continued historical disability assessment in South Korea maintains the stigmatisation of disability within Korean society and narrows the conception of disability in the popular narrative, which again creates a stigmatising environment for persons with disabilities in Korean society by restricting the number of 'permitted' disabilities.

Intersectionality of the current concept of disability in South Korea

As seen above, it is possible to see how Korean society views disability according to the medical model. If the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH) by the WHO (WHO, 1980) is adopted in South Korea, the word that most closely corresponds to 'disability' is *jangae*, and that with the closest meaning to 'impairment' is *sonsang* (Korea Disabled People's Development Institute, 2019). The word for persons with disabilities has been officially designated by law as *jangaein*, but *jangaeja* has been used by many in the past few decades instead. The *jangae'in* is preferred to *jangaeja* because 'ja' implies a meaning considered derogatory to persons with disabilities. The term *jangaein* is used daily, and such a change in terminology could reflect a shift in the viewpoint of Korean society.

Despite positive indications of the use of language, there seems to be a significant under-reporting on the prevalence of persons with disabilities. Based on recent data, South Korea reported that in 2022, 5.2% of its population fell within its classification of disability, although the average disability rate of OECD countries (of which South Korea is one) is 15.2% (Korea Disabled People's Development Institute, 2018). This may suggest that there is significant under-reporting of the numbers of persons with disabilities, which in turn may reflect the commitment levels of the government towards this group of its population and the limited support for persons with disabilities at the governmental level.

In short, these changes in terminology, classifications, and other changes discussed demonstrate South Korea's current understanding of disability and its commitment to improvements. Although improvements and progress are limited (for example, the rate of disability according to official statistics), there still seems to be a commitment to further improvement (for example, the signature to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2013, and the ongoing process of abolishment of the disability rating system (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019)). In 2022, South Korea completed its ratification of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). An international treaty written in 2006 and including 192 countries, took South Korea 14 years to finalise ratification. Suggestions were made in 2008, but the option to ratify the protocol was not taken until 2022, when it was finally passed. At that time, the abolition of the disability rating system was also clarified, but it still remains in 2024.

The ongoing development of general services for persons with disabilities in South Korea

The disability rating system set up in South Korea is currently under review. However, in its current state there are 15 types of disability, each evaluated and rated on a scale from one to six. The government is expected to provide services according to the degree of impairment. Generally, persons with mild disabilities would receive only limited services, for example, free subway passes.

However, this rating system raised several issues, the main one being that it was considered unjust and discriminatory, and that it created 'stigma'. It also meant that

the 15 agreed categories of disability could only be assessed and classified by a medical doctor, and that the individual needs of persons with disabilities could be ignored if their disability did not meet one of the 15 agreed categories as previously introduced as a case of a student with Tourette's syndrome. These issues led to protests by persons with disabilities (Kim, 2018). The Ministry of Health and Welfare of South Korea (2019) therefore decided to abolish the disability rating system policy, but this is an ongoing process, and currently it is frozen at the status that it had in 2019.

The government has also simplified the rating system from levels one to six to descriptive categorisation of 'severe' to 'mild' disability as a first step. However, in 2024, the same system is still in place. Certain services such as provision of mobility assistants are now available to all persons with disabilities, at least according to official reports. However, certain services, such as provision of work assistants, are still only available to those who have a 'severe' medical condition. Another huge problem of this rating system is that any newly registered persons with disabilities have to be reassessed every two years, and they are often downgraded, for example, from level 3 to 5, allowing them to have their severe disability conditions assessed as mild. Kim (2017) criticised the fact that this regrading leads to persons not receiving disability support from the government such as disability pension and work assistants.

4.6 Affirmative action for persons with disabilities in Korea

There are various kinds of affirmative action in South Korea. Representatively, the target is persons with disabilities and women. The quota system for women is carried out according to a proportional representation system, which also covers the hiring of soldiers and police (Ma, 2021). Meanwhile, for persons with disabilities, the Special Admission System and Employment Quota System are representative policies for achieving equity. The Special Admission System is targeted towards various minority groups, as explained in Table 9. However, only persons with disabilities are the target for further affirmative action, of the Employment Quota System, further demonstrating stigma and discrimination towards persons with disabilities in Korean

society. The Special Admission System is targeted at various groups of minorities. I considered it in the context of students with disabilities applying for universities.

4.6.1 Tertiary education policies affecting students with disabilities in South Korea

In this section, the special admission system for students with disabilities to enter universities is described and I explore services provided in tertiary education for students with disabilities.

4.6.1.1 The special admission system [social integration admission process] for university

Table 9. below outlines the ways to enter universities via the route social integration admission process. This route is divided into two parts: within universities' allowance and without universities' allowance. Below Table 9. describes the lists of eligible targets and those examples.

Table 9. A Brief Introduction of University Entrance Via Social Integration Admission Process for 2024 (policy announced in 2023)

	The target of Social Integration Admission Process (Total)	The target of Social Integration Admission Process (examples)
Within their allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriots and Veterans Recipients • Recipient of basic living, or near poverty line, one parent student • Live in rural and fishing villages • Students from specialised high schools • Workers graduate from specialised high schools • Studying late in lives • Students who selected as local talent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The qualification examination for college entrance • Multicultural families • Students of multi-child families • Graduate alternative schools • Priority selection for industrial universities • Students of North Korean defectors born in a third country • Related to religion • Students who have special abilities (e.g., arts and sports, languages)
Without affecting their allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in rural and fishing villages, near poverty line, one parent student • Specialized high school graduate • Workers graduate from specialised high school • West sea students (who live in tiny islands in west sea) • Students with disabilities 	

Source: Korean Council for University Education (2023), p.13

This policy outlined in Table 9. is based on the newly revised law of the Higher Education Act, Article 34 (8), which has announced the operation of the Social Integration Admission Process (Ministry of Education, 2021). Specifically, Article 34 (8) dictates that it is the duty of universities to ensure that 15% of their total quota of students selected for admission must be those who need differential educational compensation to provide them with opportunities for higher education without discrimination. Thus, it is now the duty to operate affirmative action. University entrance policy through this route categorises the groups as shown in Table 9. The policy requires universities ‘must’ operate the Social Integration Admission Process. the policy for students with disabilities is included in this section of the Social Integration Admission Process. As already explained in this chapter [4.3], universities that historically denied offers to students with disabilities are now allowed to enact this policy. Although a few targets without affecting their allowance also

impose the maximum rate [Higher Education Act, enforcement rate 29 (2)], for example, applicants who are in the category of 'live in rural and fishing villages' have the maximum quota of 4%, and workers have the maximum quota of 11%. However, there is no maximum rate for certain other groups, such as students with disabilities, North Koreans, or foreigners who meet the criterion. Thus, the university allowance is not affected by how many students with disabilities receive offers. So, even if disabled applicants have lower grades than students who receive offers through the most common major routes, they might receive offers from universities through the affirmative action route. The impact will be understood more fully in the future. However, based on currently available data, Cho (2023) reported that, in 2023, the total number of students who received offers via the social integration process increased to 2300, but 624 were from those who graduated from specialist high schools. This indicates that, again, certain minority groups are excluded from the target population.

In short, the government allows universities to receive more students than in their quota, at their discretion, in order to ensure admission for citizens who would not otherwise be given the opportunity for higher education due to other factors which could deprive of educational opportunities of those students. However, as noted in Table 9. above, the Ministry of Education is striving to reduce the gap among different groups, such as those from different regions, or any other social minority groups, such as students from North Korea and foreign students, these students may also be selected by universities via the Special Admission System. However, although universities have a duty to select 15% of their total number of students from minority groups, there are no limitations as to which minority groups they may select from, for example, all from other minority groups and none from students with disabilities. Therefore, students with disabilities may be now competing against poorer students, and students from rural fishing villages.

[4.6.1.2 Services provided in tertiary education institutions for student with disabilities](#)

Another policy introduced affecting students with disabilities in South Korea is based on the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act (2007). Under this act, the Ministry of Education in South Korea is responsible for reporting on services for

students with disabilities in tertiary education. The Ministry of Education gathers data from universities that in turn gather data from their students who have enrolled using the disability registration system under the Welfare of the Disabled Persons Act or seek out services once enrolled.

Any student who is registered through the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act is entitled to receive services from their university. It is the disability support centres in universities that act as the central office within institutions that provide a range of support services for students with disabilities. However, in 2023, the average number of staff in the Disability Support Centre in each university remains between zero and one. Kang et al., (2023) analysed Korean four-year university courses, which include more than 10,000 students, and in a total of 53 universities, the average number of staff who are entirely responsible for disability services is 0.9: the average number of internal staff of disability support centres is 1.2, and of external staff the average is 0.9.

This result indicates: firstly, a lack of staff, the centres' service provision would be only a formality as they would not be able to assess individual disability needs or what those students need to access disability services, due to this lack of staff and budget. Secondly, it means that those students with disabilities whose disability is not listed legally, cannot be supported. In short, the lack of budget or lack of interest leads to a lack of support.

Support services range from learning to living support services, depending on the students' particular needs. Learning support may include support with writing and communication and providing assistive technology devices (National Institute for Lifelong Education, 2023).

Universities are also responsible for providing professional support, including a sign language interpreter, stenographer, comprehensive notes and handouts of lectures and remote or online support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Education, 2021). After the pandemic, the Ministry of Education enhanced its online support. By subsidising subtitle production costs, screen commentary production costs, and software costs, and providing real-time stenography and text interpretation (National Institute for Lifelong Education, 2023). Moreover, in exceptional cases, the activity

assistant and the student's family are also included in assistance for students. The inclusion of support from the family as an official means may, in fact, indicate the lack of support available.

In terms of living support, universities have a responsibility to provide reasonable accommodation. This may include ramps for mobility and access to wheelchairs. However, the Ministry of Education has not yet enforced the provision of adapted rooms in dormitories.

The Ministry of Education, through registered universities, is responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities have access to adequate services. They have confirmed the target as: (1) in any university or higher education institution according to the Higher Education Act, Article 2 and the Lifelong Education Act, Articles 31 and 33; (2) those students who are persons with disabilities based on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, Article 2. The notice attached a proviso that students whose disability is not severe, or not included in the eligibility criteria, can be supported if the university committee confirms that this is in order. It may indicate to universities that students whose disability is not included in the legal criteria that they may be able to decide not to provide service.

In 2023, student support from disability support centres can be divided into three main categories, as shown in Table 10, below. The first section is learning support, mainly provided by assistant students [without disabilities], and some portion is occupied in professional support, for example, support of a sign language interpreter or stenographer. Another support is the provision of assistive technology, and universities may also develop plans to improve their level of awareness. However, this remains at the discretion of the university.

Table 10. The List of The Support of Students with Disabilities in Korean University received In 2023

Types of Support	Support Detail	Examples
Learning support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Move Support ● Writing support -Providing assistant students - Professional support ● Mobility support -provided by assistant students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support ramps ● Sign language interpreter, stenographer ● Online learning support [started when the Covid-19 pandemic occurred] -Subtitle production cost, screen commentary production cost, real-time stenography, text interpretation ● Remote support programme, communications support ● Provision of assistive technology devices ● wheelchairs, one-handed keyboard
Awareness improvement project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Upon the university's demand/request system 	

Source: www.nile.or.kr (2023)

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act Article 31(4) was amended to:

For supporting information access under paragraph (1) 4, the head of a university shall provide support prescribed by the Presidential Decree for video materials used in class, such as screen explanation, closed captions, and sign language interpretation, for students with disabilities.

Anecdotally, it is suggested that some universities allow students with disabilities who have not enrolled through the national disabilities system to receive some support. However, it is likely that support through this route is limited and, if given, no records or data can be found. I will explore one of these cases in Chapter Seven, through the voice of my interviewed student, *Yeoseon* (not registered, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, female, fourth-year).

Students who need a sign language interpreter or stenographer can only access these through professionals employed by the disability support centres. These professionals are in short supply within the Ministry of Education due to a limited budget. Non-professional assistants are mainly recruited from students without disabilities. These students can help students with disabilities with mobility support, scribing, attending lectures, and taking notes on their behalf. Students supporting their peers with disabilities can access scholarships or earn volunteer credits from their university for undertaking the role of student assistants (National Institute for Lifelong Education, 2023). All support costs are 80% met by the government and 20% by the university.

In 2023, 1,548 student assistants were funded by the government budget, and 246 student assistants were funded by the universities' own budget (Higher Education in Korea, 2023).

Despite the progress that has been made to date, many universities in South Korea still admit only a few students with disabilities every year and, as a result, have not fully integrated disability support into their institutions. One of the consequences of this lack of mainstreaming is a general lack of awareness about disability needs within universities and insufficient adequate accommodation for students with disabilities, which creates barriers to access (Ministry of Education, 2020). As explored by a study by Kang et al., (2023), according to a government report (Ministry of Education, 2020), disability support centres lack human resources and have a high turnover of staff, which results in them not being able to provide the necessary support for students with disabilities.

The current lack of general resources, learning/teaching support and information on students with disabilities in South Korea has resulted in low enrolment rates and a lack of data that enables decision-making, resulting in many students struggling to complete tertiary-level study at universities.

The Ministry of Education investigates each university's provision for students with disabilities every three years, and, following the results of the investigation, it evaluates and presents the results, graded 1 to 5. It defines the type of disabilities according to the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, even though it refers to only four

types: visual, hearing, physical and all others (Survey for evaluation of educational welfare support for students with disabilities in universities, p.15). The assessment criteria seem to be just a formality because no sanctions or prizes have yet officially been awarded. The criteria in 2020 consisted of selection (10%), teaching/learning (50%), and facilities (40%). Currently, the National Institute of Special Education's assessment report strives to make improvements, with changes in feasibility (National Institute of Special Education, NISE, 2021). As previously explained when discussing the types of disabilities, there are limited numbers of students who are admitted to be enrolled and get support. Those admitted students with disabilities may have to endure stigma, and those who do not have an accepted disability type cannot get support and are in danger of failing their studies. The interesting and notable point is that in Korean studies, it is difficult to find students' subjective feelings on stigma or any studies on those who cannot get support from universities. Therefore, I explored these topics through the student's experiences during interviews.

4.6.2 The continued affirmative action for students with disabilities after graduation

The Korean government also applies policies of affirmative action for persons with disabilities in employment, under a policy similar to the Special Admission System. This policy continuously affects students with disabilities after their graduation and may affect their disability identity negatively, creating a potential dependency on the policy of affirmative action.

Act on the Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was enacted in 1990 and aimed for equality of opportunity in attaining careers for persons with disabilities. It legislates that companies must hire a certain percentage of persons with disabilities in the labour market. Kim (2012) argued that this regulation can be regarded as affirmative action. Thus, when students with disabilities graduate from universities and apply for jobs, they would be affected by the employment quota system.

When the Act on the Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was first implemented in 1991, the minimum percentage

was 1.0% for companies with more than 300 employees. Until 2000, the Act only required the government's *effort* to hire, but this changed to *duty* in 2000 (Employment Development Institute, 2008). This duty has now been changed to companies with more than 100 employees (Employment Development Institute, 2008). From 2024, this increased to 3.8% for government and public sector companies, and 3.1% for the private sector (Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, Article 27).

Over the past 30 years, the obligation to employ persons with disabilities has applied to companies that have 50 employees or more, but fines for non-compliance are only imposed on companies that have more than 100 employees. However, this policy has several issues in this operation.

According to the Ministry of Employment and Labour, several high-ranking public companies do not hire persons with disabilities. Moreover, because the same rate of the quota-levy system applies to all companies that are mandatorily required to hire persons with disabilities, numerous conglomerates pay on the quota-levy system rather than hiring persons with disabilities, including some high-ranked universities (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2023). Thus, companies can 'pay-off' their quota rather than hire persons with disabilities. What is more, of private companies, several universities are among the worst performers. This indicates the discrimination of universities towards students with disabilities. A report by Lee et al., (2010) pointed out that enforcing the hiring of persons with disabilities contributes to their finding a job, but still limits the percentage of jobs created.

Therefore, according to official data on companies that have low employment rates of persons with disabilities, there is little evidence that Korean society's perspectives on disability has been improved. Since many companies still choose to pay a fine rather than hiring persons with disabilities (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2023). Therefore, many companies do not hire persons with disabilities, which is the same reasoning applied to the ineffectiveness of the Special Admission System. So, the perspectives for persons with disabilities in Korean society has not changed.

In summary, the phenomenon that after almost 30 years has resulted in no greater number of students with disabilities entering universities through the Special

Admission System may indicate that this policy has had little impact on universities' perspectives towards persons with disabilities and has not changed their consideration of how they may educate students with disabilities as resulted in continuing the quota levy system indicates. Moreover, this continuing affirmative action may have impacted persons with disabilities themselves negatively in that they have to use the Special Admission System when they are applying for universities and continue to use the Quota levy system when they apply for jobs. Thus, these affirmative actions may make persons with disabilities internalise discrimination.

Therefore, I considered the following questions: Why do persons with disabilities remain in positions from which they still have to receive help from policies such as the Special Admission System in the education market or the quota-levy system in the job market? Is it because of structural problems? Or a problem of students with disabilities themselves? Would it be because of Korean culture and society? I examined this further in chapters six and seven through the interviewees' own voices.

4.7 The unexplored impact of affirmative action for students with disabilities in tertiary education in South Korea

The high importance and value placed on tertiary education in South Korea impact the perception of low completion rates amongst students with disabilities, and in turn, this could cause them to be excluded from society. There is a considerable gap in achievement rate between students with and those without disabilities in accessing education. According to the report from the Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities (2019), in 2017, over 41% of the total population of South Korea had a tertiary degree while only around 15% of persons with disabilities had a tertiary degree.

In 2007, focused social efforts resulted in the enactment of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, which aimed to improve support for students with disabilities in universities (Kim et al., 2009). This was against a background of a general increase in the number of students (including both students with and without

disabilities) achieving tertiary degrees. This trend was the result of Korean society placing increased value on tertiary education, where having a degree was taken for granted, although this trend would change following the social change of the demographic cliff as described in Chapter Three. This means that the relative proportion of students with disabilities among graduates from tertiary education, although increased, has remained relatively small. Detailed numbers of data is available from the official data of the annual report from the National Institute of Special Education (2023) and the annual reports by the Ministry of Education (2009).

It can be seen that there has been a gradual increase in the number of students with disabilities at universities over the last 28 years. In 1995, eight universities gave offers to a total of 113 students with disabilities (Annual Report on Special Education, 2009, p.47). The number of universities operating the Special Admission System gradually increased and peaked between 2013 and 2021, when the number rose to more than 120, but by 2022, this had fallen to 108 again. In 2023, out of 408 universities in South Korea, only 103 recruited students with disabilities via the Special Admission System; a total number of 934 students (Annual Report on Special Education, 2023, p.115). Thus, there is a stagnant phenomenon.

However, according to Kwak (2009), the increased number of students with disabilities remains concentrated in certain universities and is not spread across all universities. This may be seen as a direct result of the policy not being enforced but left to the autonomy of each university. According to the open data from Higher Education in KOREA (2023), although the total number of students whom universities select through the Special Admission System route is 934, the total number of students with disabilities who attend Korean universities is 8572. This data clearly shows that there is a much greater number of students with disabilities who did not enter university through affirmative action.

Furthermore, although the data reported shows an actual increase in the number of students with disabilities, it should be noted that these figures are based on limited data, which may lead to inaccuracies. Some data could be excluded; for example, students who did not enter universities through the Special Admission System route, but through the regular student route, compete with their non-disabled peers, would

not be included. As shown by the data, students with disabilities who entered universities via general selection account for much greater numbers than those who entered through the Special Admission System route.

Likewise, students who did not seek out disability support through the national disability process would also be excluded from the data. A study by Kim and Chung (2015) argued that the reason for this is fear of stigma. Therefore, the data available only includes students with disabilities who access the university through the Special Admission System route and who submit their personal details, including disability information, to the university as part of the registration system, and students who enter the university through the regular route, but seek disability support services voluntarily. South Korea is in the early stages of the provision of disability support services, with most universities starting to provide support for their students with disabilities around 15 years ago. Therefore, it is likely that the actual number of students with disabilities is much higher than reported.

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Three in detail, due to the significant demographic decline in population growth in South Korea, most universities have been struggling with continuously reducing numbers of students. This phenomenon allows students to receive offers from universities more easily. However, it should be considered in the light of high-ranked universities and low-ranked universities because the greater demand for higher-ranked universities continues to discriminate against students with disabilities. I further explored this issue in detail in the next chapter.

4.8 Discussion

As seen in this chapter, historically, persons with disabilities in Korea have been excluded, and the duty of support for persons with disabilities has been mainly the responsibility of the person's family, not the government. It can be found that there are conflicting factors in disability laws, such as the range of targets of those laws and the definitions of disability (Yun, 2018). Furthermore, this limitation of the laws allows the exclusion of certain numbers of people with disabilities. Additionally, for persons without disabilities, those who have the potential to acquire disabilities, this

policy limitation allows them to have no information about support for disability. Therefore, it was necessary to address all related laws, along with the negative perspectives of persons with disabilities, due to cultural background, which have not allowed attention to be paid to this minority group.

As described earlier, affirmative action in the Korean context receives much negative feedback, and the biggest reason for this is the meritocracy-based culture, which leads to the public seeing it as reverse discrimination (Ma, 2021). In Korea, there are controversial debates on affirmative action as an invasion of equality, although there has been structured inequality (Ma, 2021). Women are also the target of politics. For example, the Public Official Election Act, Article 47 states the mandatory quota for women as:

When any political party intends to nominate its members as candidates to run in an election of proportional representation or members of the National Assembly or members of local councils, such political party shall nominate not less than 50/100 of the candidates from among women and nominate candidates falling under every odd number in order to increase the candidate roll from among women.

It is the same for persons with disabilities. However, compared to this target group Korean affirmative action for persons with disabilities has unique characteristics, which lead to another form of affirmative action in employment. Plenty of studies have been carried out on affirmative action for persons with disabilities, not only for the Special Admission System but also for the Employment Quota System. However, they all analyse the effectiveness of the quota system but do not focus on the cause of this continuous discrimination or cultural background or suggest how to end it. This indicates that affirmative action policies in this context are intended to accept the status of minority groups, rather than striving to reveal the grounded reasons for the continued gap between groups. It further reveals the discrimination embedded within policy that the Ministry of Education allows segregated education environments from the preschool level, which is explored in the next chapter.

These issues are all connected and may be some of the reasons why the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)'s recommendations cannot be properly implemented in the Korean context. One of the most important things to point out is that the voices of students with disabilities are missing from all these discussions. Therefore, I now turn to the features of studies on students with disabilities in South Korea to summarise their experience from the literature in this review.

4.8.1 The experience of students with disabilities in South Korea

There are no studies that document the personal experience, through their own voices, of South Korean students with disabilities in tertiary education. There is, however, some data that can be used from existing studies on related topics that explore the difficulties that students with disabilities have encountered when trying to adapt to student life in universities that have generally failed to make the necessary adaptations to meet their needs (Kim et al., 2007; Choi, 2009; Kim et al., 2013).

The Ministry of Education (2020) reported that tertiary institutions have yet to fully adapt their teaching methods to help students with disabilities access learning. It reports that many institutions continue to apply a traditional academic approach to teaching, which students with disabilities often cite as a reason they have left their studies early. Kim et al., (2012) reported that students without disabilities gave mainly personal reasons – such as changing their focus of study, or poverty – for leaving their studies early. In comparison, students with disabilities said that it was barriers to or difficulties in pursuing their studies that were the main reasons for leaving their studies. A few subsequent studies have tried to identify and better understand these barriers, which included a lack of sense of belonging as members of the university community due to limited student interaction and less social support from their peers (Kim and Son, 2008; Yoon and Jun, 2012) as well as ongoing negative attitudes towards disability from students and staff (Yoon and Jun, 2012). A further study by Kim et al., (2012) provided evidence that students with disabilities achieve lower grades not only on admission, but also throughout their course of study. Several academics have researched this difficulty (Yoo, 2011; Kim and Chung, 2015; Choi, 2018) who reported that students with disabilities find it harder to

continue their studies and to graduate within the same timeframe as their able peers (Kim and Park, 2010; Kim and Chung, 2015). This potentially leads to further disadvantages, particularly in societies such as South Korea, where there is a significant focus on and value attached to educational achievement, resulting in students with disabilities feeling further excluded and marginalised. However, again, no studies have focused on the personal views of students with disabilities and no studies have endeavoured to explore the grounded reasons for this phenomenon.

4.8.2 Support provided by student-led organisations in South Korea

It has only been a few years since students with disabilities set up an integrated student-led support organisation. This organisation is operated by the students from each university, including the role of director. Not every student is directly connected to the organisation but can raise their voices through the director. Some universities have links to Disabled Persons' Organisations that focus on a particular impairment, such as the Korean Association of Deaf University Students. This student-led organisation has links to other Disabled Persons' Organisations, although their activities seem to be limited.

In addition, a few South Korean universities have a human rights centre that deals with human rights issues, including those related to disabilities. These operate separately from disability support centres, and currently, there are no studies on these organisations or their impact on students with disabilities in tertiary education.

It is interesting that not all members of this union are students with disabilities. In fact, the majority of members are students without disabilities. This phenomenon may indicate how Korean society views persons with disabilities. Furthermore, it affects students with disabilities themselves as they continue to be a minority voice. However, no studies explained this interesting phenomenon. Therefore, I analysed this phenomenon in depth through the interviewees' voices in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

4.9 Summary

A number of factors in South Korean society substantially affect someone who acquires a disability. If, as discussed, Korean perspectives towards persons with disabilities are not positive, before acquiring a disability that person without disabilities is likely to have negative feelings about disability and persons with disabilities. Reflecting on my own experience and on the literature, when a student acquires disability while attending university, the student presumably will face societal struggles when trying to adapt to new situations and environmental changes. Interestingly, research and other material on persons with acquired disabilities are hard to find, both from the government and in terms of guidelines from individual universities. Surprisingly, this is similar internationally. Apparently, some countries, such as the UK and the US, seem to have better information on accessibility, such as on governmental websites. However, in the research field, there is not a big difference between countries, as I presented in Chapter One. Why does this topic fail to attract attention? It may be caused by ableist perspectives that prevent disability support centres, and any similar institutions, from considering the possibility of 'acquiring' disability.

If we believe that adaptation to one's disability depends on personal variables, then it can be argued that this perspective towards disability is also the individual's own issue. However, society should set up a social safety net so that students with acquired disabilities can be backed by their universities and their society and receive full support. Whatever the problem is, the fact is that every student, no matter whether they have a disability or not, should be able to access information and receive help whenever they need it.

More than 30 years have passed since South Korea first operated the Special Admission System for students with disabilities. When just focusing on this as affirmative action, it is questionable to assert that this policy is successful in contributing to access to higher education or whether it has led to persons with disabilities gaining visible positions in their society. If this is the case, the Employment Quota System should be redundant or at least have changed its target group. Further, if the Special Admission System, having been implemented for a few

decades, had contributed to positive outcomes for persons with disabilities, then the gap between students with and those without disabilities should have been reduced. On the contrary, the trend of students with disabilities who enter universities through the Special Admission System has not changed. Rather, increasing numbers of students with disabilities enter universities without using the Special Admission System (Higher education in Korea, 2023) demonstrates that this policy is now losing its meaning and needs to be changed. It is notable that policy targeted at people with disabilities, except for some changes in policy for persons with autism and intellectual disabilities, has stagnated.

Affirmative action for persons with disabilities has remained unchanged for decades, and its status seems to have made very little progress. Affirmative action does not contribute to students with disabilities achieving the same level of education results or job positions as their peers without disabilities. Rather, these policies allow persons with disabilities to remain in a marginalised position and to be the subject of stigma. This may reflect on policy failure – failure to achieve its aim – rather than on inherent discrimination. Korean students/persons with disability may believe that they cannot be independent without affirmative action. However, Korean society and its unique culture, based on Confucianism and meritocracy, may contribute to the stigma towards persons with disabilities. In these circumstances, the recommendations from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) cannot be implemented successfully.

Again, no studies have researched how affirmative action contributes to students/persons with disabilities remaining in a minority position. However, through changes in the law, it is possible to see how trends and targets have changed. Even though this may be caused by changing demographic trends, the literature clearly shows that persons with disabilities would now be a target for the alleviation of crisis in universities.

This chapter explored how the concept of disability is accepted in Korean context. I reviewed the history of education for persons with disabilities, through the process, what disability means to Korean people. I explained disability policies and related laws in Korea. By describing policies in the Korean context, I aimed to explain how

the current concept of disability settled in. In short, in Korea, 'disability' is accepted as 'impairment' with a strict legal definition rather than a broader concept as accepted in many countries such as the UK. I described affirmative action for students/ persons with disabilities in two main ways: the Special Admission System and the Employment Quota System. In short, throughout this chapter, I demonstrated that the impact of the Special Admission System has not been explored itself, as well as the experience of students with disabilities themselves. In the next chapter, the Korean education system is explored, and I compare the experiences of the two groups: students with and without disabilities.

Chapter Five: The current Korean education context and the gap between students with and without disabilities

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the meaning of disability and how affirmative action is understood in the Korean context. To understand the present Korean education system, it is essential to understand the background of Korean culture, including its educational history. So, in Chapter Three, I reviewed Korean history and culture. Korean culture is significantly influenced by Confucianism, and it determines the current cultural milieu. It affects the way that laws are interpreted, and therefore the model of disability that is followed and policies relating to disability, as explored in Chapter Four.

Confucianism has also impacted the education system and how education is perceived in Korean society today. For presenting the background of the experience of students with disabilities and how Korean culture based on Confucianism and meritocracy intersects students' experience, in this chapter, I intensively explore the current context of education in Korea and describe the general education system in South Korea. Among the different levels of education, I particularly highlight the tertiary sector. This chapter introduces the Korean focus on education, along with UNESCO's four building pillars. I review the phenomenon of education fever in Korea, and how Korea thus differs from other East Asian countries. I then explain the hierarchy of education, from primary level to tertiary and higher.

Furthermore, I investigate the impact of education fever on people with different socio-economic status, the huge dependence on the private education market, and how this is linked to the importance placed on the ranking of universities. In doing so, I compare the mainstream Korean education system with the special education sector, including how Korean students apply for university and how this differs for students with disabilities. In the previous chapter, I explored the role of the Social Integration Admission Process (formerly the Special Admission System) in university admissions. However, as I explained, there is no research on how this impacts

students with disabilities. Thus, in this chapter, in each section, the policies targeted and the status of students with disabilities are discussed.

Finally, I draw all these issues together to summarise how they intersect to impact students with disabilities and their educational experience. In summary, this chapter will bring insight into how education for students with disabilities differs from that of students without disabilities.

5.2 Education in Korean context

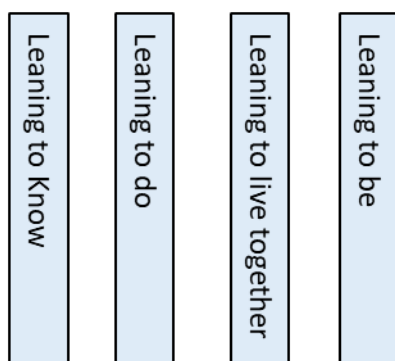
In this section, I describe how the Korean education system aligns with or differs from other education systems in comparable high-income countries using the UNESCO model. Following that, I describe the current and historical contexts of education in South Korea.

5.2.1 The current focus on education in South Korea and UNESCO's four building blocks

Figure 9. shows the four pillars of education. UNESCO introduced the model of four pillars that represent essential building blocks of education (UNESCO, 1996, cited in (Delors, 2013). They are: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; and learning to be.

Figure 9. The Four Pillars of Education (UNESCO)

The Four Pillars Of Education (UNESCO)



source: UNESCO (1996)

These pillars are interrelated, and all need to be in place in a sound education system.

The first, *Learning to know*, is about access to knowledge (Bengtsen and Barnett, 2020), and they emphasise the right to education. It is not just a means of acquiring knowledge itself but learning how to think, consider and live with others. So, the current and most recently developed version of *Learning to know* focuses on community living. The shared meaning of experience with others is seen in Korea in the importance of family and that family's place in society. This pillar can be linked to traditional Korean values grounded in Confucianism, as described in Chapter Three.

The second building block, *Learning to do*, is about accessibility to truth and is related to the workplace. This pillar stresses the importance of learning from other people.

UNESCO explains that the third pillar, *Learning to live together*, is the key pillar of education (Nan-Zhao, 2005), and that this is the right direction for education to go in. Bengtsen and Barnett (2020) suggested that it is now necessary to reorganise the four pillars into three, because the era has changed. They stress that, in the past, higher education was only accessible to a small elite, but higher education now has to be seen as something that is accessible to all. Nan-Zhao (2005; p.3) also argued that the pillars should be understood as an inter-cultural, international concept. This pillar indicates the interaction of different cultures: Living in global communities. Interpreting this *Learning to Live Together* pillar to current Korean society, as I explain later in this chapter, there are gaps between the pillar aims and the aim of Korean education. Specifically, in the education for students with disabilities, I describe how Korean education before entrance to university excludes students with disabilities and compensates for this deprivation by providing the route of the Special Admission System throughout this chapter.

The last pillar is *Learning to be*, which is related to education for personal development. If *Learning to live together* is applied to the public sector, this *Learning to be* pillar is applied to the private sector (Delors, 2013). It helps one to develop one's own thoughts and to build critical thinking. This concept emerged in 1972 due to the development of technology and industrial development (Faure, 1972). This

pillar accepts human beings as vulnerable and acknowledges the possibility of their being affected by other elements in the world. UNESCO argues that this last pillar represents the need to raise human beings with emotions such as empathy, sympathy, and care for others, so that they are able to reflect themselves in others.

According to UNESCO's model, education is not just a means of obtaining knowledge for and of itself, but as a broader social good. In short, UNESCO argues that education should enable us to support each other and to live together in the world. Carneiro (2015) also emphasised this role of education, which will show us the right direction.

Reflecting on South Korea's vision for education and comparing it to UNESCO's four pillars, I came to the conclusion that, while some of South Korea's goals are closely linked to UNESCO's four pillars, its aim appears to be skewed towards *Learning to know* and *Learning to do*, rather than *Learning to be* and *Learning to live together*.

The goal of *Learning to be* in Korea was initially aimed at the 'development of the complete person', but, in the current era, it is more closely connected to the fourth revolution, the concept of human beings as a tool or means rather than having a purpose in themselves (Delors, 2013). This is conceptualised by the fear of dehumanisation following the development of technology, but it also reflects the reality of current Korean education, which has good outcomes, such as high exam scores, linked to high productivity, but disadvantages such as the high pressure to achieve scores based on high competition, and falling numbers of students. It has not just occurred in Korea recently but has a historical context, as described in Chapter Three.

The goal of *Learning to live together* emphasises diversity in culture and stresses the importance of the inclusion of all diverse individuals. Korea's domestic education issues are affected by other countries and global issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and its low birth rate and ageing society. These factors cannot be seen as separate from global issues as the current global community is interdependent. These factors can give an insight into Korean society, including the impact of education policies on minority groups. So, on the one hand, this pillar is closely connected to the current reality of Korea: the necessary influx of international

students due to the rapidly decreasing birth rate, to ensure the survival of Korean universities. On the other hand, this is also closely linked to Korean history and culture, which explains the history of and reason for the strong focus on education, as discussed in Chapter Three. Although UNESCO's model of education represents the ideal for education, it does not entirely fit well with the current Korean educational situation. There is a need for more appropriate models which explain Korea's developmental progress and cultural background, such as the historically high value that Korea has placed on education.

The Ministry of Education has announced on the greetings page of its official website that the country faces diverse social conflicts, a decreasing birth rate, and significant changes in the structure of industry. It admits that it needs to consider what to educate, how to educate, and whom to educate, as a result of these crises. The Ministry of Education introduced its goal of 'customised education': customised for every section of society. Students, households, regions, industries, and society as a whole. This means that it will focus on the fourth industrial revolution, to cultivate human resources. It has announced that education will be the key to finding a way to overcome the crises. The Ministry of Education's current official policy aims to respond to these changing environments and to reduce the gaps in socio-economic status, and this will be achieved through the goal for 'education customised for every household'. Education for persons with disabilities and for low-income households is included in this customised education. Throughout the chapter, I explain how its goal reflects the reality of education for students with disabilities.

The Ministry of Education also refers to the 'normalisation' of (public) education, which has deteriorated due to the increase in private education, and this will be explored in detail later in this chapter. Meanwhile, in the context of disability, the intention of 'normalisation' is a similarity between the lives of persons with and persons without disabilities within a community. The definition of normalisation is assumed as Nirje (1969), which focuses on 'environment', compared to Wolfensberger (1983)'s definition of normalisation of 'persons' themselves. Wolfensberger has also contributed to 'normalisation programmes', how to engage in 'passing' disability (Shildrick, 2015). 'Passing' disability refers to the practice of pretending to be 'normal' and hiding one's disabilities (Samuels, 2003). The subject

of this concept developed from persons with learning disabilities and then spread to persons with all types of disabilities (Lemay, 1999). Thus, the concept of normalisation possesses negative perspectives of persons with disabilities, who to be cured or provide the method to pass their disabilities, indicates that social perspectives towards disability as 'abnormal' have to be addressed. This perspective towards disability and persons with disabilities is also prevalent in society, as explored in interviews with students who try to hide their disability and have a negative disabled identity.

The Ministry of Education has also focused on lifelong education, and the targets here include persons with disabilities. It has announced that it will increase the size of the eligible target population by one and a half times. It also aims to implement support care for persons with disabilities instead of relying on their parents. Currently, in South Korea, parents of persons with disabilities take on most of the responsibility for support, as they have done so historically (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, 2018). I refer to this in Chapter Three and also in Chapter Four.

As explained in Chapter Three, these changes in direction in education are closely connected to the social changes of the decreasing birth rate and, consequently, reduced numbers of students. This demographic shift means that Korean universities are competing for increasingly smaller numbers of students, which has implications for their funding. As a result, the Ministry of Education announced that it would release universities from certain regulations. For example, it is giving them more autonomy in recruitment. The recruitment quota has consequently been abolished, and universities are free to build new campuses or enter into mergers with other universities, all of which were originally strictly controlled by the government (Higher Education Act, Article 32). Furthermore, it transfers some authority from government-controlled institutions to private universities and reforms structures in a way that gives more autonomy to the private sector. This also means that universities have more autonomy in the offers they make to students.

Korean universities are striving to attract more foreign students to overcome their domestic crises. This intention of releasing control can be seen in the obvious influx of international students into Korean universities. The Korean Statistical Information

Service not only analyses the details of current tertiary students, but it analyses and publishes specific details of foreign students: the numbers, countries of origin, majors, and status after graduation, so that it can be clearly seen how and where the Korean government focus is. This indirectly shows the crisis of Korean universities. Meanwhile, details about students with disabilities at the tertiary level can be found in information released by the National Institute of Special Education. However, this data is not as comprehensive as the Korean Statistical Information Service data on foreign students and does not include these students' majors or status after graduation. There may, therefore, be students with disabilities who come from other countries and receive support from Korean domestic disability support centres, but that data is not available. In short, the goal of the Ministry of Education is to focus on domestic issues, mainly relating to the decreasing population and current affairs such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is clear that there is still a lack of interest in students with disabilities, who remain outside the focus of the government.

5.2.2 What is the cause of Korea-specific phenomena in education?

Many studies in East Asia focused on policies and the culture of Confucianism and its influence on education (Kim and Park, 2000, Huang and Chang, 2017, Tan, 2017). However, I believe that this combines with other factors embedded in the cultures of each country, and therefore impacts in different ways. It is true to say that Confucianism affects education in most East Asian countries. However, education has different features in each country. For example, Dawson (2010) argued that both Korea and Japan have huge private education markets, which indicates the failure of public education. Japan went through a period of rapid growth. Choi (2022) argued that the differentiation of types of universities is linked to gaps, such as those between public and private universities, between cities and rural areas, and also the gaps between different jobs. In Japan, there has been a decrease in the pace of mobility between different social classes, and the belief that 'everyone is middle class' has replaced the 'gap society' or 'divided society based on education'.³ This resulted in a lowering of education fever in Japanese society. Kim and Hwang (2014)

³ 'Gap society' refers to a society in which parents' educational attainment is passed on to their children, and the percentage of university graduates does not rise above 50% (Choi, 2022).

also argued that Japan in the past experienced a similar phenomenon to Korea: an increase in education fever and consequent problems, but then, on entering a low-growth era, they faced lower efficiency of education. Japan's case shows that education is inextricably tied to the developmental stages of countries.

Shin (2012) argued that, in Korea, between the development of the economy and investment in education, there was a complementary relationship. The success of human resources in higher education contributed to economic development. As already mentioned, Korea-specific circumstances, such as the lack of natural resources, lead Korean people to focus more on education. Furthermore, unstable national circumstances prevent people from focusing on diversity.

In short, every country has a different cultural and historical background, as well as different developmental stages, all of which shape their vision of education.

However, I considered it important to focus on the Korean context and address the inequality and inequity of its education system.

5.3 A basic outline of education in the Korean context

In this section, I describe the current education system from primary to high school. After that, I focus on the education fever phenomenon in Korea, which is connected to the gap in socio-economic status. Following that, I describe the issue of the private education market for students with disabilities, and how these contexts connect to create the education gap between two student groups.

5.3.1 The current system of education in South Korea

The Korean pre-university education system consists of 12 years of schooling: six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school (Framework Act on Education 8 (1)). This '6-3-3' system was adopted from the US system, when the US military controlled Korea (Lee, 1989). All children at the age of six enter primary school, and primary school and middle school are compulsory. However, there are some exceptions to this. For example, those who are unable to attend school because they have long-term health conditions or have to travel

overseas can be exempted, or temporarily suspended, from the obligation to attend school under paragraph (1), as prescribed by *Presidential Decree*, Article 19 (2). This law applies to all students, including children with disabilities, and to all schools.

There are two semesters that are consistent through all grades until high school; the specific dates vary for each school, but, commonly, the first semester begins in March and ends in mid-July, and the second semester begins mid-end of August and runs until December. Semesters in the tertiary education system comprise two: the first semester runs from March to June, and the second semester from September to December. Universities normally have a three to four-year curriculum.

From 2021, all students who attend public schools have been entitled to complimentary education for all twelve years (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Article 10 (2)). This does not apply to certain types of schools, such as foreign language high schools.

5.3.2 Education fever in South Korea and the socio-economic status gap, and the gap between students with and without disabilities

The expansion of the private education market reflects both the failure of public education and cultural and historical factors. Private education in South Korea exists in parallel to state education. Kim (2016) argued that the increase in value and in the different uses of education is due to the increasing demand of the new ruling class (Kim, 1998). The utility of education has soared through the public education system to resolve the surge in demand of the new ruling elites. Furthermore, recruiting the new elites to focus on the 'education phenomenon' allowed this phenomenon to thrive further. Kim (2016) stressed that in South Korea, the higher the person's education level, the more income they can achieve, which translates to social status.

Education fever has increased as time has passed. For example, in 2006, the Korean government decided that English should be taught in primary schools, and this policy caused even greater education fever (Kang and Lee, 2018). In contemporary South Korea, it is very common to attend an English preschool, particularly for higher-income families. Byun et al., (2018) argued that the purpose of sending children to an English preschool is to have high English proficiency, which

gives children an advantageous position from which to advance to a prestigious university. 'Pre-learning', especially in major subjects such as English, maths, or writing, is also a common phenomenon, especially for children who live in areas where there is strong education fever, such as *Gangnam* in Seoul. This region has huge districts that host numerous private academies, and these, in turn, impact the price of property in those areas, although not all residents in *Gangnam* are rich. The gap in academic achievements between different regions is clearly evidenced in studies on education by region in South Korea (Lee and Choi, 2020).

Furthermore, there are a lot of studies on the correlation between socio-economic status and achievement of grades (Byun et al., 2012). The research of Kim and Hwang (2014) showed that parents' socio-economic status affects the different factors of their education fever in relation to their children. For decades, many researchers (Phang and Kim, 2002; Korea Institute for Health And Social Affairs, 2007) have shown that gaps between different parents' socio-economic status correlate with gaps in their children's education results. Moreover, there are similar studies on persons with disabilities' educational attainment and the correlation with lower socio-economic status (Nam, 2011; Kim, 2019). As discussed in Chapter Four, the huge gap between the number of persons with disabilities attaining tertiary education (15%) and their peers without disabilities (41%) would indicate the potential impact of disability on their socio-economic status throughout their lives.

A total of 58.8% of parents believe that, in Korean society, discrimination exists based on university degrees, and this belief is fairly constant among citizens (Lee, 2020). Korean parents and students generally do not believe that public education will be sufficient to fulfil their children's educational needs if they wish to progress to university, but this belief varies according to their socio-economic status and there is also regional variation. According to a report by the Seoul Institute (2018), the correlation between those households whose heads are university graduates and the households' educational attainment, disaggregated by district of Seoul, is substantial. The three districts [represented as one of the wealthiest districts] with the highest number of university degrees by household are 56.0%, 51.1%, and 49.1% of all households, the head of the family has a tertiary degree, while in the lowest three districts, the figures are 30.8%, 33.2%, and 33.8%. Similarly, according

to data from Yoon (2022), freshmen at Seoul National University, which is the top-ranked university in Korea, mainly come from the metropolitan area (*Seoul, Incheon, and Gyeonggi-do*) and the three [one of the] rich districts of *Seoul (Gangnam-gu, Seocho-gu, and Songpa-gu)*. This further adds to the argument that parents who have higher socio-economic status can and do invest more in their children's education (Moon and Choi, 2019).

Park and Baik (2019) have also highlighted that socio-economic status and regional differences create and perpetuate the education gap in Korea. It may be said that there is a correlation between socio-economic status and area of residence, which affects children's education. Furthermore, they argue that as most of the specialist high schools (such as foreign language high schools, which allow students to enter high-ranked universities) are in cities, therefore, the biggest differences are not those in regional differences but socio-economic status. Moon (2016) also referred to this.

However, again, only a few studies are available on students with disabilities relating to regional variation or socio-economic differences. Data is published triennially by the National Institute of Special Education, and there are several points of interest in the 2020 research.

Firstly, more than 50% of middle and high school students with disabilities responded that they do not receive a private education (National Institute of Special Education, 2020). Although the percentage of those in private education varies depending on the types of disability, in answer to the question in the survey, 'What kind of private education do you have?' the greatest proportion of the responses were 'learning (cognitive therapy)'. Since learning has a different meaning from cognitive therapy, it is not possible to know the exact status of their education. Secondly, the majority of responses (53.2%) relating to 'the place for taking private education' were 'the private special education centre', followed by 'private academy' (37.2%). Exactly what 'the private special education centre' means is still vague, and it might again refer to therapy rather than education, and the place shows variation, according to the types of disability, but it is not possible to clarify the different challenges according to disability types. Thirdly, this survey was very likely to be completed by students' parents, not the students with disabilities themselves. Thus, except for a

few factual answers to questions, this data could contain bias or even errors. In light of the previous discussions about the impact of socio-economic status on education, it is likely that if the parents of students with disabilities have a high level of socio-economic status, they are more likely to support their child with disabilities to attend high-ranked universities. However, it is hard to find studies which demonstrate this.

Another study from Jeong (2016) surveyed students with disabilities in universities about their past experiences. The results were similar to the National Institute of Special Education's and showed that the reason for students with disabilities not having private education is that they could not find disability-customised education, as well as the financial burden of private education.

5.4 The current status of Korean education: A long process of preparation for entering university

Normally, the transition from middle school to high school is the starting point for preparation for the university entrance exam. Although diverse forms of high schools exist, such as those specialising in science or foreign languages, the aim of all these different types of high schools is the same: to get students into high-ranked universities (Song et al., 2018). Thus, their original purpose has been lost due to the pressure to conform and concentrate on entrance to those high-ranked universities. Every Minister of Education (whose official term is three years) makes a promise to get rid of the phenomenon of education fever and reduce the high costs of private education, which fuels the fever (Ministry of Education, 2023). As a result, the Ministry of Education of the former government (president) (19th) strove to make changes in order to operate those various types of specialist high schools, such as foreign language and international high schools (Ministry of Education, 2019), but the discussion has been abolished following appeal against to the policy (Choi, 2024). The Korean government has also undertaken measures to try to redress the imbalances, for example, abolishing the name 'community college' and enabling it to be called 'university' (The Higher Education Act 8 (2)). The main difference between a university and the former community college is the length of the degree (two to three years at the latter). These various policies have had little impact on reducing

the reliance on private education to bolster exam chances, despite the fact that budgets for private education have been increased, and the public has complained that these kinds of policies worsen the situation.

5.4.1 The education budget

There is intriguing data regarding investment in education. According to Kim (2022), the annual budget for all education, from the Ministry of Economy and Finance annual budget for 2023, constituted 17.8% of the total government budget. The government spent 96 trillion South Korean won (KRW) on pre-university education; 84.1% of the total education budget, and a significantly smaller amount was allocated for tertiary education; 13.5 trillion KRW (14.2%). If factors such as student numbers in tertiary education are taken into account, the budget per student was only 4,394,490 KRW (approximately 2,600 British pounds sterling (GBP)). This prioritisation was the opposite of that of most other OECD high-income countries (2021), which spend and invest higher levels of the national budget on tertiary-level education, followed by high and middle education and then primary (Korean Council for University Education, 2022). This data demonstrates which sector of education the Korean government and, by extension, society put the most value on.

However, competition for resources and grades is not finished once a student has entered university. They must strive to attain good grades throughout their time at university, as well as gain experiences and opportunities that may be beneficial for their career. Commonly, university students in South Korea strive to obtain good English scores, seek internships, go to other countries as exchange students or prepare to undertake the requisite exams to enter training in law or high-level public service.

Once again, there is no research in this area relating to students with disabilities. According to Kim and Kim (2017), companies generally have low expectations of employees with disabilities, and consequently make less effort to accommodate their disability support. One of the participants in that study stated that he/she believed that there are only low numbers of highly educated persons with disabilities [have high-ranked university degrees] in the job market, and if they have severe disabilities

this can negatively impact requesting reasonable accommodation to companies. Another recent study argued that hired persons with disabilities face challenges due to their disability and are limited in their choice of career (Kim et al., 2022). However, these studies do not take into consideration how much effort students with disabilities need to make to obtain job offers, and discussing discrimination is only relevant when their effort in, for example, obtaining good English scores and seeking internships is on the same level as students without disabilities. Furthermore, discrimination in the job market may have strong links with affirmative action: the Social Integration Admission Process and the Employment Quota System, although this correlation has not been researched. This issue is discussed in Chapter Seven.

5.4.2 The commodification of education and the private education market

As outlined above, in South Korea, the private education market is inflated, causing the commodification of education. Chung and Bae (2016) argued that this is a 'colonisation of the education economy' (p.413, cited from Kang, p.66). In other words, private education affects the public education sector and the industrialisation of education. This phenomenon of private education taking precedence over the public sector allows the private sector to continue to make increasing profits. Furthermore, it can be said that the private education market has deteriorated in following its purpose of educating students to make its own profits.

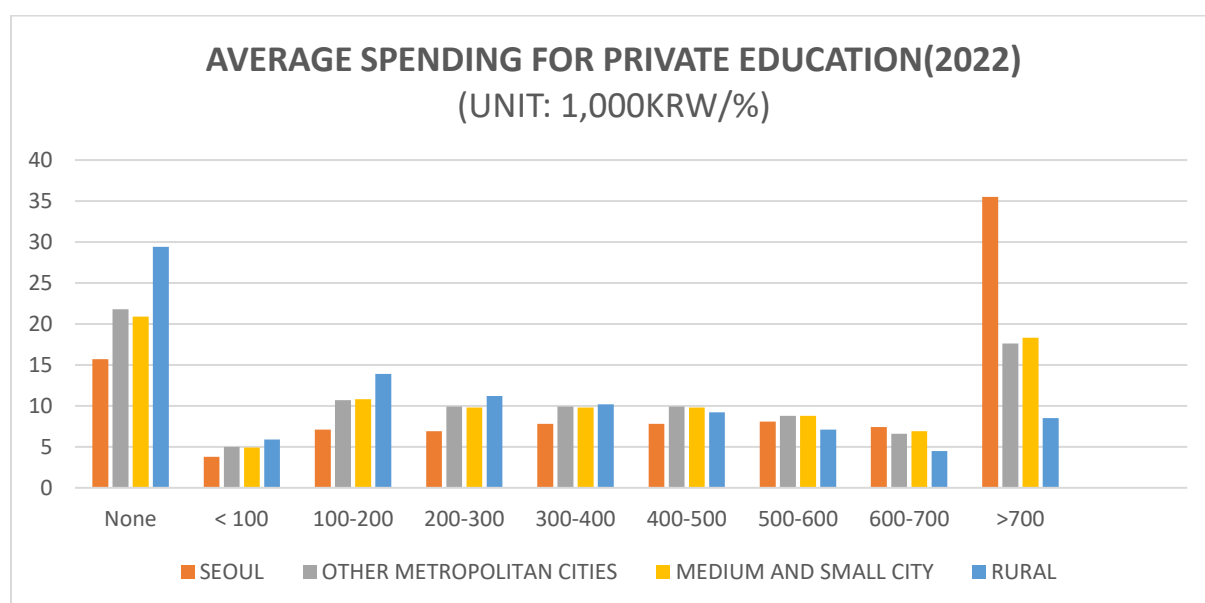
According to reports from Statistics Korea (2022), the hours of private education provided are increasing every year (the average of 7.2 hours per day in 2022 increased from 6.7 hours in 2021) along with the costs. The total amount of money invested in private education was 26 trillion KRW in 2022, which increased from 23.4 trillion KRW in 2021 to 10.8%. The average amount spent on private education per student also increased by 7.9% from 485,000 KRW in 2021 (approximately 287 GBP) to 524,000 KRW in 2022 (approximately 310 GBP). The average expenditure on private education was 590,000 KRW for students whose achievement was ranked in the top 10% and 323,000 KRW for students in the bottom 20%.

The data also reveals that during the COVID-19 pandemic (from March 2020 to April 2022, as defined by WHO), the number of students receiving private education in

South Korea increased. In 2021, a total of 78.3% of students had some form of private education, for example, additional study or full-time private education, or both. Additional tutoring increases students' chances and is something that wealthier parents can afford, while parents on lower incomes cannot afford private education, and this is the case across every grade, from primary level to high school. Students in high school spend the biggest proportion of their money on private education. For example, according to official data, the amount spent on students in the first grade of high school in 2021 averaged 706,000 KRW (approximately 418 GBP) per student. Yang (2023) argued that the amount of money spent on private education during the COVID-19 pandemic was more, which caused even wider gaps in education attainment between children. The gap is always affected by socio-economic status (An et al., 2023; Cho, 2023).

Therefore, private education is regarded as essential for current Korean students, but the gap in education attainment between students according to their socio-economic status is increasing. For example, there are substantial differences in the amount of money spent on private education by parents who live in Seoul, compared with other metropolitan cities, medium and small cities and rural areas. Figure 10. shows the gap of average spending for private education among the regions.

Figure 10. Average Spending on Private Education



For example, Seoul and other cities had the highest average monthly expenditure per student on private education – 700,000 KRW (around 415 GBP), whereas the figure in rural areas was 100,000-200,000 KRW (around 60-120 GBP) (Statistics Korea, 2022). This reflects the likelihood that families living in urban areas earn higher salaries, and therefore, as Figure 10. indicates a higher rate of participation in private education. This has led to studies which argue that there is an inevitable polarisation of socioeconomic groups. Kim and Pak (2022) argued that the variables that contribute to inequality in education are students' background and socio-economic status. Contrary to the expectation that social capital would benefit students with low parental socioeconomic status and thereby reduce the educational gap between classes, social capital has been shown to be formed differentially according to socioeconomic status. The formation of capital was also found to be low, with those in higher socio-economic status being more likely to be urban, spending more money on private education, and therefore perpetuating the current status quo. Moon and Choi (2019) agreed with Parkin (1979)'s argument that there are two barriers to entry into crucial positions: one is the barrier of property, and the other is the barrier of academic achievement. Therefore, the university entrance system confirms the ruling class through the exclusion of public entrance. This is linked to parental ambitions to maintain their socio-economic status through supporting their children's education in high-ranked universities.

5.4.3 Parental ambitions and the conformity culture

Parents want to purchase a good-quality education for their children to achieve better grades. Woo and Hodges (2015) argued that the obsession with education and the conformity culture of Korea increase the private education market. Kim (2003) suggested that this is an effective way to reduce anxiety for parents. It is also an effective way to expand the private education market.

According to a survey of parents about private education by the Korean Educational Development Institute (2019), the first reason most parents use private education for their children is 'to enable my children to succeed in the competition' (24.6%). The

second is 'because other parents do it, it makes me psychologically anxious' (23.3%). This second reason demonstrates the conformity culture that has permeated parents' beliefs regarding the education of their children. Many parents answered that if their children have to study by themselves, then private education is necessary (35.2%), and deciding what kind of private education children have is a decision for parents (36.9%). It can be said that, for parents in South Korea, private education represents conformity and adherence to existing social norms. However, according to Kim (2003), indeed, the effect of a degree from a high-ranked university is crucial for Korean society, in terms of income. Those who attend a high-ranked university are more likely to get a well-paid job, as Koreans believe that the name of the university is proof of a student's ability. However, perhaps as a result of this pressure to conform for both families and students, a number of studies refer to peer pressure among Korean mothers, because in the Confucianism-based Korean culture, raising children well is regarded as the duty of mothers (Yoo, 2007, 2014). It is the same for mothers of children with disabilities (Oh, 2019).

The private education market for students with disabilities

The report from Statistics Korea (2022, p.3) investigated private education for all populations in South Korea but did not disaggregate the data on specific target groups such as students with disabilities. Therefore, it is impossible to know how many students with disabilities are able to access private education. Although South Korea focuses on private education for students in general, and there is a substantial amount of research about this, there is just one study which investigates students with disabilities' private education (Yun, 2020). This study argued that the main reason for students with disabilities to access private education is the same as those students without disabilities, which is to progress to higher education. However, this lack of research further demonstrates an overall lack of interest in understanding the impact of accessing education for students with disabilities in South Korea.

It can be assumed that if the family of a student with disabilities does not have sufficient money, it will be harder for the students to attend private education and, as previously discussed, private education thus aligns with socio-economic status. However, it is, again, hard to find related research on this. This may be one of the

reasons why the Korean government continuously strives to introduce policies to reduce inequality in education. Furthermore, it can be assumed from numerous data on households with disabilities and from the national report on persons with disabilities (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2020) that persons with disabilities in South Korea are inclined to be poorer than persons without disabilities.

Moreover, although it is quite common to study at a private academy in South Korea, the majority of private academies may not be accessible to students with physical disabilities and/ or mobility difficulties. As briefly introduced in Chapter Four, the Building Act, Article 64 specifies that when a building is taller than six floors, the owner must install a lift. However, this article does not apply retrospectively. Thus, if the private academy is in an existing building that has no lift, then students with physical disabilities cannot access the building. Furthermore, the majority of buildings do not have accessible toilets. This accessibility issue does not just relate to providing adaptation to meet mobility challenges. It also relates to adaptations for students with sensory impairments, such as students with hearing or visual disabilities. This means that students with disabilities struggle to access the range of education facilities available in South Korea equally with students without disabilities. These factors widen the educational gap between persons with and without disabilities.

The Impact of Private Education linking to entering high-ranked universities on Students with and without Disabilities

The increasing use of private education is clearly not solely explained by Confucianism, as this has been a central tenet of Korean culture for hundreds of years. Other reasons discussed in the literature include shifting gender norms. This shift has led to an increase in both parents working, which in turn has increased household incomes, and may lead to household decisions to use the additional resources to improve their children's education opportunities. This further reflects the belief that additional tutoring or accessing the 'best' schools, those with the best exam results, will, in turn, increase the likelihood of access to a more highly ranked university and optimise future career pathways. The lack of a national childcare system when both parents work can also be a factor that leads parents to send their

children to a private academy (Baek et al., 2019). Additionally, when a student's grade is higher (Kim and Kim, 2014), and their family's socio-economic status is higher (Jo et al., 2015), they are more likely to join private education. This underlies the fact that students who have higher socio-economic status are likely to enter more highly ranked universities. The reasons may be the same or different for students with disabilities. However, this cannot be confirmed because of the paucity of research on the topic. The different features of parents with students with disabilities and those who have to support their children continuously on university campuses are discussed in Chapter Six.

The overall aim of these practices is that children will be advantaged and attain good scores in the public education examinations and university entrance examinations (Dawson, 2010). I explain the impact of this in more detail later in this chapter. As this obviously disadvantages those coming from poorer households or regions, there is a law to limit private education: the Special Act on the Normalization of Public Education [and the] Normalization and Regulation of Pre-Curriculum Education (2019). However, it seems not to have solved this issue.

Moreover, the impact of education fever does not finish once students successfully enter university. Rather, the impact of such practices is long lasting and perpetuates inequalities, such as gaps in the ranking between universities, often corresponding to those in metropolitan areas and those not. Furthermore, the gaps in equity are experienced in the type of careers that students follow when they graduate from university. It has been argued that the outcome of this private education system is to incite and perpetuate anxieties about academic achievements and social status, but people continue to buy into the private education system, so it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dawson, 2010).

Table 11. shows the ranking of Korean universities (Lee et al., 2023) in 2023.⁴ As can be seen from the table, all universities in the top ten are located in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. This phenomenon is directly linked to the gap between

⁴ A total of 52 Korean universities declined to participate in QS ranking because its ranking criteria are not appropriate in Korean circumstances and work against them (Cho, 2023). Therefore, after reflecting on this opinion, in this thesis I use the Korean domestic ranking, which may be more suitable for research in the Korean context.

the incomes of graduates among those who graduated from universities located in Seoul (Kim, 2016).

Table 11. Korean Universities' Ranking in the Year in South Korea 2023

Ranking	Name Of <u>The</u> University	Score	Region
1	Seoul National University	226	Seoul
2	Yonsei University (Seoul campus)	224	Seoul
3	Sungkyunkwan University	215	Seoul
4	Hanyang University (Seoul campus)	209	Seoul
5	Korea University (Seoul campus)	199	Seoul
6	Kyung Hee University	175	Seoul
7	Ehwa women's University	172	Seoul
8	Dongkuk University (Seoul campus)	169	Seoul
9	University of Seoul	164	Seoul
10	Konkuk University (Seoul campus)	162	Seoul

source: Lee et al., (2023)

The 'place-based theories' explains this phenomenon (Neumark and Simpson, 2015). Following their argument, the highest-ranked universities are mostly based in regions that are economically rich. This gives further insight into Korea. From the 1960s, the South Korean government proceeded to implement the regional development project, focusing on major areas, such as the capital (Kim, 2003). This policy had diverse effects, such as the biased ranking of universities according to their location. One of the effects is that the numbers of universities are mostly focused in metropolitan areas.

Among the total number of 336 universities (17/09/2022), there are 48 in Seoul and 68 in other metropolitan areas: a total of 116 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2022).

Lee and Choi (2020) demonstrated that universities located in metropolitan areas have successfully contributed to levelling up and creating the possibility of social mobility, as shown by the fact that most high-ranked universities are located in Seoul and the metropolitan areas. However, what this means is that the possibility of continuing to the 'next level' is applicable only to graduates of these high-ranked,

metropolitan-based universities. This corroborates the place-based theories outlined above in Table 11. Due to the universalisation of universities in South Korea, it is not sufficient for individuals to [just] have a 'tertiary degree'. Rather, earning a 'good tertiary degree' is required.

This is the same for students with disabilities. According to Kim and Cho (2013), in a study ten years ago, it was shown that students with disabilities attending high-ranked universities (1-10) were more likely to live in Seoul and other metropolitan areas. This reiterates the likelihood that the reason for education fever is connected to the urban, largely metropolitan, private education market, as that is where the more highly ranked universities are based. It is not easy to find studies relating to students with disabilities to whom this applies. The study by Kim and Cho (2013) is one of the few pieces of work on this.

In summary, education in South Korea is crucially more than just achieving a degree; it is closely linked to taking someone to the 'next level', meaning progressing their socio-economic status. Those families that have a high level of socio-economic status, generally aim to maintain their socio-economic status by passing this on to their children, according to the culture of Confucianism. When this phenomenon becomes extreme, it can affect bigger problems, such as an elitist culture of universities, in particular locations attracting students of certain socio-economic status, who are from privately educated groups of students, and thereby excludes others, thus creating tertiary education accessibility gaps. Therefore, the government is trying to work on levelling policies.

Korea's preoccupation with socio-economic status may most likely originate from its cultural background, which is the core reason for focusing on education. This may also be one of the causes of inequality between students with and without disability. As Table 11. indicated that all students aim to enter high-ranked universities, and high-ranked universities are located in Seoul, the capital city, which may indicate a lack of diversity in Korean society. As described by the gap in the private education market, students with disabilities experience inequity in their education rights. Furthermore, Korean society has a conformity culture, 'disability' is not accepted as one of the diversities. Therefore, challenges exist in how a positive disabled identity

for students with disabilities is created in this society. However, it is notable that there is a lack of evidence as to whether this phenomenon appears similarly for all students with disabilities or not because of the lack of data. In the following section, I compare education policies in the Korean context for students with and without disabilities, and how students with disabilities are not their focus.

5.5 Fundamental policies in South Korean education and students with disabilities

In this section, I explain the education system for students with disabilities. First, I explore the legally defined types for students with disabilities until the high school level and after entering universities. After that, I explain the details of the teachers and students at each level. Finally, I determine how students with disabilities are segregated in the education system.

5.5.1 *The current system of education for students with disabilities*

Earlier in this chapter, I briefly introduced the fundamental structures of education in South Korea. For pre-university students, compulsory education for students in South Korea is only until the middle school level, but for students with disabilities, compulsory education is longer. It includes high school (Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 3). The aim is to equalise the education levels of the two groups. It is possible to presume therefore that historically, students with disabilities have not received equal opportunities to access education.

Table 12. and Table 13. listed and compared the legal types of disabilities of the act of and the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act and Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. Students who are eligible to have special education are those who have broadly one of 11 types of disability, as decreed by the government, and as described in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 15, rather than in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, Article 2. The Welfare of Disabled Persons Act lists fewer types of disabilities. Emotional disturbance or behavioural disorder, learning disabilities, health impairments, and developmental delays are not contained in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, which means that the definition of disability in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act is narrower than in the Special

Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. Therefore, students with disability types 5, 8, 9, and 11 are able to apply to universities via the Social Integration Admission Process, as described in Chapter Four. However, universities can limit the entitled candidates to those disabilities as defined by the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, those students whose disability types are only on the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act cannot apply for those universities. This demonstrates a gap between different laws and policies. For example, special schools for those with ‘emotional disturbance’ are found in seven places, although this type of disability will not be accepted legally when they become adults due to the difference of disability types in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act and the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act (Ministry of Education, 2022, p.24). Thus, these students may face barriers both before and after entering university. Below, the two charts show the different types of disabilities, defined by the two Acts.

Table 12. Legal Types of Disability as Defined by Welfare of Disabled Persons Act

Types of Disability as Defined by Welfare of Disabled Persons Act

Legal Type In Welfare of Disabled Persons Act	
1	Physical Disability
2	Disability of Brain lesion
3	Visual Disability
4	Hearing Disability
5	Speech Disability
6	Intellectual Disability
7	Autism
8	Mental Disorder
9	Kidney Dysfunction
10	Cardiac Dysfunction
11	Respiratory Dysfunction
12	Hepatic Dysfunction (or Liver Dysfunction)
13	Facial Disfigurement
14	Intestinal Fistular/ Urinary Fistular
15	Epilepsy

Table 13. Legal Types of Disability as Defined by Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act

Types of Disability as Defined by Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act

Legal Type In Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act	
1	Visual impairments
2	Hearing impairments
3	Mental impairments
4	Physical impairments
5	Emotional disturbance or behavioural disorder
6	Autism (including the relevant disabilities)
7	Speech impairments
8	Learning disabilities
9	Health impairments
10	Developmental delays
11	Case of having more than two types of disabilities

source: Ministry of Government Legislation

5.5.2 Numbers of teachers and students at each education level and those in the special education sector

The number of teachers in each class increases at each level. The officially allowed ratio of teacher-to-pupil per class is as follows, and the details are outlined in Table 14. These numbers were decreasing compared to previous years (2022).

Table 14. Numbers of Teachers and Students (with and without disabilities) at each Level in General Schools on Average

Educational Stage	Numbers of teachers	Ratio of teachers to pupils per class on average (percent)
Preschools	55,637	9.4
Primary schools	195,087	13.3
Middle schools	114,800	11.6
High schools	130,610	9.8

source: Ministry of Education: Basic education statistics (2023)

The available data for special education teachers in mainstream schools and special education teachers in special schools are as follows in Table 15. Meanwhile, the ratio

of special education teachers to pupils per class cannot be verified as only the average data is available, which is within the legal specification.

Table 15. Numbers of Teachers and Students at each Level in the Special Education Sector

	Number of special education teachers in general schools	Number of special education teachers in special schools	Ratio of teachers to pupils per class (percent)
Preschools	1,559	-	Not available
Primary schools	7,160	-	Not available
Middle schools	2,804	-	Not available
High schools	2,301	-	Not available
Total	13,824	10,146	Not available

source: National Institute of Special Education: Special education statistics (2023), pp. 5,7

5.5.3 Comparison between the requirements for mainstream and special teachers in South Korea

General teachers of primary to high school are educated via diverse routes, summarised as three. The first route is graduation from a university of education or department of education. Courses mainly focus on common subjects, such as Korean, maths or English. The department capacity is entirely for prospective teachers. The second route is by completing teaching credits and is mainly for candidates whose university does not have a department of education. Prospective teachers cannot exceed 10% of the total capacity of the department. The last route is through the graduate school of education; again, the capacity of the graduate school is entirely for prospective teachers (Ministry of Education, 2021). To become a teacher at middle school and high school, students can either obtain a teaching certificate when they graduate from a university or graduate at a master’s level in education. To obtain their teaching certificates, they may have to pass the national teaching examination, but there are routes for teaching certificates without examination. As explained in Chapter Three, regarding the decreasing birth rate, the Ministry of Education also seeks ways how to figure out the overabundant number of teachers.

The training of special education teachers is mainly carried out through the department of special education in the university of education within the university, or through a major in special education from graduate schools of education. The appointment of special education teachers is different according to the type of school, public or private. In public schools, candidates have to pass the examination, whereas in private schools, recruitment is through open competition at the school level (Kim, 2009). However, the Annual Report of Special Education (2022, p.50) pointed out that still not every teacher who is in charge of special education schools or classes has a special education certificate. Moreover, there remains a lack of special teachers in general schools. I explain this further in the following section.

In short, the requirement seems to be similar for the two groups: general teachers and special teachers, but their perspectives on inclusive education show differences and their roles in schools are different, according to their certificates (Kim and Kim, 2020). This may indicate gaps in Korean society relating to the perception of disability.

5.5.4 A policy of segregation from the start of education for students with disabilities

The Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 1 states:

The purpose of this Act is for the State and local governments to provide disabled persons and those who have special educational needs with an integrated educational environment pursuant to Article 18 of the Framework Act on Education and to provide them with education according to their life cycle considering characteristics, such as the type and level of disability so that such education may contribute to their self-realization and integration into society.

The Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 27 (1) clearly refers to the obligation to provide special education classes at each education level, including preschool. It states that schools should provide special education classes as follows:

1. Preschool: If there is more than one but fewer than four students eligible

for special education, one class shall be established, and if there are more than four persons, two or more classes shall be established.

2. Elementary school and middle school: If there is more than one student but fewer than six students eligible for special education, one class shall be established, and if there are more than six students, two or more classes shall be established.
3. High school: If there is more than one but fewer than seven students eligible for special education, one class shall be established, and if there are more than seven students, two or more classes shall be established.

This act does not mean segregated education separate from students without disabilities in the schools. Rather, it indicates the aim of supporting students.

According to interviews with students with disabilities, the majority of students with disabilities got integrated education. According to the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, one hundred high schools in Seoul had special classes for students with disabilities on 3rd January 2022, based on the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 27 (1).

The unexpected impact of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 27 (1)

The Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act states that, for example, in middle school, if there is even one student in a school with disabilities, then the school must establish a special education class. However, this law has possibly unintended consequences. One newspaper reported that a provincial education office terminated its special education class because it had only one student (Her, 2022). Thus, the office ignored the law, and this student had to attend another school, one hour's journey from his house, while the school that, in effect, refused him was just in front of his house. This newspaper also reported that another school refused to admit a student with disabilities because it did not want to hire more special education teachers. According to the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, the school should have a special education teacher for every six students with disabilities. Consequently, this school sent some of the students with disabilities into a general class (Her, 2022). This newspaper pointed out that whether

to establish special education classes is regarded as the 'choice of the school principal'. This kind of discriminatory administration still happens quite often. Even though they are aware of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea's sanctions, in many cases schools refuse to give offers to students with disabilities.

Policies and limited support

There is a website that has public data for students and parents providing information on schools and facilities for students with disabilities. Originally, as most schools in South Korea were public, students could not choose the school they wanted, but were randomly assigned to schools. However, the authorities have made an exception for students with disabilities and they can now visit schools ahead of their application and apply where they want to through the admission form.

Students with disabilities or those who have long-term health conditions can attend schools in hospitals, some of which operate online classes. According to the report from the National Institute of Special Education (NISE), in 2023, a total of 37 places operated 'school in hospital', but the staff in these schools are varied. Mainly, one or two special education teachers take on that role. However, since there are only a few schools in the hospitals nationally, and those schools have a relatively small number of students, they also still have a relatively small number of teachers.

Special education support personnel in schools refers to people who support the education of students with disabilities, such as by providing safety support or learning support. These personnel are sometimes conscripted to public service, as an alternative to completing mandatory military service. However, there remains insufficient support personnel for the students' needs. For example, in 2023, only 34% of all schools in South Korea had support personnel for supporting students with disabilities. Obviously, then, there is a massive staff shortage (Kang, 2023). There is no individual assessment of disability; instead, schools follow the legal definitions of disability types and degrees, which are entirely based on medical criteria.

5.5.4.1 The superintendent's role

As education is so important to South Korea, there is a superintendent in each metropolitan city in addition to the government minister for education. The Ministry of Education decides overall policy, which is then enforced at the regional level by the superintendent. Since 2006, the amended law of the Local Education Autonomy Act has decreed that the superintendent is elected by residents of that area (Park and Noe, 2019). The superintendent represents the residents and, to the extent to which they are permitted (which is not total), makes independent decisions according to their discretion. Considering that all ministers are appointed by the President of South Korea, the fact that superintendents are elected by residents shows that this policy in itself emphasises the entitlement of Korean people to make decisions and also what a central role education plays for Koreans. The superintendents also oversee education for students with disabilities. So when students with disabilities apply for tertiary institutions via the Social Integration Admission Process, they also need approval from the superintendent in their region. The success of education policy is largely determined by the election of the superintendent. If a policy fails, the education minister comes under pressure to resign, which is the same in every government department.

5.5.5 *The status of students with disabilities after graduating from high school*

The National Institute of Special Education collects data on the status of students with disabilities entering further education after graduating from high school levels. According to the Annual Report of Special Education (the National Institute of Special Education, 2023, p.29), in 2022, a total of 6,528 students graduated from high school. Of those, 61.6% studied in general classes, 56.1% graduated from special education classes in high schools, and 57.9% were from special education high schools. In 2023, 57.6% of students with disabilities entered universities. This data does not equate with 100% since there are students who do not enter further education or a career.

The distorted purpose of high schools, which aim only to get students into university, is the same in special schools for students with disabilities. Special schools, such as

schools for students with visual impairments and schools for students with hearing impairments, also have those goals. Special schools can support their students with disabilities to enter university through the Social Integration Admission Process. Career schools provide courses for students with disabilities who graduate from high schools (Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 24). Currently, the number of career schools is limited, which may cause a few students with disabilities to struggle with entering university. However, there is a lack of research.

The majority of policies for students are targeted towards students without disabilities, providing them with extensive information about education in an accessible way. However, this is not the case for students with disabilities. The website of the Ministry of Education is impossible to access for some. It is not easy to find any information relating to students with disabilities, and there is no direct link for them and their parents. It is, for example, difficult to find any section on or link to accommodation for students with disabilities.

The Korean Council for University Education, for students who are preparing for university entrance, also operates a website. However, this website rarely has any specific information for students with disabilities. It suggests that 'if you search for another website (*adiga.kr*⁵)', then you can find the necessary information for students with disabilities. The information specifies that universities 'try to', rather than 'must' make provision for students with disabilities. As a native Korean, I interpret the word for 'must' as being very different from the word for 'try to' since the word for 'must' turns this into a legal issue.

5.6 University Entrance

In this section, I explain the route to enter universities. I also briefly explain tertiary students with disabilities and how it is out of focus from governmental policies.

⁵ 'adiga' Meaning in English: Where should I go (for university)?

5.6.1 The regular route and early action

The route for entrance to universities in Korea can be explained broadly in two ways: the early action and the regular route following the period to apply for. The early action mainly indicates the route for applying for universities during students attending their final year of high school. The regular route mainly starts when they get scores on the university entrance examination. Table 16. broadly describe the details of the routes.

Table 16. Routes For Entrance To Universities In South Korea (early action and regular route)

Routes	Details
Early Action	High school's records (subject)
	High school's records (comprehensive)
	Writing ability
	Performance/awards record (for example, arts/ sports)
	Others
Regular Route	University entrance examination score
	Performance/awards record
	High school's records (subject)
	High school's records (comprehensive)
	Others

Source: Korean Council for University Education (2023)

From the third grade of high school, students are entitled to apply for university. Universities assess prospective students across a number of factors, including grades in high schools, writing ability, and any other considerations that might help the student's assessment, such as awards or interviews. The policy changes frequently, but this is the current policy. The route for applying to university may be one of two different processes: the regular route and early action, according to the university's recruitment period. Early action was implemented in 2001 and was originally aimed at avoiding the strict, score-based, university entrance procedure and normalisation of public education (Ministry of Education, no date). This process broadly has five stages: a student's high school records of subjects are evaluated;

the student's high school records comprehensively are evaluated; writing ability is taken into consideration; performance and awards record, and then others are then looked at.

The regular route also has five routes but mainly assesses the student's scores on the university entrance examination (Ministry of Education, 2023). The Social Integration Admission Process (see Table 9) has both early action and the regular route; the choice of route is at the universities' discretion.

An increasing number of universities are selecting students via early action. In 2021, 75.7% of universities adopted the early action route for choosing students (Ministry of Education, 2022). However, there are a number of ongoing problems with early action, including the possibility of constructing a fraudulent representation of one's credentials. According to the Korean Federation of Teachers' Associations, the biggest teachers' union, 63.6% of members agreed that the regular route should be expanded, and the biggest reason given for this was to ensure fairness in the admissions process (Hwang, 2022).

Although these diverse selection routes exist, the Ministry of Education has announced that for the recruitment of prospective students for 2024, 85.8% of those students being selected via the early action route will go through a comprehensive evaluation. In the meantime, for those going through the regular route, 91.7% of universities have reported that they will evaluate through the scores of the university entrance examination (Korean Council for University Education, 2023). All these routes also have an impact on students with disabilities. They can choose to apply via these routes, compete with peers without disabilities, or choose to apply through a special selection route.

5.6.2 The tertiary education status of student with disabilities

As referred to in Chapter Four, in 2023, a total of 934 students received offers from 103 universities through the Social Integration Admission Process (National Institute of Special Education, 2023). Every year, a similar number of students with disabilities enter universities through this route. Although there is an analysis of tertiary students who drop out by gender, majors, regions, and years, there is no official investigation

into the details of students with disabilities who drop out, and no data is available.

For postgraduate education (master's and PhD levels), universities do not use the Social Integration Admission Process. Although there is factual data, there is no statistical information about how many students with disabilities enter or drop out of postgraduate courses.

5.7 The Korean government's effort to reduce the social gap between different groups of students including between those with and without disabilities

I described the Social Integration Admission Process in Chapter Four. Universities which operate the Social Integration Admission Process are able to limit their admissions by qualifying that the application of such students, for example, will only be considered by those who have a specific type or degree of disability. Moreover, currently most universities do not have the Social Integration Admission Process for students with disabilities in certain subjects, such as medicine. This point is looked at again in Chapter Six.

Students with disabilities who want to apply to universities through the Social Integration Admission Process also apply through the early or regular route, according to the university's recruitment policy. However, depending on the university, the recruitment policy varies according to whether it is via the early action or regular route, and in some cases injustice happens. A few high level universities only implement the regular route for those students applying through the Social Integration Admission Process, so, in some cases, students with disabilities have to decide whether to give up their current offers and strive for a more highly ranked one which only has the Social Integration Admission Process via the regular route. If they fail to get into this high-ranked university, they have to apply again the following year. No regulation on this issue has been implemented by the government.

5.7.1 Current changes in lifelong education

I briefly introduced the Lifelong Education Act in Chapter Four. The Lifelong Education Act was enacted in 2000 but was recently revised to take into account

persons with disabilities. These changes have been made possible by the ongoing action of some Korean organisations.

Supporting this, from 1st January 2023, following reorganisation within the Ministry of Education, the duty of providing tertiary education as well as lifelong education for students with disabilities comes under the jurisdiction of the lifelong education team within the Ministry of Education. Before 2022, this was overseen by the lifelong education team for students with disabilities within the Department of Special Education (Ministry of Education, 2023). This change shows the government also strives to figure out the problem in the education sector caused by a decreasing birth rate and starts to focus on students with disabilities.

5.8 The prevailing requirement for a tertiary degree in Korean society

In South Korea, a tertiary (bachelor's) degree is almost a necessary condition for Koreans when applying for a job (Kwon et al., 2017). The requirements for applying for a job have been levelled up, as have the average standard of tertiary degrees. Moreover, having a gap period on one's curriculum vitae, such as because of a substantial period seeking work after graduation, is also seen in an unfavourable light (Kim et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017). In order to support students during this period, the Higher Education Act contains a specific article allowing university students to postpone their graduation (The Higher Education Act, Article 23 (5), 'Postponement of Acquisition of a Bachelor's Degree'), thus obviating the need for a blank section in the curriculum vitae as graduates seek employment. Whilst this may demonstrate the support of the government to facilitate employment, it also clearly perpetuates the existing social and cultural norms which lead to employers discriminating against graduate job seekers. This phenomenon applies to all students, including students with disabilities. Meanwhile, since there is the Employment Quota System for persons with disabilities, this practice, of postponement of the awarding of their degree, could present different issues for students with disabilities. However, it is hard to find any research about this.

For students who choose to pursue further education, a master's degree by coursework in Korea takes two years, and a PhD takes four years. Following the

expansion of higher education, not only the number of undergraduate students has increased, but also the number of postgraduate students has increased hugely (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2022). From 1980 to 2021, the number of graduate students increased by about 9.7 times, from 33,939 to 333,907. This was in large part due to the relaxation of graduate school establishment standards due to the alleviation of rules and the increased number of students going to university. This, in turn, led to the need for students to differentiate themselves from other graduates and seek postgraduate study to advance their career opportunities. According to the Korean Educational Statistics Service (2022), the employment rate for university graduates in 2021 was 64.1%, and for those with master's degrees, it rose to 82.6%. This data demonstrates the extent to which achieving further degrees can give advantages also continuous competition in Korean society. According to a Ministry of Education report, the reason for this increase is the demand for high-quality human resources, along with the relaxation of graduate school establishment standards by the government, and the general increase in popularity of higher Education. The report comprehensively analyses the data, including the subject and level of study, as well as student details including regional breakdown, gender, ages, the status of leave of absence (the percentage of students who dropped out, disaggregated by age and gender). However, there is still no data available on students with disabilities.

5.8.1 Young people's thoughts on these issues

The issue of continuing competition for university entrance examinations is not only the problem of an overheated private education market, but one that appears to prevail throughout Korean society. Rather, this continuing competition impacts every moment of a person's life, not only their career but also on such concerns as marriage trends, as discussed in Chapter Three. This underpins a tendency towards polarisation in every sector in Korean society (Kim, 2015). The newly conceived term *hellChoson* is commonly used to suggest that living in South Korea is like living in hell (Song and Lee, 2017), which indicates how young Koreans feel about living in their country.

Do students with disabilities feel the same way as their peers without disabilities? It

is difficult, as always, to find studies about this. The majority of studies on students with disabilities start from biased questions and focus on narrow topics, such as specific topics about physical and attitudinal barriers, and support for the questions discussed above is unavailable. Thus, I revealed students with disabilities' thoughts through the interview and presented them in Chapter Seven.

5.9 Summary

Throughout the three literature review chapters, I shared the meaning of education in the Korean context, the reason why it occupies crucial values in Korean culture, and how the phenomenon around education has emerged. Education became a pivotal value when Korea faced financial challenges and military instability. However, the phenomenon of education never impacted negatively on minority groups. I described the gap between people of different socio-economic status and how policies that have led to the emergence of more private education impact differently on diverse social groups, such as students with disabilities.

I investigated the history and the culture that appeared during the development of the country, through which it is possible to see why Koreans are so strongly focused on getting a tertiary degree, especially from the more highly ranked universities. I also assumed that this phenomenon affects persons with disabilities negatively, with cumulative exclusion from society and education, although there was little evidence in the published literature.

The lack of data on students with disabilities shows a lack of interest and attributed value. A comparison between students with and without disabilities at each level of education clearly showed the gap between the two groups. Still, South Korea seems not to achieve integrated education for students with disabilities in mainstream grades, and so gives them the benefit of the Social Integration Admission Process policy as compensation for these disadvantages. Although there are quite comprehensive policies for university admission, for some minority groups the government focuses more on enabling them to enter university, rather than putting in further effort to achieve equality among the different groups. In short, the government puts little effort into inclusive education. It can be said that it may be

forced to implement these policies due to demographic changes being the primary driver rather than disability rights.

The Korean government continuously focused on the establishment of special schools. This may arise from the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 27(1), 'The duty of establishment of special classes'. However, although the law states its goal as inclusive education, in fact, this appears to be just a declaration.

Such policies as the Social Integration Admission Process allow every different type of school to aspire to the same goal: sending their students to a higher education institute. It may be that the government enforces this affirmative action rather than making the effort to provide inclusive education, because it permits students to achieve entry to the more highly ranked universities.

Although such policies are changing for both domestic and international reasons, there is no research on how students with disabilities themselves think about these policies of affirmative action or how they experience them. Furthermore, no investigation can be found about the positive and negative impacts of the Social Integration Admission Process on students with disabilities. It is also hard to find the voices of students with disabilities regarding current youth trends, or evidence of how their opinions differ or are similar to their non-disabled peers. Therefore, the key finding of this chapter is the lack of data on the voices and perspectives of students with disabilities. How are these students influenced by either traditional Korean culture such as Confucianism or current youth trends?

I summarised the result of the literature review across the three chapters, and presented the methods I have chosen, based on the literature review. In short, the Korean historical background and culture affect the current Korean education system, which focuses on the grade of the degree achieved in a competitive social atmosphere. Within this historical context, it is presumed that students with disabilities are not a primary focus of the system. These unique characteristics of Korean history and culture would be the key points for tackling the current issues around students with disabilities in the tertiary education sector.

Thus, the experiences of students with disabilities in the Korean context were explored through their own voices and my reflections. In the next two chapters, an analysis of the meritocracy-based Korean society, the use of affirmative action, and the cultural norms are explored through the interviews completed.

Chapter Six: Isolated students, meritocracy and affirmative action

6.1 Introduction

Critical Disability Studies aims to look at disability through the lens of the intersectionality of history, politics, and culture. Therefore, throughout chapters three to five, I explained Korean culture as a background and how Confucianism based meritocracy is a crucial value to them. Historical descriptions aimed to give insight to the readers on the impact on Korean society's Confucianism-based culture, and conceptualisation of equality, not equity. The review of the Korean context of education, showed how it is crucial to Korea, but clearly demonstrated the structured inequality among students with and without disabilities. The Special Admission System [changed to social integration admission process, explained in Chapter Four] was adopted to achieve equality among student groups and takes the central position of this issue.

Therefore, in this chapter, through the interviewees' voices, I demonstrate, how affirmative action in tertiary education in Korean context operates and how this policy affects meritocracy based Korean culture. The analysis from the interviews indicates that students with disabilities have not 'earned' but are 'given' their degrees as affirmative action affected the students with disabilities negatively. I summarise the impacts as *Isolated students*. In short, this policy conflicts with Korean culture, and results in a negative impact on students with disabilities. I have analysed the themes and collected the students' voices, and my findings were supported by the staff, and professionals interviewed, along with the findings from the literature. Although the policy of affirmative action contributed to Korean society's equality of opportunities for students with disabilities, there are numerous issues to be addressed in its implementation. It has unexpected effects on the Korean social problem of the demographic cliff. Affirmative action perpetrated students with disabilities to be stigmatised within a meritocracy based Korean society. In this chapter, I present my findings on the phenomenon of affirmative action.

6.2 How affirmative action operates in the Korean context

Since 1995, the Special Admission System has supported students with disabilities to enter universities. At first, due to the prevailing social discrimination, the government strove to operate this policy outside the universities' student quota; for universities, this means additional financial benefits for every offer they make to students with disabilities (because in the 1990s, there were numerous numbers of students in Korea domestically whereas the phenomenon has reversed currently). Furthermore, it positively reflected the universities' assessment by the government (Kim et al., 2009). However, it is not obligatory for universities to operate this policy. This is different from the Employment Quota System [explained in Chapter Four]. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) shared his opinion:

Because selecting and giving offers to students is at the discretion of universities, and Korea's universities are mainly private ones, if the government intervenes in this, universities will rebel against that policy. Korea's special admission system arose from benevolent or religious ideas rather than as a public policy.

Meanwhile, in the beginning, because of the lack of university support, students with disabilities faced numerous challenges in universities, which led to them protesting for their education rights, and these events contributed to society's perspectives towards persons with disabilities.

6.2.1 Exploring the Special Admission System

The Special Admission System, a form of affirmative action for entering universities, can be operated both within the university's student quota and outside of it (see Chapter Four, Table 9). As explained, currently this policy is integrated into the social integration admission process and the Special Admission System for students with disabilities is operated outside of –without affecting – the student quota. The interviews with professionals and staff indicated two different opinions of the Special Admission System for students with disabilities. Most of those interviewed agreed

that this policy is still necessary in Korea. However, two of the professionals admitted that it leads to further discrimination towards persons with disabilities, and that it cannot solve this problem which, they argued, is inherent in the Korean education system (*Ti, Seol-Hon*). I explained their points here.

When it was first introduced, it was not easy for students with disabilities to achieve offers for places to study at university due to cultural and societal biases and the resulting discrimination against them. This was the reason why the Special Admission System was implemented as a policy that would not affect the universities' student allowance, but would bring in more money for each additional student to whom they gave an offer.

6.2.1.1 The positive effects of the special admission system

This system has had many positive results. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) said:

Many students with disabilities have entered university. In the 2000s, it played a pivotal role in completely changing universities' sensibility to the human rights of students with disabilities. Students [with disabilities] entered universities and not in silence, but thought, 'Why do they give offers to us but not educate us properly? It's hard to gain access to the lecture theatre, there are no lifts, so I'm always late for my lectures. That's why I don't get as good grades as others, and it's hard to adapt to university.' So the students protested. Some of them were filing lawsuits. Some won their cases, and, through this process, arose a very important opportunity for Korean universities to start looking at people with disabilities differently. So, finally, the special admission system exerted great power in the sense that universities can only change when there are people who demand something from them.

As time passed, many students with disabilities entered universities, universities started to be equipped with fundamental facilities, and the protests and activity by students were reduced. However, because of domestic and international changes in

circumstances, the policy was misused in various ways. Many universities had been established, but demographic changes (the decreased birth rate) had an impact on the survival of universities, and some faced bankruptcy. Thus, for some universities, affirmative action, such as the Special Admission System, became meaningless to numerous universities because they were forced to give offers to whomever for their survival. This was also a reason for newly established university departments for students with autism and intellectual disabilities, as described in Chapter Three. However, the Special Admission System is still useful for students who aim to go to high-ranked universities, which would otherwise refuse to give offers to them. So, it is true to say that the Special Admission System has helped many students with disabilities who aim for high-ranked universities, as there are structural inequalities in the education system, as explored in Chapter Five.

6.2.1.2 The negative effects of the special admission system:

However, there is a negative side to this phenomenon, which is reflected in the Korean cultural phenomenon of academic elitism. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) argued that this problem would not be solved:

Because, for students who think, 'I want to go to a high-ranked university', this policy allows them to enter easily a more highly ranked university [than entry based on their grades would allow]. This gives rise to criticism that it is 'reverse discrimination' against students without disabilities.

Thus, due to the demographic shift, it may not be necessary for students with disabilities who apply for low-ranked universities to use the Special Admission System route. However, for them to apply for high-ranked universities, students and professionals agree that using the Special Admission System is still useful or even necessary. Students with disabilities who attend high-ranked universities know that, without this policy, they would not have received an offer from that university.

Woojae (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, attending high-ranked university, fourth-year) explained:

There is a person I know who entered another high-ranked university under the general selection route [and thus competed with students without disabilities], but this person's disability is the 6th level [the mildest level, described in chapter four]. Is it even possible [for students with disabilities] to compete [with peers without disabilities]? The admission level for the special admission system is much lower than for general selection, so I think that if the special admission system is abolished, maybe many students with disabilities will give up going to university.

Students with disabilities who think similarly to *Woojae* may not believe that they could have gained entry to the university level that they currently attend without the Special Admission System. However, the negative side to this is that this policy also can be seen to create a stigma towards students with disabilities, even among themselves.

Secondly, students with disabilities who entered universities through the Special Admission System were more likely to experience maladaptation. *Junjae* (hemiplegia, disability of brain lesion, acquired from brain tumour in high school, mild, third-year, male) said:

Since I came to a good university [through the special admission system], it seems like it's harder to study when everyone around me is doing better than me.

In short, universities give offers to students with disabilities whose grades are lower than those of the average students to whom they give offers, and, after giving those offers, there is no support for the students with disabilities. Furthermore, students still face stigma, which leads to a lack of confidence in their ability because they have entered through the affirmative action route in a meritocracy-based culture.

Therefore, although the government made some effort to operate affirmative action, discriminatory perspectives have still not substantially changed. For example, *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, attending high-ranked university, female, fourth-year) suffered from mental health problems of anxiety disorder, for which she is taking medication. This is

caused by the route via which she entered the university. She explained the process of her mental health difficulties.

I tried to hide this when I was in the first and second years of university, because, when I entered university, I realised that the admission route is a very sensitive issue. Especially because most of my peers in my university [high-ranked] studied really hard to gain an offer from this university, and the selection process is such a sensitive issue, which made me very reluctant to disclose my disability, and the fact that I got an offer through this selection [the Special Admission System]. A friend from my home town who is close to me [who does not have a disability and attends another high-ranked university, after three years of attempting entry], told me like, 'Hey, I heard that students with disabilities can cruise through university admissions'... If even a close friend who knows that I have a disability and says that aggressively, I assumed that other people's thoughts...

“All opportunity for individual evaluation and assessment of the candidate is lost”

Professionals such as *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) argued that Korea introduced reasonable provisions for university entrance examinations, such as the extension of time allowed. However, implementing the Special Admission System removed that effort that was being made to devise equitable assessment. As *Seol-Hon* argued:

In Korea, students with disabilities can apply [through the general selection route] for any department [subject] if they have the [necessary] competitiveness, and it would be a way through which they can assess their ability, but the special admission system blocks [their right to be assessed by a route that would measure their ability]. For example, in the case of blind people, it is difficult for them to do geometry, so they are enabled to compete equally by being given different problems of the same level that replace

geometry. In order to do that, they have to change the test questions to alternative questions. They have to make this kind of effort. But they have not developed those skills [to provide alternative questions]. Isn't this discrimination indeed against persons with disabilities?

So, instead of developing alternatives, some universities have just adopted the Special Admission System and although the government adopted special provisions for the university entrance exam, such as extending the time, it did not consider alternative ways of assessing the students' abilities.

This means that persons with disabilities are likely to remain in a minority position even though their opportunity for education has increased, and there is less likelihood of reducing the inequality gap between students with and without disabilities. In fact, the gap is likely to be wider due to other diverse variables, for example, the increasing demand for the private education market, along with the gap in socio-economic status, as seen in Chapter Five. Indeed, it is still difficult to find persons with disabilities in diverse social positions, making their voices even harder to be heard, three decades after the Special Admission System was adopted.

Universities' misuse this policy

Some universities post their offer for students with disabilities, such as stating a requirement for a specific impairment, such as a hearing impairment only. This results in students who might otherwise have applied being put off, as *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) noted:

When seeing the post, students with other types of disabilities would think, 'I can't apply'. But actually, they can apply, but they can't attend because the university is on a steep hill. That's how they structurally misuse this policy.

What *Ti* is highlighting here is that, even if technically a student with a physical disability achieved the admission level required to attend the university, the student would not physically be able to access the university due to its inaccessible location, and (presumed) lack of ramps, lifts and other facilities. Therefore, universities

structurally discriminate against students with disabilities: they may not want to adopt accessible environments; therefore, they may admit only students with specific types of disabilities, which will not involve them in making further efforts.

Woojin (physical disability, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, third-year) related her experience:

My university [one of the high-ranked] only operates the special admission system as part of the regular route. But if they operated this system on the regular route for students with disabilities, entry via the special admission system should also be judged by scores in the university entrance exam. However, because my university operated the special admission system only as part of a regular route, this means that students with disabilities have to also prepare high school records, a personal statement, interviews in addition to scores. [therefore, these students were subject to the standard admission procedure, as well as required to demonstrate their case for special selection. This means that students with disabilities hardly know which evaluation criteria or reference materials to prepare.]

Also it means that, if you want to apply for this university's special admission system as part of the regular route, you must turn down all offers from other universities even if you've achieved them through the early action. So, I really had a lot of conflicts of opinion with my mom while going through the entrance process. I felt that they [her university] were really trying not to select [students with disabilities]...

She finally succeeded in gaining an offer by insisting on going through the process of the regular route, but she thinks this process was discrimination against students with disabilities. Moreover, it also means that universities can eliminate students with disabilities if the students do not meet their criteria, even if the criteria discriminate against persons with disabilities. Thus the Special Admission System can, either inadvertently or intentionally, be used to discriminate against persons with

disabilities. *Byeol* (physical disability, spinal muscular atrophy, severe, male, fourth-year) had a similar experience to *Woojin's*. *Woojin* gained an offer in the end, but *Byeol* failed to get an offer from that university. In his university interview, he experienced discriminatory questions, such as: 'Can't you attend university independently?' or 'How often do you think you might be in a dangerous situation?'. These questions were based on his personal statement, which described a high school experience in which he was in danger, almost died, and had to be in hospital for several months. So, he had to prepare for university admission again, and the following year he received an offer from another [his current] university. One thing that should be pointed out about his experience is that, although he thought his experience could be classed as discrimination, he did not raise this officially.

Universities that operate the Special Admission System sometimes restrict eligibility for students with disabilities to apply to specific majors. Firstly, it was noted that universities are inclined to restrict the majors that students with disabilities can select to subjects such as social welfare, and rarely include subjects such as medicine or engineering. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) noted that:

...Another problem is that universities want to introduce a special admission system, which does not operate for science and engineering, or medicine, but for majors such as social welfare or special education. This means that universities operate with limited majors which do not require much adaptation for students with disabilities. What that means is that the range of majors is very narrow.

Many students with disabilities expressed the same opinions. For example, *Ri-Ahn* (Blind, Retinopathy of Prematurity, severe, female, third-year) reported that:

...I wanted to go to a department of Korean language education. But I realised that, in fact, there were a lot of universities that had a Korean language education department but didn't operate a special admission system. So, although there were many universities I wanted to go to, there were not many universities I could apply to.

What *Ri-Ahn* meant was that if she wanted to 'guarantee' her place, she should apply through the Special Admission System, but by doing so, she narrowed her choice of subjects down. She could have applied through the regular system [not through the special admission system] but would not be guaranteed a place because she would have had to compete with other candidates with or without disabilities and their scores in the entrance exam. So, she made a choice to apply for several different subjects at different universities in order to ensure a place. [The Special Admission System also requires student fees in order for them to apply through this route]. This was a choice faced by many students who applied via the Special Admission System, and most ended up choosing to study a subject which was not their first choice.

Students with disabilities, therefore, face barriers when they apply for universities due either to limited subjects being available to them or to the limited number of universities that implement the Special Admission System. This leads to a lack of professionals with disabilities in diverse areas. Further, some universities limited this affirmative action policy to students who have 'severe' disabilities, as defined by the legal levels. This is also discrimination.

This policy can also be misused by students whose disability level is defined as 'mild', to achieve more highly ranked universities. Universities need students with disabilities for reasons such as obtaining a positive evaluation from the government or avoiding bankruptcy, as discussed in Chapter Three. So, students with mild disabilities use this policy to get offers from higher-ranked universities.

However, although there are problems with this policy, as outlined, the majority of students with disabilities still think that it is helpful. In many cases, their scores were lower than those of students without disabilities, and this admission system enabled them to enter much more highly ranked universities than they would have otherwise been able to. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued that there are also students who strive to abuse the Special Admission System, as a *coupon* to enable them to get into the 'good' universities. As he argued:

Because there are people who use this policy as a coupon, scholars have argued that the quality of education will decrease, and people's perceptions will continue to get worse. That's why there is the objection to this policy. Now, the education market is distorted.

Secondly, students with disabilities believed that they cannot enter universities if there is no policy, such as the Special Admission System. The majority of professionals and staff also argued that there is still a need for this policy in South Korea. For example, they made the point that the number of students with disabilities is still far lower than the number of students without disabilities, so there is still a necessity to increase the number of those with disabilities who attend university in order to address the underlying discrimination in Korean society. As *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability) said:

I think we still should have a special admission system, because [I believe] the quantity guarantees the quality. So, we should have a lot more students with disabilities in universities. Currently, about 70% of students without disabilities [are] attending universities. But the number of students with disabilities is probably around 50% [at the point of the interview, it was 56.2%, according to the National Institute of Special Education (NISE) (2022), in 2023, rose to 57.6%], so yes, absolutely, a lot more students should graduate first, so that a few smart students can lead other students with disabilities.

As this professional argued, Korea also needs a few leaders who can raise public consciousness as well as that of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, some of the professionals believe, similarly to the students and other staff, that if there is no such policy as the Special Admission System, it will not be easy for students with disabilities to obtain offers from universities. There is also an argument for systematic change at the National Assembly every year (for example, in 2023 data), (Cowalknews Media Centre, 2023) and, as a result, some factors could be improved, such as reasonable facilities in university campuses, the introduction of more disability support centres, or increased numbers of students with disabilities' entering

the university of education. However, there is still a lack of sociological research happening. More precisely, there have been many debates on other sociological issues of inequality, but they have yet to be extended to disability and education policy. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) said:

Possibly, since social welfare research in Korea itself has been brought in from outside along with religion, disability policy characterises itself as beneficial and individual rather than being critical of society.

Thus, although the original aim of this policy was to overcome discrimination and to enable students with disabilities, who had fewer opportunities, to access higher education, as time has passed, the Special Admission System has allowed students with disabilities to obtain offers from more highly ranked universities than are appropriate for their abilities or grades. *Seol-Hon* (professor of special education, 32 years experience, male) argued that:

Ultimately, this system is discrimination, because it has the effect of jumping students to another level [without their own effort].

So, on the one hand, this policy gives unfair advantages to students with disabilities because they are prioritised above others, while, on the other, universities choose students with disabilities because they have to ensure that they recruit enough students to cover their costs, and, due to the decreasing student numbers, they are widening access to students who may not previously have been able to get the grades required to attend one of the more highly ranked universities. So, universities accept students with disabilities who only partially or do not fulfil the admissions criteria. The challenge is, then, how these students manage their adaptation once they are at university, and how their peers and tutors and others react to them. It appears from the research undertaken here that universities have not given any serious thought to how to accommodate students with disabilities to ensure that they flourish, even as they are giving offers to them. This is further evidenced by several other factors that have emerged from this research.

Except for one student, all interviewed students who entered universities via the special admission route did not think to apply via the general admission process rather than the special admission route because they considered that they were not sufficiently competitive compared to their peers without disabilities. This can be mainly due to their lower scores, as described in Chapter Four, and inequitable educational opportunities.

Woojae (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, fourth-year) reported that her university sent students with disabilities the options they had to study after they received the offer from the university, clearly indicating that these students were selected to make up numbers, rather than to enhance their opportunities for study. When taking into consideration that each major has a different admission level as well as competition level, it seems that the university's policy for students with disabilities can be seen as discriminatory because these kinds of policies regard students with disabilities as *free riders*. Moreover, despite the simpler criteria for admission under the special selection process, universities rarely offer any reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities, meaning that they are more likely to accept students with disabilities who do not need this crucial support from the university.

Students may not be able to fight against the universities prior to their entry since it might impact their offers. However, after entering, even though students with disabilities could fight against discrimination, the majority of them seem not to have the will, because their universities gave them offers. For example, in *Byeol's* (physical disability, spinal muscular atrophy, severe, male, fourth-year) case, although he thought that his failure to achieve an offer could be because of his disability, he gave up escalating this legally. Professionals argued that this is a 'cultural issue'. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

I think that disability identity and the political and economic position of students with disabilities in South Korea are at a very low level. First of all, even if students with disabilities have received a lot of discrimination and things like that up until high school, they have a

culture in which all those things are erased once they enter university. That's why disclosing one's own disability or raising one's voice, saying, 'I have a disability, and I have to fight for this because this is a problem', is very rare.

According to my analysis, the Special Admission System results in students with disabilities not wanting to complain about their university by allowing them to access more highly ranked universities. So, it is a social structural problem. Furthermore, the admissions issue is something that is now in the past for them because they are already university students. In other words, again, there is a social structural problem in this process of entering universities. *Won* (visual disability, severe, male, former chairman of the national tertiary students with disabilities' union, fourth-year) said in his interview:

Well, to be honest, everyone asked me, 'You are someone who has already entered university. Why do you want to raise this issue which is already over for you?'

In this way, students may prefer to erase their past experiences, even when desperate and discriminatory, because they have already entered universities. When asking students about their personal thoughts on the [ongoing] issue of Disabled Persons' Organisation' rallies for their rights, the answers showed clearly that they are divided. A few students with disabilities answered that they have some thoughts about joining a rally (*Ain, Woojin, Nams, Won*). However, the majority of students with disabilities answered that they would not have the courage to join (for example, *Misun, Byeol, Yeoseon*) or that they are not against them but still had no thoughts of joining (for example, *Woojae, Jae-hyeon*). Some of them had negative attitudes towards action in case it lowers public opinion of them (for example, *Jinho, Hyun*). Lastly, a few students had no opinion about it (for example, *Junjae*). A few also argued that they do not think they are the same as persons with disabilities who hold rallies in public (for example, *Dawon*). *Ti's* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) analysis of the reason was:

First of all, students with disabilities wear the armour once they become students in universities. They think, 'Once I get the tertiary

degree and my academic background, I won't be discriminated against any more.' So, while the students are at university, no matter to what extent there are no ramps or lifts, they will not raise this as an issue. In other words, even if you have been strictly subjected to a lot of discrimination and such things until primary, middle or high school, Korea has a culture in which all of those things are erased once you enter university. That's why the students themselves reluctantly disclose their disabilities and remain at the lowest level of raising their voices.

Ti had a disability almost from birth and entered his university through a special admission system. His analysis is, therefore, convincing since he experienced this whole process for himself. Another possible reason for the lack of disability identity is the current Korean youth trends. All students are busy trying to achieve better grades and get better careers, so that makes it difficult to have opportunities for a group disability identity (as described in Chapter Three). *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

This isn't just a problem for students with disabilities, these days. Korean university students are obsessed with getting a job. So, for example, they don't involve themselves in unions, so they don't have a chance to form a group [disability] identity.

6.2.2 The effects of the misuse phenomenon

From here, I explored the phenomena of misuse of the Special Admission System through the interviewee's voices.

6.2.2.1 The phenomena of misuse of the Special Admission System and limited support

The result from implementing the special Admission System, occurs many side effects and there are plenty of issues with the Special Admission System itself. Firstly, this policy resulted in the universities' disproportion phenomenon. As *Won*

(visual disability, severe, male, former chairman of the national tertiary students with disabilities' union, fourth-year) stated:

In the case of students with disabilities in universities, 'the bias phenomenon' is quite severe. It seems like students with disabilities are concentrated only in certain universities. As a result, these universities continue to receive awards, while the other universities continue to fall to the level of underachievement. Yes, I think this structure continues to repeat itself.

Among my interviewees, there were five students with disabilities who entered their universities by general selection, but those universities were not highly ranked. For students who aim to attend high-ranked universities, the Special Admission System is essential. For those who do not attend high-ranked universities, this route may not be necessary. This indicates that this policy should be revised in terms of its aims and targets. Most professionals agreed that South Korea's Special Admission System has failed.

Secondly, I would like to address the issue of students who acquire disabilities while attending university. If the university has a Special Admission System policy, prospective students with disabilities can enter that university through that policy and the university would support those students with disabilities who enter through that route. However, because of the policy, students who acquire disabilities while attending universities can be overlooked. Thus, information about disability support should be available to everyone.

Thirdly, many universities have a disability support centre. However, the result of the interview explained that the failure of advertisement. The disability support centres may not have to advertise their existence to current students who may not already be aware of the centre's existence. However, *Ri-Ahn* (blind, Retinopathy of Prematurity, severe, female, third-year), who entered via the Special Admission System, said that she did not know there was a disability support centre at her university. *Ri-Ahn's* case indicates that universities should advertise their disability support centre to the general public in advance of students' admission. This is also

crucial for students who acquire disabilities while attending university. I further explore *Ri-Ahn's* case in the next chapter.

Countries have different policies for declaring personal information. For example, in the UK, when students receive offers from universities, they are sent a questionnaire which asks several things, such as their gender, race, marital status, and disability, and it is up to them whether to declare their disability or not. There is a simple way to confirm their disability, such as proof by means of a doctor's letter, and there is an additional and separate consultation process to ascertain their needs. Another East Asian country also has disability registration system, which is based on a medical professional's opinion, but services are not limited to specific levels and types of disability. *Jinwoo* (professor of special education, 12 years experience, physical disability, male) said:

The same process goes for that country. But they all have exceptions. To put it simply, there is disability certification and disability level. Then, there are things that you can benefit from because you have a disability certificate and level. But in terms of assistants, these should meet personal needs, so the consultation should be carried out on an individual basis, separately from the [legally defined] disability level.

However, in South Korea, there is only one way to declare disability, enrolment on the national disability system, and for university students to show this official document to the disability support centre.

Although there are a few exceptions, such as foreign students with disabilities for whom it is hard to be enrolled in the Korean legal system. It is not common for Korean universities to admit students with disabilities who are not legally enrolled on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act register. Normally, there is no separate consultation process for assessment, and support for disability commonly depends on disability documents. So, students who want support from the disability support centre should enrol in the national disability register and show their certificates. Individual assessments by universities are not yet available. The support available

often depends on the [legal] level of disability, whether it is severe or mild, and on the universities' policies or budgets (previously reviewed in Chapter Four).

Thus, students who acquire disabilities, and/or who are not enrolled on the national disability system (both those who do not want to enrol and those who cannot enrol because their disability is not on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act list) cannot access support because of this limited allowance and/or lack of advertisement. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

Since there is a special admission system, universities aim to only care about the students with disabilities who have entered their universities through this system... If there were no special admission system for students with disabilities, the university's perspectives on disability would have widened further, and they may have considered students with acquired disabilities.

Ti's argument requires us to think about what we are missing in the current system. This leads us to consider not only universities missing the point about students with acquired disabilities but also those who are struggling with types of disabilities that are not legally admitted and who cannot receive support from universities. One of my interviewees, *Yeoseon* (not registered, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, female, fourth-year) acquired disability after entering university, possibly due to feelings of loss of purpose, and additional events which made her symptoms worse. After disclosing her disability, she was excluded from her union [her case will be dealt with in Chapter Seven]. Since *Yeoseon* refused to register on the national disability system, she could not be the target of support from the university. She is continuously making an effort to overcome her disability but only by herself and with her family, not assisted by any support from the university.

Lastly, *Junghyun* (autism, Asperger Syndrome, male, severe, second-year) entered the university not through the Special Admission System but through the general route. *Junghyun's* mother said that she did not receive any information regarding the support available to her son from the university, and finally, *Junghyun* failed in three subjects. This is his mother's argument:

Junghyun attended a community college. During the first semester of his first year, there were a lot of non-face-to-face classes [due to the COVID-19 pandemic], and he received almost no support from his university at that time. He did well in high school, so I believed he was doing well in university as well. But university was very different from high school. Nobody cared for him, and he got three Fs, and he had a bachelor's warning. So, in the second semester, I spoke to the disability centre [in his university]. After I had told them this, they decided to get assistant support for him.

But it didn't work well because, due to the system, when my son applied, a student assistant also had to apply, but there were no student assistants applying [at that time].

Only if there was a student who wanted to be an assistant would the centre be able to match him with an assistant. There were similar accounts from several students. Students often receive requests from their university's disability support centre, which is seeking assistants by themselves. [for example, *Dawon*; disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, second-year and *Ri-Ahn*; blind, Retinopathy of Prematurity, severe, female, third-year). This demonstrates that the range of support offered by universities is very limited.

6.2.2.2 How does misled policy negatively affect students' disabled/disability identity?

Isolated students with disabilities

Various factors and the public's attitudes towards students with disabilities allowed them to be isolated. I explain the phenomenon of passing [hiding] disability along with isolation.

6.2.3 Analysis of the grounded reason for the contribution to the isolation of students with disabilities

I determined that the reason for the isolation of students from the misuse of affirmative action is the culture of academic elitism and a segregated environment before the students enter universities. From here, I explain the reasons along with the phenomenon.

6.2.3.1 Academic elitism and students with disabilities using affirmative action

A total of five of those interviewed (for example, Woojae and Misun) said that they did not think about their disability and its status in any great detail until they entered university. Possibly, this is because of the relatively small and restricted areas they moved around in, and of being around only a limited number of peers and teachers in schools. However, once they entered university, what they experienced led them to become more aware of their disability, as *Woojae* (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, fourth-year) spoke about:

I don't think that I encountered any difficulties because of my disability until entering university. Well, even in high school, teachers liked me if I got good grades. So, my disability was not much of a problem, and I only had limited information about how I could apply for universities through [the Special Admission System] ...

But.. it was in my first year, after entering university, I realised that my hearing ability was not as good as I had thought... [I realised] the schools were a controlled environment, there was a teacher in charge, and all my friends were sitting in a row during class... I realised that I was rarely exposed to a particularly noisy environment or a place where many people surrounded me. So, I didn't know my hearing ability... But after coming to university, I had the welcome session for freshmen, and, after that, I attended a party... I realised that I couldn't recognise people's voices. The place was like a pub, but there were a lot of voices and music sounds, which were loud, and I couldn't hear... People just played drinking games. I joined in,

but even if they explained the rules, I couldn't understand at all. But if I didn't join in the games, I would feel a bit alienated... I think I spent my first year feeling a little bit like this, 'I can't hear that much'...

Like *Woojae*, after entering university, for those whose actual level of disability is different from how they have perceived it, when they realise this from their experiences of interaction with others, it often leads to serious mental health problems for them. This seems to be particularly acute in the transition from school to university. As *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year) said:

*Because I was always the only person with a disability... while growing up... I thought it was a bit strange that I have a disability, and I always had a somewhat negative perception [of it]. [But] I didn't think much of it until I applied for the special admission system and entered university. I just thought that 'the admission level is a bit lower than the general admission, but they would let me in'. I did not think much about it, but when I went to the orientation session that was **only** for students with disabilities, I definitely realised that I am different from others.*

It is interesting that, before entering university, most of those interviewed had not had much experience with others who have disabilities. This lack of experience in seeing and interacting with persons with disabilities and the gap between their actual disability status and their original perception of that led to mental health problems. It may also emphasise the fact that, in Korean society, persons with disabilities are quite segregated.

6.2.3.2 The effects of a segregated environment before entering university

As discussed, even students who had been in an inclusive education setting in mainstream schools also struggled with their identity as a person with disabilities. *Ain* (disability of brain lesion, wheelchair user, severe, female, fourth-year) talked about her own feelings and experiences. She had received a partially inclusive education;

she had been in some special classes in mainstream school, as required by the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, until high school (described in Chapter Five). For example, when she had classes such as mathematics, she had classes in general classes with students without disabilities, but when in physical education class, she had been in a special class. She shared her confused thoughts about her disability identity.

*University is a good environment, which offers the opportunity to have friends both with and without disabilities, but I think it creates more confusion about my identity. In a group of students with disabilities, I feel a sense of belonging... But, at the same time, I don't feel that too... Sometimes it just makes me feel more confused... When I meet friends without disabilities, I feel somewhat lonely because I have more fundamental concerns than others have, derived from my clearly disclosed disability... When my friends consider the careers they want that fit their aptitude, or the salary they want... I have to think about what kinds of work I **can** do! That's why it's hard to talk about careers with friends who do not have disabilities...*

Meanwhile, um... to be blunt, friends with disabilities [in my university] are mostly graduated from special schools. I feel that I have to be careful when I talk to them and have to make an effort not to make mistakes with the words I use. So, because of those things, I feel confusion about my identity... Even though I have a disability, I don't have a complete sense of belonging to a disability group. But there is also a gap which is not filled even among friends without disabilities.

The key theme of *Ain's* interview is the gap between students in mainstream schools and those in special schools, and this clearly shows how segregated environments affect both students with and without disabilities negatively when they eventually are in the same environment together. Several issues can be seen here. Firstly, again, there is the segregated education environment issue: special schools versus

mainstream schools. Secondly, the more significant issue is that both students from special schools and students in mainstream schools aim to enter university, but those in mainstream schools do not have reasonable accommodation for their learning during their classes and exams. Students such as *Woojae* (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, fourth-year) or *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year) mentioned that they had to request reasonable accommodation for themselves and that there were no guidelines on available. Thirdly, the experience of segregation, either from other students with disabilities or from students without disabilities, deprives students with disabilities of opportunities to make connections with different groups of students, to accept their own disability, and to create disabled and disability identities. For *Ain*, this gap has led to confusion about her identity, a lack of sense of belonging in both groups. What has made her confused is the different perceptions of the friends who graduated from special schools and those who graduated from mainstream schools, and/or of friends without disabilities. This identity issue was not only a challenge for *Ain*. Most of the students with disabilities talked to me about having feelings similar to hers. Students continuously struggle with conflicts of identity between those created in a segregated environment and those created in the environment they are currently involved in. Moreover, the sudden integrated environment also affects students without disabilities negatively. *Seol-Hon* (professor of special education, 32 years experience, male) recounted:

The university that I work for matches students with and without disabilities for living in dormitories and studying. The problem is that the matched students without disabilities end up taking a leave of absence or even dropping out because of their peers with disabilities. At first, I didn't know why that was happening. However, it is the case that, while living with peers with disabilities, they received various requests from the students with disabilities' parents. 'He can't do these things, so you need to help him', 'Please take care of him'.... And many other students were observing this situation. The only way to get out of this is to take a leave of absence or drop out.

In the end, the reason for this problem arises because the students with disabilities are technically unable to form a relationship with the matched students. If they stay together, students with disabilities need to let their peers without disabilities know how they can best support them in order to be able to live together. [For example, they might suggest that they ask them]: 'What do you need? Tell me when you need my help'. Likewise, the students with disabilities [might ask]: 'I want you to help me with this but at other times, I don't need help.' This [kind of communication] helps both students. But, they don't have these kinds of skills.

Similarly, several interviewees said that when they disclose their disability to (mostly) friends without disabilities, they can see their peers' embarrassment, and they cannot find an appropriate reaction to these students. These negative experiences of disclosing their disabilities have often led them not to disclose their disabilities further, and also to feel stressed and anxious, or even to have more serious mental health conditions. At the same time, for students without disabilities, the lack of experience in seeing persons with disabilities makes it difficult for them to get along with their peers with disabilities. Connecting to this point, another limitation of this policy is the perception that it makes it easy to get offers from universities. *Paul* (professor in social welfare, 25 years experience, male, physical disability) said this about the policy's limitations:

Students with disabilities got into universities quite easily through the policy of the special admission system. Most of these students did not have the experience of fierce competition. Those characteristics do not change even when they come to university.

All these policy limitations create challenges. Thus, this is a social problem.

6.2.4 Following results

The following results showed that students' negative disabled identity has various negative impacts on them. I explore the phenomenon that makes students not raise

their voices. Connected to this, a weird phenomenon that students without disabilities join disability unions and raise their voices instead of their disabled peers is addressed.

6.2.4.1 Negative impact on students' disabled identity

The noticeable finding of this analysis is the negative impact of the Special Admission System on students' identity. I have striven to represent students' thoughts about their disability in relation to the issue of disclosing disability. Obviously, some students have no choice but to disclose their disability, such as wheelchair users, and Darling (2022) supported this. Disability activists usually have severe disability. Some students, for example, *Misun*, who wears a prosthetic arm, can disguise this to the public who think she is *non-disabled*. This is regarded as passing disability. However, this can create stress for those students and may even lead them to have long-term mental health conditions. Including *Misun*, many students (*Woojae, Misun, Dawon, Ain, Junjae, Nams*) confessed that they are struggling with mental health issues because of their disabilities. *Misun* said that she had experienced several occasions when she disclosed her disability to others, and she had to face an uncomfortable atmosphere, which led her not to disclose it on future occasions.

The relationship becomes a bit different when I disclose my disability ... First of all, before I confess my disability, I can make jokes [to peers] and I show my real personality, but after the moment I disclose my disability... So, here is an example. I was in a squash union, and I had no choice but to disclose my disability, because I had to serve with one hand, while holding a ball with the other hand. But right after disclosing, I received cautious looks. It happens every time when I disclose my disability to the public, which has made me become defensive. Because I got that kind of attention, I don't try to get any closer, and I'm a little anxious for no reason.

So, reactions from the public led her to have mental health problems and to pass her disability. Those reactions from others may come from a lack of experience of seeing persons with disabilities as described above. Thus, a segregated environment such

as in education, in the whole or parts of a setting, could cause these uncomfortable reactions, because seeing students with disabilities may be unfamiliar to them.

Another reason for her intention to pass her disability is connected to her social situation caused by the fact that she entered her high-ranked university through the Special Admission System. Thus, affirmative action is at the root of the problem. She said:

I agree that I came to this university with lower grades than other students, and actually, even then, I didn't understand why the interviewers chose me, because I didn't think that I performed that well in the interview. But I tried to be honest all the time, so, maybe, compared to other interviewees, that might have appealed to the interviewers.

I asked her:

Then, it sounds like, depending on whom you are talking to, the degree of openness is likely to be varied.

She continued:

Yes. I think I can disclose my disability to those who already know about my disability such as interviewers, since they already reviewed my personal statement and Curriculum vitae. I think I can be more open because I have nothing to hide.

So, for *Misun*, the issue of disclosing disability depends on whom she is talking to, and I conclude that students with disabilities' actions are clearly connected to the Korean public's perspectives of and reactions towards persons with disabilities. The biggest reason for her to hide her disability is a social one, the fact that she entered a high-ranked university using the Special Admission System.

Pieta (professor of special education, 31 years experience, female) analysed the reason for trying to pass disability as 'the lack of disability identity of the students'. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) and *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical

disability) also expressed the same opinion, and agreed that this lack of disability identity is due to negative societal perspectives.

Seeking support and disclosing disability issues

One of the common issues students talked about was disclosing their disability when they needed to seek support from the disability support centres. One of the main supports they need is assistants. The issues of confidentiality and disabled identity emerge. When students are supported by assistants, their disability has to be disclosed to the public, including their peers without disabilities. Many interviewees argued that these specific circumstances caused them serious stress, even mental distress. *Woojae* (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, fourth-year) explained that it was the reason that she avoided seeking assistant support until her third year at university:

I know the assistant system is a good system, and there is also support from professionals such as stenographers, not just support from students without disabilities... But the biggest barrier for me was, if I wanted to apply for assistants, then my disability would be open. I have to tell other students that 'this person is my assistant, and helping me because of my limitations due to my disability'... I have to admit my limitations caused by my disability so that I can seek some support. This was the most challenging, rather than applying for the [assistants] system itself. I would also have to report my disability to professors, and explain why I need assistants, tell everyone everywhere... It was very burdensome and challenging, and was the biggest barrier for me.

These psychological issues *caused Woojae* to have a mental health condition, which necessitated her taking medication, which also had a negative impact on her study.

The difference between students with severe and mild disability

Meanwhile, students who have a mild degree of disability, such as *Jinho* (hearing disability, otitis media, mild, male, fourth-year) and *Hyun* (acquired a physical disability during military service, physical disability, mild, male, fourth-year) showed a

tendency to be open about their disabilities in public. I deduced that this was because they experienced (relatively) fewer episodes of discrimination and were somewhat satisfied by the compensation from the government compared to the limitations they had to experience due to their disabilities. As *Hyun* said:

I think firstly, personality is an absolute factor [in accepting disability], and the second factor is what the disability is and how severe or mild. Because I don't think I could have accepted my disability so readily if I had acquired paraplegia.

Jinho (hearing disability, otitis media, mild, male, fourth-year) also shared his experience:

For example, I got an exemption [from military service] because of a disability. All of my peers are going into the military, so we talked about that a little bit, and everyone said, 'It would be better to go into the military if I had a disability.' Some of them asked me, 'You're stronger than me, so why do you get an exemption [from military service]?' But, the government didn't accept me. I duly underwent a medical examination and was granted an exemption. I told them, 'Why are you asking me about that?'

So, students with mild disabilities are relatively confident and unashamed about disclosing disability. The above two students' cases are reflected in Korean society's perspectives towards persons with disabilities and corresponding discrimination towards persons with disabilities.

Joining and operating a disability union

Accurate official data about the university students' union activities is not available. However, professionals and the staff of disability support centres argued that these activities are decreasing along with the decreasing feature of overall students' union activities. Briefly, this is caused by social factors such as increasingly demanding credentials, which lead to a lack of time for leisure and other diverse student experiences. Instead of having a variety of unions, universities now have several unions which focus on careers, especially since the end of the pandemic (Chung,

2023). In order to prevent the extinction of unions, currently many universities support union activities by providing funds, which has not happened in the past. Many students with disabilities argued that it is not easy to join a union, because of barriers of, for example, physical inaccessibility and relationships with peers. *Ain* (disability of brain lesion, wheelchair user, severe, female, fourth-year) explained:

Since I have a mobility issue, if I want to join a union, I have to ask the union in advance. 'I am in such a situation. Is it OK to join?' Asking, in itself, made me feel like my existence needed to be approved by others...

So, she created a union with other students with disabilities. Another issue, again, stems from the gap between students who attended special schools and those who attended mainstream schools before entering university. The students from special schools are challenged when they are with peers without disabilities, and they have difficulties communicating with them, which indicates that physical barriers are not the only ones that exist. This basically comes from the problem of segregated education policy.

In the disability unions, it is worth noting that most students with disabilities have physical, hearing, or visual disabilities, but students with types of mental disability are unlikely to be included. These students have no communities from which to receive help. *Taesun* (mental disability, schizophrenia, severe, male, first-year) said:

There can't be a union like that for students with mental disability. You may know why I said that this wouldn't exist. Because all [these students] are trying not to disclose their disability.

This student meant that because of the practice of passing mental disability, due to social bias against them in Korean society, it is not possible for students with mental disability to gather together for self-help. It is possible to find the reasons for this from Korean society and culture.

What is the cause of stigma towards students with disabilities?

As described in Chapter Three, Korean society is grounded in meritocracy, especially from the *Choson* dynasty. Because it is possible to upgrade one's social

status through public examination, people may think that any other routes, even if these are aiming for equity, are unfair. *Sungjin* (director of internet press on disability, 22 years experience, male) interpreted it like this:

It is related to meritocracy or a fairness culture, more frankly and accurately speaking, a distorted form of fairness in Korean society today.

Thus, Korean society is not likely to accept affirmative action as a means of achieving equality. Many other groups of minorities who are the target of the Special Admission System also suffer from the stigma of this ‘*cruising*’ issue. However, as explained in Chapter Four, only persons with disabilities are the target of the Employment Quota System, which extends affirmative action after the Special Admission System. This clearly shows the prevalent and historical discrimination in Korean society, and I will analyse the reasons for this from the grounded cultural norms in detail in the next chapter.

6.2.4.2 Lack of activism of students with disabilities

Some students with disabilities strive to establish their disability identity, by joining, or operating, disability unions, and becoming involved in activities such as removing barriers on and around the campus. They may also study related materials and have discussions as a part of the union activity. However, the interesting current issue regarding disability unions is that the majority of members of disability unions are students without disabilities, and students with disabilities have uncomfortable feelings about this. More than half of the interviewed students referred to this. Apparently, students without disabilities can join the disability union, but the phenomenon of them taking the main roles in the union seems to be problematic.

Woojin (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, third-year) stated:

The problem is that it is not easy to find students with disabilities... I want to find more students [with disabilities], but this is not well networked in my university... We are currently accepting

applications to join, but there are no students [with disabilities] who apply.

Woojin continued to explain the challenges associated with the issue of lack of activism:

...I really don't have any friends with disabilities... I expected that once I entered university, I would meet a lot of students with disabilities. However, it did not happen. I thought there would be communities, and that's why I joined the disability union, because I thought that it would have many students with disabilities. I don't know where everyone has gone.

I asked:

Then, is the union [you are involved in] a mix of students with and without disabilities?

Woojin replied:

Yes... but actually, it's embarrassing even to say that they're 'mixed'. Because only I and one other person have been identified as students with disabilities, and the rest are all students without disabilities...

What is the reason for this? Are there specific reasons for this? Does this mean that the majority of young people with disabilities are segregated in Korean society? Or are they all choosing to pass? What other reasons might exist for this invisibility?

6.2.4.3 The involvement of students without disabilities in disability unions

Predictably, a total of four interviewed students with disabilities expressed negative perceptions of this phenomenon. *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year) noted:

I felt a bit of reluctance to join the union. I have a bit of an uncomfortable feeling about a student without disabilities being a representative of the human rights of students with disabilities. I feel it's like a man who speaks for women's rights.

I said:

I don't understand why it has happened like that. But some students say that it may be [because students without disabilities want] to add one more sentence in their Curriculum Vitae.

She replied:

I exactly felt that way too. It is nice to do something together, but I still thought that the representative should be a student with disabilities.

I think this may be one of the reasons why students with disabilities are reluctant to join the disability unions, as *Misun* said. However, I think this may not be the underlying reason. *Won* (visual disability, severe, male, former chairman of the national tertiary students with disabilities' union, fourth-year) expressed his opinion:

My university's Disability Rights Committee is also [currently] chaired by a student without disabilities. One of the reasons why the committee could not appoint a student with disabilities as chairperson is... there is a tendency [among the students with disabilities] to say, 'I don't want to do it...' I asked students with disabilities first, but they said they had too much work to do to act as the chairperson. Also, they feel that it's difficult to communicate with students without disabilities...

Thus, those who raise disability rights are not students with disabilities themselves but their peers without disabilities. Moreover, students without disabilities may aim to join a disability union not just based on charity but for other selfish reasons. Firstly, it may come about because they want to find something that will lead to them being able to apply to be assistants. Through this route, students' assistants can earn

volunteer points or scholarships from their university. *Sumin* (staff of disability support centre, 13 years experience, female) said about her university's case:

The reason why students without disabilities join the disability union is because of the way the assistant system works. If you join the union, you will be able to work [as an assistant]. I know that there are students who come in to find this connection. It could be that it is a good opportunity for work experience, rather than having any concerns about the human rights of persons with disabilities...

Secondly, it might be advantageous for their future career. When they apply for companies, they will be able to add a sentence about their volunteering experiences. For example, they can demonstrate that they have a warm heart from their Curriculum Vitae.

All the students agreed that Korean society has discrimination against persons with disabilities. Furthermore, many students hold pessimistic views that the public in Korea will not change their attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and some are sceptical towards the public. *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year) said:

There has always been hatred. When I was young, my friends said, 'Hey, you look like a person with disabilities!' not because I exposed my prosthetic arm, but when I acted somewhat stupid. I always told my friends not to speak like that, but they didn't understand why I told them not to [since she wore a protistic arm, the majority of her friends did not notice she has a disability]. But one of the reasons I didn't want to reveal my disability was that my closest friends were also talking like that to me. I mean, just imagine if I say, 'Hey, you look like a Korean' as a joke... imagine, when they act stupid, they would feel bad...

As described in Chapter Three, this perspective reflects the historical and cultural context but also may be linked to current youth trends. I will explain further links to youth trends in the next chapter.

6.5 Discussion

The key theme around tertiary students with disabilities can be summarised as two conflicting values: meritocracy and affirmative action. Universities misuse affirmative action to overcome their financial difficulties and have numerous negative impacts on its implementation. As explained in Chapter Three, although those located in the capital city are less likely to have financial issues than those that are not, a number of universities in Korea are currently facing a financial crisis (Korean Council for University Education, 2023), and using affirmative action to overcome their financial crisis.

It is clear that the Special Admission System has contributed to an increase in the number of students with disabilities who access tertiary education, as evidenced by data from the Ministry of Education. Reports show how, over the past 28 years, the number of students with disabilities who entered universities increased, as described in Chapter Four.

The negative side effect of the Special Admission System is also addressed by the participants in their interviews, and they describe the narrowing target of the provision of service. Although there are broader ranges of disability admitted in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act or the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies For Persons With Disabilities Act, which are also regarded as basic laws, than in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act (as described in Chapter Four), most universities in South Korea only accept legally enrolled persons with disabilities according to Welfare of Disabled Persons Act criteria. Services are provided according to these documents. Thus, it is necessary to consider the validity of this difference. Regarding this issue, the issue of overlooking acquired disabilities while attending the university arises. Universities that have a small number of students with disabilities are allowed to support them through the student centre, based on the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 30. However, their main focus is those enrolled students with disabilities who entered university through the Special Admission System.

Korean Council for University Education (2019) pointed out that, due to the Korean focus on entering high-ranked universities, after entering those universities, students

can experience sudden environmental change and a loss of motivation, which leads to psychological and mental difficulties. This exactly corresponds to *Yeoseon* (mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, not registered, female, fourth-year)'s statement. Korean Council for University Education (2019) indicated that universities still have insufficient numbers of counsellors, because of a shortfall in budget and priorities, which leads to a low quality of counselling, eventually leading to students' deteriorating mental health. Indeed, from *Yeoseon's* interview, it is possible to see how restricted the current support system in Korea is. *Yeoseon's* difficulties are explored in depth in the following chapter.

All these problems may be caused by flawed policy. However, as seen in the argument of Lumb and Burke (2019), policies reflect culture, and people create culture. Korea's situation may indicate a lack of agreement in the policy-making process.

In terms of the issue of affirmative action: widening participation, Teichler (2008) asserted that the approach to diversity in education has clearly varied features drawn from countries such as European countries and the US. Every country should adopt policies that are customised to its own culture, history, and development stages. Thus, we can find the reason for the failure of the Special Admission System in Korean culture. As Teichler (2008) claimed, European countries approached changes following an increase in the numbers of universities, but if society fails to level out, the gap between social groups could become wider. This exactly shows the reality of Korean society. Teichler (2008) also argued that exterior factors influence the result of enrolment in tertiary education. In the case of Korea, a number of universities were established with the aim of the universalisation of tertiary education, but the falling birth rate and other environmental factors gave rise to Korean universities targeting international students, as well as students with autism and intellectual disabilities, for their survival.

Furthermore, universities in Korea, as everywhere, are ranked according to status. These scores are based on the universities' admission levels, as described in Chapter Five. Selection of students is based on diverse aspects as briefly introduced in chapters three and five; this is the university's own decision. Meanwhile, as explained in Chapter Three, the government has forced universities when they strive

to raise their tuition (The Higher Education Act, Article 11), which has caused universities a financial crisis further, along with the decreasing birth rate and other government policies.

As seen in Chapter Four, the Ministry of Education announced the operation of the Social Integration Admission Process (Ministry of Education, 2021) in the newly revised law of the Higher Education Act, Article 34 (8). This meant a governmental policy that tried to enforce affirmative action. This arose from a bottom-up approach by the union of students with disabilities and Solidarity against Disability Discrimination (Cho, 2021). Data started to be more open and available to the general public (Higher Education in KOREA, 2023). As described earlier in Chapter Four, according to open data from a few universities, the majority of the students who received offers to universities through the Social Integration Admission Process fall into the categories of workers in certain companies, who graduated from named specialist high schools, such as technical high schools, and students who live in rural and/or fishing villages and who are relatively likely to have fewer opportunities for learning.

This means that, according to the currently available data, the majority of students entering through this process are not students with disabilities, although this was one of the stated aims of the policy: that universities should encourage diverse students who have fewer opportunities for learning and not target specific groups. Therefore, given the static nature of the data on the admission of students with disabilities through the Special Admission System over the past almost 30 years, we need to question why this is still so. Why did those universities that mainly operate this system fail to persuade other universities that are reluctant to operate the Special Admission System about the benefits of giving offers to students with disabilities? This also indicates that the government did not actively make efforts, despite the fact that there are some passive incentives, such as universities could receive positive governmental evaluations for giving offers to students with disabilities (Kim et al., 2009, p.26). No penalty or alternative methods have been devised for universities that have no Special Admission System policies, and this may indicate indifference at the government level.

There were two government reports in relation to this issue in 2002 and 2009. Thus, more than 15 years ago. When summarising these reports, Yoon and Kim (2002) argued that this policy sub-standardises students with disabilities, and even weakens their efforts to study. Secondly, Yoon and Kim (2002) criticised the fact that students who attend special schools can also apply to universities through the Special Admission System, which can contribute to the weakening of integrated education. The segregated environment in education affects both students with and without disabilities. For students with disabilities, it leads to a kind of culture shock and difficulties in having relationships. Furthermore, it impacts the university as well as causes students' maladaptation and segregation of persons in disadvantaged positions. Such policies as the Special Admission System or quota-levy system make the majority of persons with disabilities unwilling to protest against society, and lead to polarisation between persons with mild disabilities and those who have severe disabilities, or those who have higher socio-economic status, and between different disability types and so on. Jay (researcher, former director of Disabled Persons' Organisations, 3 years experience, male, physical disability) stressed that *'without protest against discrimination, nothing can be changed'*.

For students with disabilities, earning a tertiary degree seems to be the way to escape the stigma from society, and achieve being included in the highest group in Korean society. However, analysis shows that their hope seems to remain only as a hope. The Special Admission System has failed to change persons with disabilities' social position and social perspectives towards them. The same process continues: affirmative action weakens their effort and will to achieve a tertiary degree.

Kim et al., (2009) reported that the number of students with disabilities who were entering universities without using the Special Admission System decreased. However, as explained, it is necessary to think of universities divided into high-ranked and low-ranked universities. As seen in the interviews, for those who attend high-ranked universities, the Special Admission System plays a pivotal role in how the students achieve admission. I discussed the issues divided into several topics: challenges students face, discrimination towards students, and, in the end, how these phenomena influence students negatively by not raising their voices, they internalise discrimination.

Challenges students face

After the implementation of this policy for almost 30 years, the professionals overwhelmingly agreed that a number of problems are still unresolved. These arise from factors such as the failure to develop an examination system for students with disabilities that is equitable to that for students without disabilities (Kim et al., 2009, p. 317). Yoon and Kim (2002) claimed that many students with disabilities drop out. Precise numbers cannot be calculated, since the government does not collect the drop-out statistics of students with disabilities. One of the reasons for this dropping out is that they enter a higher level of university than is appropriate for their abilities, and they lose confidence in their ability to study. None of my participants decided to drop out because of this reason. However, one interviewed student, *Junjae* (disability of brain lesion, hemiplegia, brain tumour, male, mild, third-year), stated that he found difficulties in following the study at his university because he could get an offer from a higher level of university than his ability.

Students who enter high-ranked universities through forms of affirmative action experience stigma from those universities (Lee and Chae, 2013). Furthermore, a complete change of environment can cause students to suffer from *culture shock* (Yoon and Kim, 2002, p.29). This may lead to stigma for all students with disabilities, including those who do not enter via the Special Admission System route. Kim et al., (2009) later put forward a similar argument. They point out that lack of support for students means not only limited information for them but also discrimination.

Discrimination

The point of restriction of applicants' types of disabilities may explain why universities focus on students with autism and intellectual disabilities, as these types of disabilities are less likely to require further adaptations. Kim et al. (2009) 15 years ago warned that this policy could be misused as a means of filling the student admission quota without the need to provide extensive accessible facilities if universities restrict applicants with disabilities, for example, those with hearing disabilities.

Kim et al., (2009, p.346) argued the necessity of abolishing restrictive criteria for applicants with disability. However, still, this has not happened as the report could

only make recommendations. Regarding the issue of discrimination in the selection criteria, the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 1, clearly states that the law forbids any discrimination against persons with disabilities. Therefore, the denial of reasonable accommodation and restrictions on the eligibility criteria of applicants are discriminatory in themselves (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2013). At the launch of the policy, there were rallies against discrimination by students with disabilities, and there were even some lawsuits about reasonable accommodation in the university. Two cases were partially won in 2001 and 2007 through civil litigation and, in 2008 and 2014, the plaintiffs prevailed through the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act (Kim, 2018). However, these cases are all there have been, as it is very rare for students with disabilities to make their voices heard.

Decreased feature of raising voices

I saw the reasons for this decreased feature of raising voices as being broadly two. The first was that universities have adapted their facilities much better as time has passed and may have recognised that students are not so passive anymore. The second possible reason is due to structural changes. As time has passed, students with disabilities have been able to enter universities that have much lower admission levels thanks to the policy that allows universities to give offers to these students outside their admission quota. As described in *Woojae's* case, students have less confidence that they would receive offers from universities without this policy. This policy weakens students with disabilities' ability and competitiveness. Thus, the reason why these students do not fight against discrimination is a structural issue.

An interesting point addressed by participants was that students without disabilities are the majority of members of the disability unions. This phenomenon can be linked to the charity model of disability, seeing the person with disabilities as a victim or someone to be pitied (Retief and Letšosa, 2018). It further revealed the background of Korean culture.

Internalised discrimination

At this point, we need to consider why current students with disabilities do not fight against discrimination. From the analysis of the students' interviews, I realised that a few students with disabilities are thankful for the policy since it allowed them to reach more highly ranked universities than their grades would otherwise allow. Therefore, some mentioned that they were reluctant to protest against Korean society because they wanted to be involved in the Korean community in the future.

Literature argued that there are conflicts of values in terms of *fair access*, grounded in the concept of intersectionality versus *meritocracy* (Burke, 2020; p.4). Lumb and Burke (2019) asserted that the concept of recognition is a culturally formed concept, which is demonstrated by governmental policy. Thus, Korean education policy is grounded in Korean culture.

As described in Chapter Three, meritocracy has been a driving force in transforming Korea into a modern society. In this process, it is possible to ignore minor values. After some decades, Korea successfully achieved economic success, grounded in the concept of meritocracy, but because of this, it is likely to fail to reach a social agreement for the adoption of affirmative action and how to progress these policies as its social norms. As a result, this Special Admission System, transplanted without enough consideration, leads to students with disabilities being stigmatised, having a negative disabled identity, and passing their disability, weakening their disability identity. It could also be demonstrated that, given the static nature of the number of students with disabilities gaining admission through the Special Admission System, one of the failures of this policy has been its ability to change biases and attitudes towards those students. However, since the adoption of this policy was totally at the universities' discretion, there was no legal responsibility or duty in relation to their selection procedure, as *Won* (visual disability, severe, male, former chairman of national tertiary students with disabilities' union, fourth-year) criticised in the interview. Thus, after decades, selection still showed bias, and this in itself demonstrates a policy failure.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I analysed students' voices around the phenomenon of affirmative action. I reflected on my own perspectives along with the opinions of the staff and professionals. In short, affirmative action in Korea may not be a policy fully aimed at compensation, but rather a policy merely aimed at concealing social discrimination, as the Special Admission System seems to weaken persons with disabilities' competitiveness. Since universities have not thought about infrastructure and did not invest in students with disabilities, and their ability to raise the status of students with disabilities through giving offers via the Special Admission System has also been eliminated. I strove to find reasons for this phenomenon in Korean society and culture, which is further demonstrated in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Cultural norms

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the phenomenon of the special admission system and affirmative action for university admission in South Korea in the Korean context. I presented both the positive and negative impacts on students/persons with disabilities, but my conclusion focused on the negative impacts. I concluded that the policy is aimed at equality, not equity, and policy intersects with Korean culture and negatively affects both students with disabilities' disabled identity and disability identity.

In this chapter, I explore the grounded reasons for this phenomenon from cultural norms, which allowed the failure of the Special Admission System and the conflict of values between meritocracy and affirmative action to achieve equity in social groups. Broadly, I explain the cultural norms divided into four. I summarised factors that explain the cultural norms as Confucianism, which led Korean society to focus on tertiary degrees, and conformity culture, grounded in Confucianism. Confucianism also had a huge impact on Korean society through compressed modernization, a method to gain success in developing the economy under unstable political circumstances, which stresses the norm of ableism. Lastly, I explore current cultural norms linked to Korean youth's trends. Finally, I address that these factors impacted the failure of cultural diversity. I further explore the intersectionality between Korean society/culture and students/persons with disabilities. In these intersectional circumstances, I explained how these factors negatively affect students/persons with disabilities' disabled/disability identity in operating affirmative action.

7.2 Cultural norms

From here, I explored how the impact of cultural norms was addressed to students with disabilities through interviewees' voices. First, I explore Confucianism and its impact. After that, I explained the compressed modernisation process of Korea and its impact.

7.2.1 Confucianism

As explored in Chapter Three, the embedded cultural norm in Korean society is deeply rooted in Confucianism. In Confucianism, one of the key values of women's role is supporting men and raising children well. In South Korea, the responsibility of raising a child with disabilities still falls on the mother. Therefore, care responsibility in Korean society is usually regarded as a mother's. East Asian countries are largely based on Confucianism, which is linked to the belief in community values of collectivism, which must not be destroyed, and, in the past, when women gave a birth to a child with disabilities, the responsibility for caring was that of the women. As described in Chapter Two, *Byeol* (physical disability, spinal muscular atrophy, severe, male, fourth-year) attends university and is helped by his mother. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued on this issue:

Why is it still a woman/mother's responsibility to raise a child with a disability in South Korea? Why does Korean society praise the mother when she goes to university with a child with disabilities? Other countries wouldn't understand it. Why should a mother accompany her child? Why can't the student be supported by personal assistants? The answer can be found in Confucianism culture.

Pieta (professor in special education, 31 years experience, female) also stressed that the important factors contributing to the lack of disabled identity were Confucianism and the Special Admission System.

Parents' impact

When analysing students' interviews, it was hard to confirm the main reasons for their negative disabled identity and the inherited discrimination. However, when considering Korean society, it appears that the influence of parents could be one of the crucial reasons behind children's issues with identity.

Linking with the concept of Confucianism, parents' impact is huge in South Korea. Most parents have sympathy for their children's disabilities, as my parents did. They

feel guilty, and this may be one of the reasons that parents support their children by helping them to achieve higher academic degrees, because they believe that achieving a higher degree can set their children free from society's discrimination. The history of resistance against discrimination and the striving for equal opportunity in education in South Korea has usually been the role of parents, not students themselves. I also believe that this stems from Confucianism. Raising children well would be one of the key principles of Confucianism, which may affect this behaviour of parents.

I do not know how parents and children with disabilities experience Korean society from an early age, and aim to be 'normal', because my disability began in my 20s. I only saw it when I had physiotherapy in the rehabilitation department in secondary and tertiary hospitals, and that is all that I watched and experienced. Therefore, I relied on interviews with my participants to investigate their different contexts.

When I analysed the interviews, it appeared that Korean parents focus on their children's medical treatments or therapies, and this is because they perhaps believe that their children can be cured in the end. I also met peers with acquired disabilities in the hospital, and the majority of them gave up their studies. The difference between them and me is the fact that I returned to my university just one year after acquiring my disability, alongside ongoing medical treatments, whereas most students who acquire disability find it hard to return to their normal lives.

I think this is not just because of the problem of parents' influence but because it is grounded in Korean society, which is geared towards the *able* norm. I further discussed this ableism in Korean culture later in this chapter. Korean parents are also affected by Korean culture. More interestingly, as addressed in Chapter Six, Korean policies related to entering higher education help and allow those students to get into more highly ranked universities than their grades would normally allow, which is what their parents hope for.

Although many students without disabilities also do not think much about choosing majors, relating to the impact of Confucianism, students with disabilities are more inclined to choose a major in social welfare. Professionals interviewed claimed that this is due to their parents' or teachers' intervention, which affects them negatively,

deprives them of their own ideas and leads to them only focusing on university and treatment. As *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

Before students with disabilities explored their own interests, their parents researched everything instead of their children. The only thing that they have to do is to get physio in hospitals... In other words, in South Korea, persons with disabilities have had taken away too many opportunities and the time to think about what they desire. Parents and special education teachers consider everything instead of them. As a result, when asking students, 'Which major do you want to study?' there is still the answer 'Social welfare'... The criterion for choosing a major is not their own wish, it's their parents' [and teachers'] wish. Of course, students without disabilities are the same, but students with disabilities seem to have more of this tendency.

As a result of this aspect of Korean culture, students with disabilities are likely to have passive attitudes and are less likely to have social skills, so they may face more challenges after entering universities, as can be seen from the interviews.

Professionals' opinions of those interviewed can be summarised in two ways. On the one hand, as introduced in Chapter Six, the majority numbers of professionals argued that students need help until society has more visible numbers of students/persons with disabilities. These professionals believed that there are still not enough students with disabilities in Korean society, and that more students with disabilities could make changes. So, until more students with disabilities make their voices heard in public, and they have the power to change current policies, affirmative action should continue. These professionals also argued that, after the students enter universities, they need activities to help build their self-esteem and positive disabled identity and disability identity, such as lectures or group activities. *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability) noted:

[I believe] In this society, there is no one who learns by themselves any negative prejudice or stereotypes of people with disabilities being society's problem. This is inevitable because the mass media enforces a certain sense of identity centred on persons without disabilities... So, this identity now relies on being gathered in a group... The goal should be to have a positive disabled identity as a person with disabilities, such as one who can question, 'Why have I become like persons without disabilities?' or 'Why do I have to be discriminated against?'. But it will not happen by just gathering in a group. Parents mostly have so-called 'normalising identities'. That's why I don't expect much from the students' parents. I think it is possible only from conscious persons with disabilities.

On the other hand, a few professionals such as *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) or *Jay* (researcher, former director of Disabled Persons' Organisations, 3 years experience, male, physical disability) stressed that this structure in Korean society will continuously weaken students/persons with disabilities' disability identity unless the students realise the discriminatory social aspects by themselves and strive to fight against those by themselves.

The invisible impact of Confucianism

Moreover, Confucianism affects Korean society greatly. *Gye-hyun* (teacher, 7 years experience, female, hearing disability) argued:

Teachers with disabilities have their disability disclosed, without their agreement, to parents of students and other teachers, so they are shunned or suffer from prejudice from persons without disabilities. South Korea has two different teaching unions, the union of teachers and the union of teachers with disabilities. This weird phenomenon shows that persons with disabilities still cannot get along with persons without disabilities.

Gye-hyun's words directly show the discrimination towards persons with disabilities. Reflecting on my personal experience and thoughts, all these matters can be attributed to Korean society's lack of diversity. Historically and culturally, persons with disabilities in Korean society lack the experience of admitting their disability as being one of diversity. Therefore, when they are attacked because of their disability, they are inclined to identify themselves with their disability and discriminate themselves according to society's perspectives. Thus, these cultural norms may contribute to young people with disabilities passing their disability.

The heavy focus on high-ranked universities

The importance that Korea places on high-ranked universities affects not only students without disabilities, as we have seen in Chapter Five, but also students with disabilities and their parents. Interviewed students who attended high-ranked universities shared their pre-university experiences. For example, *Woojin* (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, third-year) recounted:

For me, aiming for a university is not a special thing but natural. However, yes... my mother told me that 'Because you have a disability, you have to get a good grade. Otherwise, others can disregard you.'

Most students with disabilities who attend high-ranked universities recounted similar experiences [for example, *Woojae, Misun, Byeol*]. We can see that, although for Korean students, aiming for university is not an extraordinary experience, it is, perhaps, regarded as somewhat more essential for students with disabilities, because of their disability and the social discrimination they will face. Thus, for students with disabilities, the high-ranked universities can be a shield against social discrimination.

This phenomenon can have a negative impact since, after entering universities, students continuously study hard to ensure a good career, as we have seen in Chapter Five, and this can lead to a lack of disability identity as well as negative

disabled identity, and therefore, it deprives their opportunities to have positive identity.

7.2.2 Confucianism and Conformity

One of the key characteristics of Confucianism is Conformity. Historically, it has continuously affected Korea hugely, both positively and negatively. As described in Chapter Three, it is one of the key components of Korean economic growth (Chang, 2017). At the same time, it negatively affected the public to have ableism perspectives, not to have perspectives of cultural diversity. Finally, its social atmosphere had a negative impact on persons/students with disabilities themselves.

7.2.2.1 Compressed modernisation and its impact

As explained in Chapter Three, South Korea has experienced compressed modernisation. It used to be one of the poorest countries but has become one of the richest countries. To achieve the aim of escaping poverty, Korean people may have to sacrifice a lot of important values, such as in the way they ignore minorities, including persons with disabilities, and in the way they focus on cities. The compressed modernisation allowed the widening of the gaps between regions and people's socio-economic status. We need to see how this developmental process impacts Koreans' perspectives towards students with disabilities. Put differently, *compressed modernisation* can be said to be *polarised modernisation*, which will now be described in more detail.

The gap in development between different areas of the population

To be specific, I found in my research that the way in which Korean culture views persons with disabilities differs according to the areas in which they live. There was a gap in the perception of those in the city and those in rural areas. It can be said that different regions have different degrees of development and modernisation. A few interviewed students and professionals who have their own disabilities shared their experiences of visiting rural areas. In those regions, they had to experience people staring at their disabilities or asking them about their disabilities rudely and blatantly. I have had similar experiences.

This may be linked to the extent to which those areas have barriers, most of which may be physical barriers. The interviewed students with disabilities also shared similar experiences. Those who live in newly developed cities said that they often see persons with disabilities, and they are possibly less likely to experience barriers. Those who live in relatively small cities/ rural areas said that residents often stare at them, ask about their disabilities and show sympathy towards them. Maybe barriers in small cities/ rural areas prevent persons with disabilities from being in those areas, and so residents do not get used to seeing them.

As previously discussed in Chapter Five, South Korea has a huge gap in socio-economic status; between rich and poor, and people who live in metropolitan areas and rural areas. Because there was such intensive development of the country over just a couple of decades, the focus was skewed towards metropolitan areas and conglomerates. I believe that, as a result, the perceptions towards persons with disabilities show huge differences between different regions.

Thus, in exploring the reason for attitudes towards persons with disabilities in South Korea, and in interpreting interviewees' opinions, I conclude that they were affected by Confucianism, but the greatest influencing factor seems to be the differences in the degree of development, such as those between cities and rural areas, which can be attributed to compressed modernisation. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

They successfully escaped from poverty and now they are [living in] one of the rich countries, but it does not mean that Korea's citizens reach a high level.

Sungjin (director of internet press on disability, male, 22 years experience) insisted that the Korean structural problem that affects persons with disabilities can be improved and will be resolved naturally to a certain extent when South Korean society is levelled up. He argued:

So, for example, some countries seem to have better integrated education than we have. What makes that possible? I think that it is possible, as a whole social system, to go up one level above that which we [Korea] are experiencing now, and this kind of happened

naturally. In other words, this has happened because a certain system throughout society has been upgraded to the next level, and there is room for this to go along with it. That's it. Persons with disabilities are just human beings, and education for them is not an isolated entity, but part of the entire education system... They are supposed to be able to live with the help of various support services in the community, but the overall support service is so backward that persons with disabilities cannot overcome it and climb up. This is not only true for persons with disabilities. For example, the reason why inclusive education is not possible is that... [I think] inclusive education cannot be possible if the entire education [system] is just focusing on entrance exams and scores... So, what I am saying is that I have a pessimistic view... the disability movement is working very hard in Korean society, and a lot of changes have been made, but, currently, overall, social changes have slowed down a lot. Then... what I am concerned about is how much it is possible for persons with disabilities to be able to break through this.

As *Sungjin* emphasised, Korean citizenship may need to be improved further as people admit their limitations. So, as he explained, when South Korean society has levelled up in a more positive direction, then it may be able to look into the issue of education for persons with disabilities. However, this seems to be yet to come.

Rapid social changes, but students/persons with disabilities remain a minority

Currently, as explained in Chapter Three, in South Korea, a small number of students with autism and intellectual disabilities go to university. As described, there are universities that are developing specific departments for those students with autism and intellectual disabilities. Numerous numbers of universities compared to number of students allow these students to get offers from tertiary institutions. *Junghyun* (autism, Asperger Syndrome, male, severe, second-year)'s mother explained the reason why she sent *Junghyun* to university:

Well... university life is also one of the experiences... So that's why I sent him to university.

However, this also suggests that persons with disabilities in South Korea do not have many places to go or in which to be educated. *Suhyun* (autism, Asperger Syndrome, male, severe, third-year) also attends an alternative form of university, which is established for only those who have autism and intellectual disabilities. As already discussed in Chapter Five, for students with disabilities who graduate from high schools, there are not many places for them to go on to. One of the reasons for entering university is to gain further experience, whatever the experiences may be. This may not be a 'tertiary education' in some aspects, as discussed in Chapter Three. However, as discussed, universities take on this role instead of society or the government. This also may be connected with universities' financial crisis. Thus, universities aim to enter the untapped market. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) said:

The biggest problem in Korea right now is that the school-age population is decreasing. Now, the demographic cliff has reached university students ... In the past, the competition rate among students without disabilities was high. So, universities didn't have to pay attention to students with disabilities. So, there was a demand to accept students with disabilities through the special admission system, but now the reverse phenomenon is happening. Universities have no other choice but to select students regardless of disabilities. Since most universities now do not have [a fixed] admission level, people whose so-called ability for learning cannot be verified are also accepted unconditionally. So, I believe that the special admission system will be meaningless in the [near] future except for at a few universities. So, that means that the idea that students with disabilities can go to university through the special admission system may now be diluted. What is the problem now?

If you [the universities] give offers to them, [you have to] take responsibility. So, if they select a student with a disability as a student at their university, they need to make sure that the [selected] student attains certain abilities required by the department and graduates.

In the past, we raised questions such as ‘Why are you not giving offers to students with disabilities?’ or ‘Why are you discriminating in entrance exams?’ But now we have to ask whether equal education rights should be guaranteed to students with and without disabilities [across all types of disabilities] by universities. It has changed in this way.

Thus, demographic change allowed universities to accept students with disabilities and now we should insist that they guarantee equal opportunities. At this point, at least two issues are addressed. Firstly, are these curriculums that certain universities provide for students with autism and intellectual disabilities can be viewed as ‘higher education’? Secondly, do universities support these students for their education rights or use these students’ and parents’ hope for their selfish goals? We can find the answer from unchanged persons with disabilities’ social status along with limited support from the government and universities.

Limited support from the government and universities

As we have seen in Chapter Four, support for students with disabilities when studying or moving around the campus is mainly provided by students without disabilities from the same university. All the Korean universities use this system, with the addition of a few professional support, such as stenographers and sign language interpreters. This system has some positive aspects, as, at the tertiary level, lectures are not easy for all personal assistants to understand, such as for note-taking support, so using student assistants may be positive for supporting students with disabilities. However, the way in which universities operate this system is not satisfactory. Firstly, many interviewed students with disabilities said that their universities could not provide assistants on time, before the beginning of the semester, or in some cases, the disability support centre required students to seek assistants for themselves, as *Dawon* (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, second-year) highlighted:

I submitted a request for assistants to help me move around on campus to the disability support centre around mid-February [semester begins in March]. Suddenly, in early March [when the first

semester started], the centre contacted me and told me that they couldn't find an assistant student [to support me]. They said, 'If you are not in a very bad situation, you may find the way by yourself.' But, at that time, I didn't have an electric wheelchair, and I was not safe, and I needed someone to protect me from accidents.

She would have been in a safer situation if someone had been able to accompany her when she moved around on campus. This would be the role of an assistant. I should ask, what is the disability centre's role then? Furthermore, students who enter universities through the Special Admission System are sometimes unable to get information about whether their university has a disability support centre. *Ri-Ahn* (blind, Retinopathy Of Prematurity, severe, female, third-year), did not even know there was a disability support centre at her university until the second semester of her second year.

I didn't have any contact from the disability centre for a year and a half. So, I had no idea that there was such a thing as an assistant system for moving around and learning. Then, one day, the centre contacted me. They were currently lending assistive technology devices for a certain period. However, I already have one! [She obtained them from a community welfare centre.] So, I have to say that this is a bit impractical. I didn't realise that that kind of support existed until that time.

Moreover, even after *Ri-Ahn* learned about the existence of the centre, she still struggled with enrolling in lectures, searching for and matching with student assistants, provide mobility and learning support, which was similar to *Dawon's* experience. From students' interviews, I can clearly see that the support provided by universities is still irregular and unsystematic.

From the opinions of students, it appeared that this has resulted from two circumstances. Firstly, universities, especially those that have a small number of students with disabilities [up to ten students], would not normally provide disability support centres, but the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act specifies that student centres should provide support for them. As a result, a number of

universities did not have a disability support centre. [This has been abolished in 2023 by revision of the act]. Secondly, there is a lack of advertising the centres to students by the universities.

Unsystematic and insufficient support

In part as a response to the lack of systematic support, several students tried to get informal support from their peers. For some students, this was a voluntary agreement because, at first, they did not want to disclose their disability to their peer group or the public. However, *Woojae* (hearing disability, unknown cause, severe, female, fourth-year) tried this approach, and found it very challenging:

So, at first, I asked my close friend, who agreed. We took lectures together. So, I applied for her as an assistant. [So it became a 'formal support' arrangement, and her friend was paid by a work scholarship from her university. It was possible for her to pretend that she was just taking classes with a close friend.] My friend took notes, shared her notes, and received a work scholarship from the university. But in reality, it was not that simple... Every student has a different writing style, and I have to ask my friends about it every semester. They probably didn't want to do it very much, and...the quality of friends' writing was a bit uneven ...So, later, I applied for a stenographer from the disability centre...[which was] much more helpful because you can see scripts continuously in real-time.

In addition to the unpredictable support offered by universities, the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts. The existing gaps in provision for students with disabilities became even wider, as most lectures were online. The prospective student assistants did not attend campus as frequently as before the pandemic. There were also challenges for students when they needed reasonable accommodation such as time adjustment, enlarged print documents, or provision for assessments. So, *Ri-Ahn* (blind, Retinopathy Of Prematurity, severe, female, third-year) said that she had to contact professors directly and ask for special adjustments for assessments. *Junghyun's* mother (autism, Asperger Syndrome, severe, male, second-year) reported that her son's university only provided support for students

with a limited range, and autism was not a type that the university provided move support, therefore *Junghyun* could not get the support. While autism is included as a legal disability type in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, the range of support offered is varied and at the discretion of the university. There is no directive from the government on what kind of support is offered.

Therefore, being helped by one's parents was commonly reported by students. As briefly introduced, for example, *Byeol* (physical disability, spinal muscular atrophy, severe, male, fourth-year), has to attend his university with his mother because of toileting and similar issues. Generally, the main reason for students' parents having to stay at universities was that it is difficult to seek help from fellow students for reasons of embarrassment or lack of dignity. Parents, therefore, step in to help with these issues, but this brings a whole range of other issues and implications for the parents and their children. These include such factors as stigma and shame at having one's parent(s) present at university, loss of earnings for the parents, and parents' inability to live their own lives and needing to care for their child all the time. Thus, it may not be desirable for both students and parents.

Some students are helped by personal assistants, funded by the Ministry Of Health and Welfare, as a separate service from the universities, but a personal assistant is usually not available all the time, which means that the parents may still feel that they have to be there to provide support and assistance. In some cases, staff of disability support centre support this work. As *Jin* (staff of disability support centre, female, 12 years experience) pointed out:

In fact, personal assistants do carry out mobility support or other support, such as toileting, for students with disabilities. However, if there is a situation such as when the personal assistant cannot be in the lecture theatre, but the student suddenly needs something, such as toileting, then in those cases, we [staff] have to support the students... That's the part we currently play [along with our own tasks]. Also, it happens with the note-taking issue.

So, although personal assistants' roles in supporting students are quite clear, because of the insufficient numbers of them, students still require assistance from

other areas, such as staff of disability support centres or students' families. I presented the issue of the lack of governmental support in the discussion section in detail.

Limited authority of disability support centres

Most universities' disability support centres do not have significant authority in their university for supporting students. Most centres are under the charge of a specific professor, they do not have independent status. Therefore, most of their functions remain as providing assistive devices or assistant students, merely based on students' national disability registration and their levels of disability. No further assessment is provided by the centres across all universities. This is one of the reasons why students who are not registered under the terms of the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act cannot access support from their universities. As described in Chapter Four, those whose disability is only defined in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, not the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, are not eligible for receiving support.

Sumin (staff of disability support centre, female, 13 years experience) mentioned that a few universities hold meetings on a regular base with students with disabilities, the chairperson only, and the university president. However, this is not part of the system in all universities and is likely to be a just formality. For example, *Dawon* (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, female, severe, second-year), shared an experience she had, of being refused permission to join a field trip because of her disability, by a professor in charge of the event. She reported this issue to the disability support centre, but the centre replied that they were unable to help her. It was unclear whether they were unwilling to do so or did not have the power to intervene. This issue is not about just one uncooperative professor, but the amount of or lack of communication and training that the university administration is giving, or not giving, its staff. Furthermore, it is about the lack of courage or will that the centres or university administration are showing in tackling these issues.

In some universities, some buildings cannot be made accessible because of the *protection of cultural heritage*. When facing such cases, students with disabilities are concerned about how far they should argue their rights under the Korean disability

acts. Students reported that the support system for students with disabilities is generally insufficient and segregated. Some students also argued that they felt the support from the university was just perfunctory. For example, *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year) shared her experience of when she visited the disability support centre:

I went there to borrow a one-handed keyboard, but I thought that they had a low level of understanding about disability. Because... they just gave me the English keyboard. I felt their service was just a formality... I asked them, 'Can't you give me a Korean keyboard?' But they replied, 'Do you need a Korean keyboard?' It is shameful...

Students' experience shows that services in universities are arbitrary, and nobody at the university seems to have any worries about this at all.

Limited information

All these cases of ignorance about students/persons with disabilities that are prevalent in Korean society are linked to students with disabilities and their parents having very limited information. Indeed, it is difficult to find systematic information for children with disabilities. *Woojin* (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, third-year) said:

I think it is very important how prepared parents are when raising a child with disabilities, and I think society has a very big role to play in that. So, if a lot of information is available to children with disabilities, or there are already schools that children with disabilities can attend, and there are good entrance examination systems, or there are many persons with disabilities actually participating in society when parents give birth to a child with disabilities, I think that this child will be able to grow up with a well-established [disabled] /disability identity, but I often think that such information is lacking [in Korea] now.

As a result, parents have a vague fear, especially those who had no idea about disabilities, and so did my mom and dad. If the parents are not confident and have no information, I think it would be difficult for them to provide an environment that could provide their children with an emotional foundation...

The two mothers of students with Asperger Syndrome who were interviewed argued the same, and talked about the lack of information available when they were faced with their child's disability.

7.2.3 Historical and political norms

In this section, I explained how historical and political norms affect the public towards persons with disabilities. Because of the Korean peninsula's unstable truce status, all Korean men must enter military service except those who have disabilities. Korea's truce status has also given rise to ableism. This issue is also linked to East Asia's cultural background and connection with eugenics. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) explained:

Think about how eugenics is regarded in Korea. We should add a Confucianism perspective to it, which is damaging our 'community's values'. The concept of 'disability' threatens our 'family' blood.

So, because they tainted our community and our blood and made our families unhappy, the responsibility of women became more important. You [women] gave birth to a child with a disability, and the blame was put on the individual [woman]. This is what has happened in Korea, which is slightly different from Western eugenics.

Ti stressed that Korea lacks diversity, and the reason for this is reflected in Korean history.

You know, Korea is rather unique. Since it has now started to be recognised as a developed country, it has a slightly paternalistic view of disability, and internal discrimination is severe...The

individualistic perspective is very strong, but, in reality, it is not individualistic. Technology has advanced a lot, but it does not have much effect on persons with disabilities. So, Korea has two faces. In some respects, it is very advanced, in other respects it is very backwards. Other countries may not be able to understand this well... It is related to the characteristics of Korea's development, and there is a need to consider the history of persons with disabilities in Korea.

Basically, there has been a small influx of highly educated persons with disabilities into the disability community and society... Students with disabilities in universities refuse to have a disability identity or solidarity, and the disability itself does not give them much pride in their identity. Rather, it is only used for concealing discrimination [for example, the use of 'disability' for entering university]. So, looking back historically, this is not an individual issue but an issue of Korean history and culture.

So, in Korea, the growth in education has made class mobility possible, and this is being seen in persons with disabilities. But, as with persons without disabilities, it was believed that a high degree of class mobility was possible; but, in reality, there was not much class movement – it just concealed discrimination from society.

South Korea has a diverse intersectionality, and, along with cultural and historical/political norms, its unstable status has a huge effect on its people. In relation to this, *Ti* continued to talk about the Korean peninsula's political status and how that affects general perspectives of persons with disabilities.

One other variable is that the nation is not stable. There is always a threat of war, and there is the fact that every man has to go into the military and then this becomes a major obstacle to the human rights of persons with disabilities. Because persons with disabilities are an obstacle for a country facing war, because in war, persons with

disabilities are factors that contribute to [the risk of] losing the war, we have to abandon them. Because this constantly harasses our community, it would not be possible to argue for the right to education for persons with disabilities to develop [in a state of ceasefire without unification]. So, the discrimination of ableism will not disappear until persons with disabilities go into military service.

Further, as *Jinho* (hearing disability, otitis media, mild, male, fourth-year) remarked and as described in Chapter Six, discrimination varied according to the degree of disability. Those who have severe levels of disability are more likely to be discriminated against by Korean society compared to those who have mild disability.

7.2.4 Current Korean youth trends

The last factor of societal norms I discuss is the current youth trends in South Korea. I briefly introduced current Korean youth trends in Chapter Three and presented the interviews with youth with disabilities in Chapter Six. When I interviewed students with disabilities, most interviewees argued that they do not want to, or have no courage to, be involved in disability rallies, and, moreover, some of them have no interest, as we saw in Chapter Six. So, what is an accurate interpretation of youth? In chapter five, I introduced the newly made term '*hell Choson*', which represents current youth's thoughts towards their country, but no research about youth's thoughts with disabilities regarding it. Throughout the interview with students, I realised that the tendency of youth with disabilities is closely connected to their non-disabled peers and may lead them to 'not protest against Korean society'. As *Hyun* (acquired a physical disability during military service, physical disability, mild, male, fourth-year) argued:

.... No matter how much we educate the public about the improvement of disability awareness... honestly, I don't think there could be any improvement further [in Korean society]. It's really the same in this status.

Dawon (disability of brain lesion, unknown cause, wheelchair user, severe, female, second-year) also appealed the same answer.

I have no such hope [to Korean society]. People say 'the awareness will be improved'. Of course, there could be improvement...maybe.. as I go down that path, there might be fewer people staring at me; of course, this would happen. However, I don't particularly believe that awareness and the policy will improve.

Thus, students have sceptical views towards Korean society, which can be one of the reasons why they are not involved in rallies. Secondly, *Sungjin* (director of internet press on disability, male, 22 years experience) insisted that this may be connected to a specific Korean phenomenon in society.

So, as you may know, this may not be a unique problem limited to South Korea, but it is still a part of current Korean society.. Like.. fairness, meritocracy, and then something else, especially some characteristics of the young generation..... so to speak, universities now seem to be job-preparation institutions, yes, so these tendencies are much stronger than in the past...

As explored in Chapter Six, *Junho* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability) expressed the same thought. *Sumin* (staff of disability support centre, female, 13 years experience) voiced a similar opinion that this phenomenon is the same for students with and without disabilities.

Students say, 'I have to study to get a certificate. I have to study, but I don't want to spend my time here, volunteering.' There is no interest in any other things such as field trips because there is no incentive... nothing.

This reality that the students, professionals and staff talked about is linked to young people's current situation and their beliefs. This may be connected to the phenomenon of students with disabilities not protesting. It shows slightly different features between students with and without disabilities. For an explanation of the interesting phenomenon of students *without disabilities* taking the main roles in disability unions, as discussed in Chapter Six, presumably for the job application. Meanwhile, students with disabilities, as previously introduced in Chapter Six, have

the same reasons not to actively join activities as non-disabled peers as they are 'busy preparing for the future'. However, furthermore, it could be linked to their [negative] disabled identity, which was affected by society, therefore the aim of *levelling up*. As discussed in Chapter Six, they believe higher tertiary degrees help them to escape society's discrimination. Thus, I concluded that both student groups may have the same reasons, but further different reasons for students with disabilities appeared to trend. For a reason for this phenomenon of students with disabilities, *Paul* (physical disability, professor in social welfare, 25 years experience, male) further stressed that 'This is a current youth trend' and the major influence is from parents. These unique characteristics need to be explored further in the future.

7.3 The failure of cultural diversity

The stigma towards persons with disabilities and mental disability

Connecting to the point of conformity culture, both originated from Confucianism in Korean culture and its recent political and historical background from the unstable status of the Korean peninsula, which contributes to its culture not accepting cultural diversity in its society. For example, in some cases, Korean society's stigma towards persons with mental health issues allows negative consequences when they disclose their disability. It can be proven by interviewed students' experiences. *Yeoseon* (**not registered**, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, female, fourth-year) experienced a poor mental health condition, which led to mental disability while she was attending university. It even caused her to be betrayed by the union she was involved in, after she opened up about this. She described her experience of acquired disability from the point of receiving an offer from her university:

At first, I just had severe depression symptoms, and what is commonly referred to as 'burnout'; those symptoms happened after the university entrance examination. Even though I got an offer from the university, I wasn't happy, and had rather complicated and mixed feelings... In that condition, I entered a dormitory. This meant, to some extent, that social relationships had been closed off... So,

psychological deterioration occurred in many ways. I couldn't adapt well to university life at that time, especially to my major, so... I rarely attended university... Having to sit for a long time among people put much psychological pressure on me and made me want to keep going out in the middle of lectures.

But I believe I still have to live with the experience of achieving something on my own, something that gives me confidence... I have that kind of personality... So, I joined a union, working on my university newspaper. And while working as a reporter, I was nearly sexually assaulted by a senior... It's very embarrassing. We had a very trusting relationship...

I think it was when I was in the first year. I can't remember exactly what month it was, but, after that, I thought that I had to get out of the situation or take care of myself. Like... 'I'm in a violent situation and I've been through something unfair, so I have to take care of myself and respond appropriately to the situation.' ... But rather, I thought that this event could threaten my connection with these people or my role. So... I became more enthusiastic about the activities in my role, and, after that happening, I still had a very close relationship with that senior, like working together...

However, these traumatic situations overlapped, and I had a sense of shame that I was not properly working, and one day – it was a very small trigger – I broke my favourite cup because of carelessness, and that triggered me to start harming myself. I could just pass over it if it was like a great depression and suicidal thoughts, but it's hard to deny because it's something like I really had to harm myself physically. My skin is scarred... and the point when I thought to myself that I was in trouble was... Harming myself is really physically happening when I 'perform this act', which means... I should accept that I am in trouble...

In the union, there is a management group. I talked to them one day: 'I'm having such a hard time, so I may have some problems with my work. I hope you will take this into account and share it with other people and not give me too important a task for some time, or I would like you to bring in a few more people for my role.' I said that because there was a project that needed to be done, which was a bit difficult to do by myself... But... after disclosing my disability, when I experienced a conflict between the management group and me with the article I strove to publish, I was suspended from my role for this reason, because of 'mental disability'.

Yeoseon's disability seemed to arise from Korean society's attitude that places too much focus on entering university itself, and it was also due to massive previous traumas. However, she did not care for herself, and the other people's reactions made her symptoms worse, as she was betrayed in her role in the union after disclosing her disability.

The case of *Misun*, who grew up with a prosthetic arm, was also rooted in Korean culture, and its inability to accept diverse people. It may also be caused by the culture of the prosthetic limb industry in Korea. It can also be linked to the Korean culture of conformity. Thus, disability in Korean culture cannot be viewed as a concept of diversity. Interviewed students such as *Misun* (physical disability, has one arm, congenital disorder, wearing a prosthetic arm, severe, female, fourth-year), *Junjae* (disability of brain lesion, hemiplegia, brain tumour, male, mild, third-year) or *Nams* (physical disability, dystonia, severe, male, graduated) told me that that they have less confidence with their *look* so they think that they are not able to date somebody or disclose something like a prosthetic arm, which causes their whole disabled identity to be negative and leads to some of them having depression. Now, I turn to how all these factors combine in intersectionality, starting with the gender issue.

7.4 Intersectionality

From here, I explored intersectionality in Korean society. Broadly, I presented gender, the period and experience of acquiring disability, the limited university target of students with disabilities and the reasons for this, and the stigma towards students/persons with disabilities in Korean society. I presented how Korean society failed to include persons with minority positions.

7.4.1 Gender

In South Korea, there is almost no study on women with disabilities, especially in relation to education. There are even no statistics which indicate what percentage of women with disabilities enter higher education. *Pieta* (professor in special education, 31 years experience, female) argued:

[There is a] lack of interest in female persons with disabilities and their education [especially compared to the general population of persons with disabilities]. There exists almost no report on them, except one case study report published [on women with disabilities' discrimination with a focus on tertiary education] by the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea, (Kim and Park, 2002). This report was published 20 years ago.

As *Pieta* stated, this report dealt with discriminatory experiences that female persons with disabilities experience. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) stated:

If South Korea had been able to get away from its Confucianism culture and quickly become more enlightened [and] if women could enter society a little faster... Well, I just imagine that there are a much greater number of women without disabilities doing that than those with disabilities. However, for women with disabilities, it would not be the same figure. Discrimination against women is still severe, and also discrimination against persons with disabilities, so such

thoughts will be in many people's minds. 'Will they be able to have and raise children?' 'Can they get a job?'

So, Korean women with disabilities have intersecting issues of both women and persons with disabilities in the Korean context. From this interview with *Ti*, an interesting point can be deduced: women never say, '*Why should we fight for women's rights?*'. This can be compared to students with disabilities who said to me, '*Why should I fight?*'. It indicates that Korean students with disabilities have a lack of disability identity and have [negative] disabled identity. Further, it can be linked to youth trends. This is the crucial finding of this research, and this is due to the structural and contextual heritage of South Korea.

Although there is substantial literature to support how Confucian societies keep women as second-class citizens, from my belief and my experiences in South Korea, Confucianism has one of the biggest impacts on discrimination against and education for women with disabilities. So, when the factor of region in Korean society focuses on the developmental process combined with that of gender, it creates a double discrimination, which is intersectionality. Thus, discrimination against women is not only a gender issue but, rather, it can be regarded as discrimination against diversity and should be approached as a broader concept.

7.4.2 The experience of acquiring disability

Students who acquired disabilities while they were attending universities, and thus were already adults, have a slightly different attitude from those who acquired them at a younger age before entering universities. I conclude that acquiring a disability during or before adolescence and after that period, as an adult, are different experiences. This conclusion arises from data collected from my interviewees and from my own experience. Someone whose disability is mild but acquired when they were young regards themselves as 'a person with disability', such as *Jinho* (hearing disability, otitis media, mild, male, fourth-year), even though his disability status is mild. However, *Hyun* (acquired a physical disability during military service, physical disability, male, fourth-year) told me, '*I don't think I am a person with a disability.*' He also said that he thinks one's perception of one's disability is likely to depend on the

degree of impairment. Thus, those who acquire mild disability when they are adults are likely to regard themselves as 'a person without disabilities'.

The experience of acquiring disability also impacts one's outlook and career hugely. Two students, *Hyun* (acquired a physical disability during military service, physical disability, male, fourth-year) and *Yeoseon* (**not registered**, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, female, fourth-year) who acquired disabilities after entering university are interested in their career after acquiring disabilities, as I am.

I was interested in a further issue that arose from the interviews with my professional interviewees. For example, *Jihoon* (professor in assistive technology, 32 years experience, male, physical disability) acquired disability in his late 20s. Before that, he studied in an area not related to disability but, since acquiring disability, this experience has affected him hugely and has changed his career. Although with a small sample, it may not be possible to draw conclusions, there may be some correlations between the experience of disability and its impact on a future career. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) also stressed the difference between persons with disabilities who have congenital disabilities and those with acquired disabilities.

The differences in awareness, lifestyle and perception towards other persons between persons with congenital disabilities and those who acquired disabilities are significant. So, of course, this is an issue that needs to be addressed in the education field, but even in universities, the approach needs to be changed, depending on when the disability occurred.

Thus, I would say that the period when a person acquires disability has a crucial impact on their disabled identity, and it may also depend on the following variables: which societies they are involved in, what kind of disability they have, whether the disability is visible or invisible, and/or the degree of disability.

7.4.3 The limited university target of the policy for students with disabilities

The continuing limited target and support of students with disabilities indicates that South Korea still adopts the medical model of disability and shows a residual attitude toward welfare. This limited support has effects on the public's negative perspectives towards persons with disabilities and stigmatised minorities. *Jinwoo* (professor in special education, 12 years experience, male, physical disability) argued that the major problem of Korean welfare policy is *the stigma effect*, such as the *without affecting the student allowance* clause for universities operating the Special Admission System. He said:

The problem with the special admission system is that it ends up like, 'These are those who got lower grades [than those who receive an offer through general selection]. I am somewhat opposed to it because it has become such a big stigma. I think it would be good to operate the admission policy [for students with disabilities] mixed with other broader groups and be considerate so as not to stigmatise them.

So, *Jinwoo* argued that welfare for persons with disabilities should be included in the general welfare policies. Further, if the universities operate affirmative action, it should not be in a way that is differentiated, but as part of general selection [either early action and/or regular route]. This might be a better option for students with disabilities and other minority students, reducing the social stigma.

7.4.4 The impact of the policy in Korean society- stigmatising persons with disabilities and creating inherent discrimination

The stigma towards students with disabilities does not start from the point when students without disabilities enter university and meet their peers with disabilities. It is likely to start from an earlier point before they enter university. Students without disabilities and the general public in Korea have relatively few opportunities to see and get along with peers with disabilities. The segregated environment does not allow them the chance to create positive images of persons with disabilities.

Therefore, the majority of the public does not think critically about persons in minority

positions, because, for them, seeing peers with disabilities is not a regular occurrence. Thus, because of this environment, the public has a bias against persons with disabilities. Affirmative action, such as the Special Admission System, adopted without enough consideration and social agreement, allows the public to strengthen this stigma. Continuously stigmatising policies allow negative perspectives not only from the public but also from persons with disabilities themselves. They stigmatise themselves and have inherent discrimination. As *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) argued:

Basically, persons with disabilities do not have a high awareness of discrimination [towards them]. They identify the discrimination as being part of themselves. 'Since I am disabled, I have lived that way, and it is natural.' Persons with disabilities in Korea have never been treated as citizens or students... They are the ones who always disturb the class and become the ones that others wish wouldn't come to class. Therefore, the discrimination becomes themselves. So, even if they experience discrimination, they don't think that it is discrimination.

Byeol (physical disability, spinal muscular atrophy, severe, male, fourth-year) told me a thought, based on his experiences of discrimination:

It may be because of undesirable stereotypes or perspectives that are deeply rooted within myself. I think my disabled identity is still preventing me from speaking out in public. I think I heard from many people while attending university that 'disability is just one of various identities'. I agree with that opinion, but it still doesn't work for me. To put it simply, I am not confident [with my disability].

I asked:

So, for example, is it like, 'I think that what I'm experiencing now is discrimination, but [I'm thinking] how will persons without disabilities react if I address this?'

He answered:

Yes, it's very similar. I think I keep thinking that I am causing harm to others because of my disability.

In short, through this case, it is possible to see that Korean society prevents students with disabilities from acting and speaking in public. One factor that should be addressed here is this *Byeol's* identity is also influenced by his parents. He said that, when he was growing up, his parents told him:

Other people may think you disturb them, so you should be careful with your thoughts and actions.

Korean society and culture allow people with disabilities to stigmatise themselves, which is bound up with their parents' thoughts along with society's.

7.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I introduced and analysed the factors which have allowed the Special Admission System to be adopted and, to last, explored how this policy leads to students with disabilities losing confidence and stigmatising themselves: the concept of *inherent discrimination*. It is not only affirmative action that causes a problem, but the policy which is adopted without careful consideration has many effects, such as students' maladaptation and their loss of confidence. It is also connected to another affirmative action: the Employment Quota System, which shows how affirmative action for persons with disabilities has broadly failed them.

It is not just one factor that affects this phenomenon, but various factors intersect with each other, helping to create structural discrimination. The Korean social phenomenon of aiming for high-ranked universities allows parents and students to achieve high-ranked universities, and affirmative action, the Special Admission System, allows them to reach these universities. However, through the interviews, I realised that discrimination has not disappeared, but rather a policy adopted without consideration allows persons with disabilities to be discriminated against continuously. Confucianism places hugely as the central position in all of these

cultural norms. From here, I explain this phenomenon through the lens of Critical Disability Studies, the intersectionality of cultural, societal, and political norms.

Cultural Norms

In Chapter Three, I explored the historical background of how Confucianism had an impact on women negatively in Korea. Connecting to the issue of discrimination against persons with disabilities and double discrimination towards female students with disabilities, I concluded that the female students' families and teachers hugely influence them on entering university. After entering universities, female students experience diverse aspects of discrimination. The study conducted by Kim and Park (2002) was the only official research and, taking into consideration that Korean society changes rapidly, a lot of factors might have changed by now, compared with 2002. Moreover, this report did not explore the differences between women in different geographical areas: the experiences of female students in rural areas or small cities compared to metropolitan areas. This lack of research clearly shows the lack of interest in females with disabilities, and this still has not improved. It is not just a matter of gender, but also of the area in which one lives and the difference in speed of modernisation between areas, as shown by data from Higher Education in KOREA (2023). I aimed to be convinced by official data which can support the current status of female students with disabilities. According to data from Higher Education in KOREA (2023), the total number of male students with disabilities in Korea is 5,156, and of female students, 3,416. In the metropolitan area, there are 3,030 male students with disabilities and 2,153 female, a significant gap. However, for example, when looking into data for *Gyungsang-do*, which is far from the metropolitan area, the number of male students with disabilities is 429, and the number of female students with disabilities is nearly half, at 249. Thus, while the gender gap in all areas of Korea is significant, it appears that it is much greater in rural areas.

Korea also has a quota system for political representatives, which includes women, but which nevertheless indicates the gap between men and women. However, a quota system for persons with disabilities for political representatives is not adopted at all, which may show indifference towards females with disabilities along with persons with disabilities.

Darling (2022) argued that women with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty, be less well-educated, and have lower self-esteem. In this issue, various factors intersect. However, the fact that it is hard to find any statistics [above Higher Education in KOREA (2023) data does not specify gender, whereas I extract female only of the data] about women with disabilities in itself indicates that women with disabilities are less interesting even to researchers.

The invisible impact of Confucianism and the failure of cultural diversity

The impact of Confucianism in South Korea can be found in diverse aspects. In Chapter Three, I described the hidden cultural norms grounded in Confucianism as describing the hierarchical feature in the classroom. Within such a structure, it is not easy to fight against those who are already involved in the same society. The invisible impact of Confucianism, which is added to eugenics, had a negative impact on Korean society.

A newspaper reported that a national university of education falsified the grade of an applicant with disabilities in order to refuse to give them an offer (Cho, 2021). The phenomenon that a few universities of education still deny students with disabilities entry shows that still the negative effects of historical and cultural norms such as Confucianism and eugenics exist. This is not limited to students with disabilities but affects all persons with disabilities in South Korea.

Another negative impact of Confucianism is addressed from the interview as the characteristics of conformity, which is one of the reasons for the failure to cultural diversity appeared in students' interviews such as *Yeoseon* (not registered, mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, female, fourth-year), excluded from her union after disclosing her mental disability. This culture also causes individuals to have uniformity, so that much plastic surgery is connected with lookism, discrimination based on appearance (Lee et al., 2017), as students mentioned their lack of confidence in appearance.

Societal norms: Compressed modernisation

To summarise, I can conclude that South Korea may have failed to embrace minority people, such as persons with disabilities. Lim et al., (2000) argued that Koreans have learnt that they have to cut off their gloomy past, when they were colonised and

poor. The government continuously encourages people to contribute to the public good, creating inherent public emotion (Lim et al., 2000). This ensures that many other sectors dismiss small sectors such as small industries, or small areas in cities.

Students and/or parents can sue against this discriminatory administration under the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act (described in Chapter Four), but this does not guarantee positive results. As seen in the previous chapter, the number of lawsuits decreased to a total of four up until 2014; after that, there were no cases (Kim, 2018). This demonstrates the decrease in activism among students with disabilities, as explored in the previous chapter.

Meanwhile, regarding the issue of support for university students with disabilities from the authorities, according to Kang (2022), the maximum hours of support from a personal assistant is 16 (monthly 480 hours), not 24 hours, because the Ministry of Health and Welfare excludes eight hours as sleeping time. Moreover, to receive 16 hours of support per day, persons with disabilities must be entitled under section one, the highest level of support, of which there are only a total of 11 persons in the whole nation. This emphasises the lack of support for persons with disabilities. As described by *Jin* (staff of university disability centre, female, 12 years experience)'s voice, in some cases, staff in universities were undertaking those roles instead of personal assistants, depending on the universities along with parents.

Furthermore, although disability support centres have training once a year from a council for supporting students with disabilities, and they communicate with each other in regional groups (Korean Council For National University Support For Students With Disabilities, 2022), in reality, disability support centres' authority is limited as described earlier in [7.2.2.1]. All support is basically carried out under the guidelines of the Higher Education Act. This should not be an excuse for the lack of support.

Political norms

The Korean peninsula's unstable status leads to an unwillingness to allow diversity, which also makes students with disabilities less confident in public, and intimated so that they cannot tell people their opinions. According to the OECD Social Expenditure Database (2023), Korea's budget for social expenditure is only 61.2% of

OECD countries' average [20.1%], and occupies only 12.3% of its GDP. Thus, policies for persons/students with disabilities may not have enough impact on the public to have positive perspectives towards them. Current cultural, societal and political norms, academic elitism, ableism and compressed modernisation caused by the development gap give rise to the public ignoring persons in minority positions. So, various factors affect students with disabilities. Especially since the adoption of the Special Admission System, students with disabilities of different features seem to have been affected negatively. *Ti* (director of a nonprofit organization, 20 years experience, male, physical disability) analysed the situation:

Before the special admission system was adopted, there were many elite students with disabilities in universities. They had effective leadership skills because they survived competition with students without disabilities, and they had a very high sense of solidarity and empathy toward people with disabilities [not only students]. However, since the 1990s to 2000s and through the IMF financial crisis, persons with disabilities have lost their awareness... The number of students with disabilities in universities has increased, but their leadership position has been weakened.

So, all these factors affected Korean society in a way that it did not develop policies for students with disabilities and admitted less diversity. When considering the disability movement in the US, it is possible to point to a few people who led the movement, for example, Ed Roberts (1939-1995) or Judith Heumann (1947-2023). Ed Roberts's actions led to the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act 504, which, in turn, led to the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Judith Heumann had been discriminated against when attending school and had the experience of being declined a teacher's license. These leaders paved the way for disability rights in the US. This point can be linked to *Junho's* (professor in social welfare, 23 years experience, male, physical disability) point. According to *Junho's* argument, in the Korean context, most approaches are top-down or led by parents, grounded in Confucianism culture. So, without a doubt, it leads Korea to lack leaders. However, the current passive attitudes of students with disabilities, which could be affected by systematic factors and contributed by culture, may have a

negative impact on raising leaders in the disability field and contribute to creating disability culture in Korean society.

Meanwhile, the fact that students with acquired disabilities change their career interests to the disability field demonstrates that they realise the barriers in Korean society after they acquire disabilities. However, this trend may vary depending on the types of disability they acquire and the degree of their disability. Possibly, the extent of discrimination from the society varies according to the types and levels of disabilities. All these factors may explain why students and other persons with acquired disability are left behind and/or excluded in the society.

Affirmative action further causes students not to raise their voices since the policy allows them to enter universities of a much higher level. However, the starting point of this problem is the government policy, not the students' actions. Affirmative action (representatively, the Special Admission System and the Employment Quota System) for persons with disabilities confirms the rampant discrimination against them, and those policies allow their social positions to be those of a minority.

The need to change the laws that affect students with disabilities in tertiary education

One further point that should be addressed here is the necessity to change the laws. As explored in Chapter Four, the definition of special education in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act broadly indicates the target as the person who needs special education. The Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, the law for special education, includes not only students who have visual, physical, hearing, autism and intellectual disabilities (the range of disabilities in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, the basic law in South Korea for persons with disabilities). It covers a wider and more varied range of disabilities: communication, emotional and behavioural, learning, health conditions, or developmental delay. When students with disabilities apply to universities, they are affected by the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. Even if the student is not registered on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, the superintendent in that area allows the student to apply for universities through the Special Admission System.

However, after students had entered university, suddenly, the law applied to them

changed from the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act to the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. Every disability centre in universities states that their target is those who are legally under the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. It does not make sense because disability in education and disability in welfare should be distinguished and should be regarded as different. When the Special Admission System was introduced for students with disabilities in 1995, the previous version of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act was enforced, and the National Institute of Special Education took a role in the assessment of students with disabilities. At that time, it was irrelevant whether the student was enrolled in the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act or not. However, this system was abolished in 1998. After that, as *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) argued, universities had no rational methods by which to assess students with disabilities. So, reviewing the national disability enrolment status might be the only convenient way to review students' entitlement. As a result, currently, students who are not enrolled on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act cannot access tertiary education through the special selection route, even if they try to apply with the support of the superintendent, because universities require registration on the national disability system and documentation as proof of this. *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) argued:

In South Korea, there is the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. However, this only applies to primary school, middle school and high schools. When you enter university, the applied law suddenly changes to the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. I don't think it makes sense. In the past, when the special admission system was first introduced [1995], students for special education were assessed separately for three years at the National Institute of Special Education. At that time, it was not a matter of whether the student was registered on the national disability system because disability in education and disability in welfare were completely different.

When it comes to education, how can it be a disability if the student does not have one finger? Many people have argued that this does

not make sense. To prove that you are eligible for special education, there should be a route for this, such as an assessment for eligibility, but it has been abolished since 1998 because universities now choose students voluntarily. But universities do not have an assessment system for students with disabilities. In other words, there is no such system for diagnosing and evaluating students. So, as a result, everything is processed via paperwork, so they just need the documents in relation to whether students are registered under the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. I think this is the biggest problem now.

So, the current system for assessment of students with disabilities is based on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, not the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. As one of my interviewees, *Yeoseon* (mental disability symptoms, acquired after entering university, not registered, fourth-year, female) argued that because she did not want to enrol on the national system, because of the stigma towards persons with mental illness, she could not get support from her university because she was not eligible for it.

As *Seol-Hon* (professor in special education, 32 years experience, male) mentioned, this kind of strict and narrow policy limits the range of support available. Moreover, I believe that this limited support may lead to persons being reluctant to enrol in the disability system because they believe that they may be discriminated against by the public, and the advantages of being enrolled do not compensate for the stigma from society. According to this argument, I also conclude that these structural issues allow Korean persons with disabilities to remain in minority positions.

One more thing I want to address before closing this chapter is that in this form of affirmative action, there are negative effects from targeting only those who are legally eligible: there will be persons who are left out. *Jay* (researcher, former director of Disabled Persons' Organisations, 3 years experience, male, physical disability) stressed the importance of remembering those who have really severe disability, who have always been excluded from the focus of disability rights.

7.6 Summary

In this chapter, I explored with the participants the Korean cultural norms which allow this social phenomenon. I analysed it broadly as cultural norms, which are based on Confucianism, in addition to historical and political norms. I also analysed the reasons why students with disabilities choose not to protest against society and its discrimination, and how it is linked to youth's trend. The crucial factors of intersectionality are grounded in Korean society, its culture and its perspectives. Broadly, I can summarise the factors as two. Firstly, its culture is based on Confucianism, and Confucianism is based on meritocracy, which contributes to its society looking down on persons with disabilities. Secondly, the political and societal factors of unstable political status also contribute to public perspectives, broadly explained as 'ableism'. Moreover, society's rapid development has allowed important concerns to be ignored, such as persons of minority status, for example, persons with disabilities. These cumulated factors result in minority groups' position continuing to remain as a minority. Thus, students with disabilities may be affected by these whole cultural, societal and political factors skewed to negative aspects of their disabled and disability identity.

In the next chapter, I will bring these issues together, summarise my whole argument, and come to my final conclusion, giving suggestions to policymakers and future research.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Summary of study

This study revealed the phenomenon around affirmative action for tertiary students with disabilities in South Korea and how Korean students with disabilities experience this. I researched, through the experiences of students with disabilities, the meaning of disability in the South Korean culture. I strove not to restrict this meaning to different types of disability but rather to find the commonality of meaning among those who have disabilities.

I started this study by sharing my personal experience of acquiring disability in the United States and facing attitudinal barriers along with the physical restrictions I experienced after returning to South Korea. Therefore, I explored the meaning of these barriers in the broader cultural context of Korea. I adopted Critical Disability Studies, which stresses culture and intersectionality. This study raised the issue that every study of tertiary students with disabilities deals with the same assumptions and comes to the same conclusion: that is, very little progress has been made, and this continues to be the case.

I addressed the issue of affirmative action globally as well. No studies deal with students with disabilities as the main target of affirmative action policy; most are about race or socio-economic status. In the current Korean context, no study investigates the impact of the Special Admission System. Furthermore, I have pointed out that none of the present studies on affirmative action consider the culture and context in which it operates, which varies among countries. Therefore, I explored what the meaning of disability in the Korean culture is and how affirmative action impacts students with disabilities, through co-construction with the voices of those students.

In Chapter One, I explained the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both on education in South Korea and my research, and especially how it impacted my methods.

In Chapter Two, I introduced the ontology and epistemology of this thesis, interpretivism, and social constructivism. Following that, I explained why I adopted

Constructivist Grounded Theory as my methodology. After describing the ethical issues, I presented my methods, broadly summarised as two: Literature reviews and Interviews. For the interviews, I described my method from sampling and the sampling result, through the interviewing, to data analysis and presented the deduced codes with a diagram of theoretical sorting.

Throughout Chapters Three, Four and Five, I explained the background of Korean society grounded in its culture. In Chapter Three, I examined Korean history and culture and how disability can be viewed in its culture, thus, how Korean culture has an impact on students/persons with disabilities. I concentrated on Confucianism, the central concept behind meritocracy in education. I addressed some of the continual challenges faced by Korea, such as the Japanese colonial period, the post-Korean War period and, more recently, the period of compressed modernisation. By explaining those challenging periods of Korean history, I aimed to stress how they affected Korean individuals' thoughts about the concept of cultural diversity, and why governments have placed so much importance on Confucianism-based conformity, collectivism, nationalism and ableism, which are closely connected to people's perspectives on persons with disabilities and other minority groups, and to the adoption of affirmative action policies. Korea's rapidly decreased birth rate has given rise to a demographic cliff and the concern of Korean universities about their survival. Thus, the implementation of affirmative action is now also closely connected to universities' survival. I explained why a few universities have established majors targeted at students with autism and intellectual disabilities. This trend establishes a need to rethink the meaning of 'higher education', which itself describes the discriminatory thinking on disability within education. However, in these circumstances, no students with disabilities are regarded favourably. Universities focus on international students and workers rather than on enrolling students with disabilities. In Chapter Three, I addressed how the culture of Confucianism affects persons with disabilities and how the rapid modernisation of Korean culture has an impact on persons with disabilities. I addressed how the meritocracy based Korean culture cannot accept the concept of equity.

Chapter Four explored the meaning of disability in the Korean context, which continues to have somewhat negative connotations. I started by focusing on tertiary

education for students with disabilities globally and in South Korea. To explore the meaning of disability in Korea, I introduced culture-based language, which is used to refer to persons with disabilities, and in disability policies and laws. I addressed affirmative action for persons with disabilities, representatively the Special Admission System in the tertiary education context and the Employment Quota System in the employment sector. I described the list of support for students with disabilities at Korean University. Following that, I described how affirmative action continued for students with disabilities after their graduation. After that, I explained how affirmative action is implemented currently, based on current data. I briefly introduced the experience of students with disabilities in the South Korean context in literature. Again, I discussed the perspectives of affirmative action in Korean culture and the gaps in the literature.

In Chapter Five, I focused on current education in the Korean context and addressed the gap between students with and without disabilities. I introduced UNESCO's four pillars of education in the context of the Korean Ministry of Education's official goals. In each section, I explored the Korean education system, in relation to students with disabilities. I addressed the phenomenon of education fever and the importance of achieving a high-ranked tertiary degree, which relies on the use of the private education market, and I discussed how students with disabilities are excluded in the whole process. I explained the gaps in socioeconomic status among students and how it allows the gaps to result in achieving different ranks in universities, where students with disabilities can be placed, and how much the concept of diversity can be accepted in this system.

I explained the fundamentally segregated education policy, based on the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, and how students with disabilities are picked up by the policy of the Special Admission System. This phenomenon in Korea makes all different kinds of schools' aims and influences all different types of special schools' aims the same, that is, entering high-ranked universities. Again, I addressed the lack of data/literature on this issue. I raised the issue of how affirmative action has an impact on students with disabilities and aimed to discover it through interviews with students with disabilities, staff of disability support centres, and professionals.

In Chapters Six and Seven, I explored the deduced themes through my interviews with students with disabilities and staff of disability support centres and professionals in this field. After presenting the results of the interviews, I discussed my findings in light of the literature at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Six presented how the meritocracy-based Korean society deals with affirmative action, the Special Admission System. Ultimately, I demonstrated the failure of this policy and the various effects that this policy has. Firstly, it is used wrongly and is combined with Korean academic elitism. This policy allows students to jump up to the next level in society, affect stigma towards these students, and influence them not to protest against the university and society. This policy also led universities to discriminate against students by selecting students with discriminatory criteria. The majority of universities which operate the Special Admission System limit majors to liberal arts, not courses such as medicine and engineering. It is misused to enable students with mild disabilities rather than those who have severe disabilities, based entirely on the medical model of disability. Only some universities reluctantly give offers to those who have severe disabilities. This policy also reflects a positive effect of discrimination, perceived by the participants, and makes students not protest against society or universities as it allows them to access high-ranked universities above their grade level. Thus, students have internalised discrimination from all these processes. Thus, the conflicting values of meritocracy and affirmative action in education, throughout the whole of society, weaken students' disability identity and produce a negative disabled identity because they are dependent on the system and grateful to affirmative action and the university which has given offers to them, creating a feeling of reliance.

My analysis also showed that one of the biggest problems of this policy is that it allowed a segregated education environment to persist. Most interviewed students, who had had education until and including university, had been educated in mainstream schools, and they had no experience of seeing or being with other students with disabilities. As a result, students with disabilities who enter universities usually suffer cultural shock and challenges to their mental health when they face a new large environment which forces them to confront their disabilities. The whole

effect of these processes leaves the students feeling isolated, eager not to disclose their disability, if possible and leads them to have mental health problems.

Students with disabilities also have fewer chances to build a disability identity because their parents influence them to 'compensate' for their disability by achieving more highly ranked universities; parents believe that their children can be free from societal discrimination through earning tertiary degrees, rather than that they should help them to build a positive disabled identity. Affirmative action allows, and even helps, them to have these socially corrupted goals. Furthermore, presumably, combined with the Korean youth's competitive atmosphere, the current disability unions, where the majority of its members are students without disabilities, further result in students with disabilities hiding on campus, presumably due to the lack of disabled and disability identity.

In Chapter Seven, I examined the cultural norms, resulting in the current experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities. I emphasised how these Korean cultural norms heavily based on Confucianism affected persons/students with disabilities. I summarised four reasons that are embedded in Korean society: Confucianism based, which affects the very unequal focus on high-ranked universities; parents' impact, which is linked to Confucianism. Related to Confucianism, I addressed conformity as one of its characteristics, and the phenomenon of compressed modernisation and its impact on students/persons with disabilities. I emphasised how these Korean societal and cultural norms affected persons/students with disabilities, how students with disabilities were excluded from their society and university's target. In addition, I addressed the historical and political norms, explained the concept of ableism, along with analysing the historical factors, and the current Korean youth trend. I revealed the fact that youth with disabilities show both characteristics of youth as having sceptical perspectives towards society and as persons with disabilities as having negative a disabled identity.

In the end, I concluded that how the country fails to have cultural diversity by convincing that there is a lack of interest in minority groups in their society, such as persons with disabilities and women, or exclusion of those who acquired disabilities. In addition, I analysed the historical and political norms based on Critical Disability Studies, explained the concept of ableism, along with analysing the historical factors.

In exploring these cultural norms, I looked at how the historical and political norms give rise to the concept of ableism, which allows parents to have a huge impact on their child with disabilities and the way in which they create identity. In the end, I concluded that how the country fails to have cultural diversity through convincing that lack of interest in minority groups in their society, such as persons with disabilities and women, or exclusion of those who acquired disabilities linked to the stigma towards students with disabilities.

Finally, I explained the public's perspectives towards persons with disabilities and those who use affirmative action in Korea. Throughout my examination of these cultural, historical and political norms, I criticised the fact that students and persons with, and acquiring, disabilities are left behind.

8.2 Limitation of study

The limitations of this study can be summarised in four points, all of which stem from sampling constraints that influenced the study's findings. Firstly, the target interviewees were students with disabilities who are either currently experiencing or have recently completed tertiary education. Consequently, this study does not capture the experiences of individuals who failed to reach or did not attempt to reach this educational level. Secondly, the research is limited by the inclusion of only one individual whose disability is not legally recognised in the Korean context, restricting the diversity of perspectives. Thirdly, it is limited in addressing the intersectional challenges faced by female students with disabilities within Korean culture. Lastly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study is constrained in examining the challenges faced by students who have recently entered university, as most participants were in their third or fourth year. As a result, the data may reflect bias in the students' recollected experiences. At the same time, this suggests that first- and second-year students may face additional, unexamined difficulties.

8.3 Revisiting research question

The research questions for this thesis were:

- How does Affirmative Action in South Korea for students with disabilities work?
- How does Affirmative Action affect the experience of students with disabilities in tertiary education in the South Korean context?

How does Affirmative Action in South Korea for students with disabilities work?

Affirmative action, which operates for students with disabilities at the tertiary level, has characteristics of failure because, as both policy and culture are grounded in the heavy focus on education, it has created numerous side effects, especially because it makes it difficult to hear students' own voices. Thus, there is a need for action to raise those student voices. At the beginning of the period in which the Special Admission System was adopted in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, there was some movement towards action from students with disabilities as a group, but it did not last long. Affirmative action for students and persons with disabilities has failed, as the policy plays a part in reducing their voices in asserting their rights; rather, it works to accept Korean society's structural discrimination. I have demonstrated this through the voices of students with disabilities, staff, and professionals. As introduced in Chapter One, and revisiting Hutcheon and Wolbring (2012) argument, the Korean disability policy for students with disabilities actually weakens students' abilities.

Every year, a similar number of students enter universities through the Special Admission System, which means that this policy already seems to have been redefined. Universities are intended to be divided into high-ranked and low-ranked universities. For the majority of students who enter universities through affirmative action, the impact of the policy is clear in high-ranked universities.

Due to the fact that the Korean private education market is huge and students with disabilities generally cannot access that, this systematic inequality cannot be reduced. For Korean students with disabilities, affirmative action works to provide access to higher education. However, considering the fact that the Employment Quota System still exists to force companies to select persons with disabilities, this demonstrates the way in which this policy has failed in Korea. Persons with

disabilities are not seen in diverse positions in Korean society, especially in the education sector: university.

Furthermore, in the meritocracy-based Korean context, there is no research about context-based laws and policies that allow persons and students who use affirmative action to remain as a minority. This continuous, systematic discrimination allows them to regard themselves as incompatible and to have less confidence in the world of expanding private education and other inaccessible environments in so many ways.

In short, systematically, affirmative action for students with disabilities in South Korea [the Special Admission System] impacts students negatively. It allows them to receive offers from higher-ranked universities compared to their amount of effort. Furthermore, in their eagerness to achieve the more highly ranked universities, this policy has ensured that students do not protest against discrimination. So, students should react positively to this policy, but it thus allows them to internalise discrimination, to have negative disabled identities.

How does affirmative action affect the experience of students with disabilities in tertiary education in the South Korean context?

The second research question must be considered in the context of intersectionality in Korean society. Up until the university level, many students experience segregated education. When students enter universities and face integrated education, they have a kind of culture shock, which arises from having been in a segregated education environment. However, no further support was provided.

As analysed throughout the thesis, we have seen that current Korean education policy has little consideration for students with disabilities. However, in response to its demographic crisis, the Korean government has moved towards access to education for all (for example, it has amended the Lifelong Education Act). Thus, perhaps most universities in South Korea should change their attitudes and their institutions' purpose and there would be a divided phenomenon among universities as high-ranked universities and those not. For institutions those not high-ranked, they are no longer the ivory towers. A few universities have already opened

departments for students with disabilities albeit only with specific types of disability. This Korean tertiary phenomenon asks us what is 'tertiary education'.

Korean universities will have to accept students with disabilities according to changing internal and external circumstances. However, as reviewed in Chapter Four, the trend of the status of the Social Integration Admission Process shows that, again, groups of students with disabilities are not regarded positively compared to other groups of minorities. In these circumstances, the voices of those students alone can address these issues. The adult population who re-enters university education is increasing through various routes that allow working people to study later in life. Research from Kwak (2013) shows this trend, especially in small cities and low-ranked universities. This study has stressed that this trend is inevitable, not only following the trends of the era, but also for universities' survival.

Still, in many crucial areas, however, the opinions of persons with disabilities are ignored. The bigger problem related to this issue is that students with disabilities rarely have the experience of raising their own voices because of continuing cultural and structural issues. This study found that students' raising their own voices is the only way to find a solution to so many of the issues I have explored. It can be possible to increase disabled identity and following disability identity.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

To answer the questions in Chapter One, about why the global trend of affirmative action is one of shrinking policy, this thesis has argued that it differs according to each country's context and culture.

As many researchers have concluded, removing barriers, both physical and attitudinal, is yet to be resolved. These factors continuously challenge students with disabilities and cause mental health issues. However, this study has demonstrated that the methods to remove the barriers must be different, according to each country's culture. Based on its findings, this study suggests that scholars all around the world should rethink the focus of the research target. Therefore, through investigating the meaning of disability in the South Korean context from cultural, historical, and societal perspectives, the implication of this study is that the

intersectionality of diverse factors in each country and culture should be considered. In the Korean case, these factors are the focus on high-ranked tertiary degrees, Confucianism and the important role of parents, and the eugenics-based historical and societal norms, which have all had an impact on societal perspectives of students/persons with disabilities.

This thesis suggests that firstly, affirmative action for students with disabilities and, in wider contexts, affirmative action for persons with disabilities should be considered in the context of each culture. This study criticises those studies that intend similar research topics and expect similar results, but which should change their direction to being culture based. In this way, this study has contributed to knowledge about how affirmative action should be considered and implemented.

Secondly, this study also contributes to knowledge about 'acquired disability' and provides an insight into how to approach the limited research that exists on this, based on the concept of intersectionality. My findings suggest that disabled identity can depend on the period when disability is acquired and the degree of disability, as Darling (2022) also argued. Thirdly, I wanted to address more about intersectionality, which is grounded in cultural factors. So, in the Korean context, I talked about the issue of intersectionality of disability and the Korean culture, especially the value placed on education. Moreover, in the Korean context, whether disability is severe or mild seems to have a huge impact on a person's disabled identity, and whether they choose to pass the disability. Lastly, this research contributes to comprehending Korean youth with disabilities' tendency, which has commonality with their non-disabled peers, but further, their disabled identity contributes to their identity.

8.5 Suggestions for policymakers

This study revealed that persons' disabled identities may formed from the beginning of their lives with disabilities. This indicates that interventions should be made from the early years of the disability period. Moreover, intervention is necessary not only for children and students with disabilities but also for those without disabilities.

Currently, in South Korea, based on the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act Article 25, various targets should have been met in terms of improved training and education on

disability awareness, including at all levels of schools and public organisations. However, these are all one-time events. As interviewed students commonly told me, in Korean schools or in their society as a whole, it is still not common to see students and persons with disabilities. As explored in this thesis, this varies according to region, such as a metropolitan area or a small city.

From my interviews with parents, and students' stories about their experiences with their parents, we can understand that parents of children with disabilities face challenges in gaining any information about how to raise a child with disabilities. Korean society's perspectives toward disability are still based on ableism, which means that policymakers still barely consider that there will be students or other persons with disabilities among their target population. This demonstrates how, in Korean society, persons with disabilities are still largely excluded, although there are continuing rallies and protests by parents, which have contributed to the enactment of the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. Furthermore, students with disabilities who were educated in mainstream schools explained that they hardly receive any formal support from their schools but, rather, they have to rely on informal support from their parents, friends and teachers. This shows that there are no official guidelines on how to support students with disabilities.

As previously described in Chapter Five, although South Korea focuses on education, it is difficult to access information related to students with disabilities. This study suggests that, from the Ministry of Education's main website, any information related to disability should be accessible to the public. When parents have children with disabilities, they should know where to go to get information and help. Policymakers should consider that there could be persons with disabilities and other diverse minority groups in the public. Through this research, I addressed the fact that, no matter whether people have a disability or not, everyone should have access to disability information.

When universities reach out to high school students to attract them to their universities, they should make an assumption that there may be students with disabilities among them. Some students may have registered their disabilities, as their schools have been notified about them, but some may have hidden disabilities and are not enrolled in the national system. All universities should make an effort to

provide all information about disability support before students enter those universities. This also means that when students acquire disabilities (potential students with disabilities) they should have information about their universities' support systems for them. All university websites should contain disability information on their front pages.

At the same time, policymakers should make an effort to enlarge the range of disability types that are eligible for support, so that every student who has disability symptoms can receive help with their studies throughout all education levels. In addition, this research suggests the end of the use of the medical model of disability.

In this way, support for students with disabilities should be arranged from the beginning of their education, from the preschool level. The legislation that applies to students with disabilities before entering university is the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, but after entering university, they come under the jurisdiction of the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. This is unreasonable. Support for students with disabilities should be determined by consistent criteria, such as those in the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. Disability in education contexts should not be applied under different criteria. The Act on the Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities covers not only persons with disabilities but also eligible veterans. There is validity in the argument that the same logic should be applied to the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. The same can also be argued for the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act. As explained in Chapter Four, scholars view the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act as a basic law, along with the Welfare of Disabled Persons Act. The Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act also defines the concept of disability widely, as described. Thus, it has no consistency with other acts as it cannot justify restricting its targets in line with their definitions. The Welfare of Disabled Persons Act should also amend its range of disability types and abolish restrictions based on degrees of disability according to medical criteria.

Similarly, limitations based on disability types and degrees should be re-defined. Thus, as seen in Chapter Seven, those who cannot access support because they

are 'not entitled' according to a medically defined degree of disability should have access to wider support.

Meanwhile, social environments are starting to change their attitudes towards accepting diversity. This has not happened easily as society is so influenced by the strict Korean culture. However, since these environments face a demographic shift, thus they need to accept diversity and make an effort to change their attitudes. The current crisis in South Korea may provide the transition to the next step. Thus, Korean society will need to devise a way of implementing UNESCO's suggestions for learning to live together.

This study focuses on tertiary education, but to consider these issues in relation to education integration, it is essential to look at the overall environment, from the very beginning of education, at the preschool and primary levels. An integrated education environment would not be successful without Korean society's attitude of aspiration toward high-ranked universities. Although this currently does not seem important for their success, they should take steps towards increased integration, even if they are slow, because, realistically, it is pivotal to their survival. The phenomenon of increasing numbers of students with autism and intellectual disabilities attending universities may show not only how desperate Korean universities are to survive, but also point to a lack of support for those students after not only the period of their graduation from high school but also their given offers to those students but giving limited support for them. South Korea needs to consider how to support these individuals and not simply neglect them and exclude them from society.

I have argued that amplifying students' voices is crucial to addressing the current issues. This can be elaborated into three key areas. Firstly, strengthening the empowerment of students with disabilities is essential. Students must become aware of the structural discrimination embedded in cultural norms and be equipped to challenge and change the existing system. This research suggests the growing body of publications addressing cultural and societal impacts on students with disabilities, which can help amplify voices from various disciplines. While this movement may begin with a few academic papers, it has the potential to expand across multiple fields as scholars contribute their perspectives, thereby enhancing the empowerment

of students with disabilities. Although this research focuses on the Korean context, its findings could be extended to other countries and, in turn, re-applied to Korea.

Secondly, a social system that ensures the inclusion of the voices of persons with disabilities is necessary to prevent a top-down approach. Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) should play a pivotal role in this process. Historically, under the influence of Confucianism in Korean culture, parents of students with disabilities have spoken on behalf of their children. Therefore, efforts must be made to empower students to assert their own identities positively and independently. Moreover, there must be broader social efforts to foster a positive disability identity among students with disabilities. Government bodies, non-profit organisations, and DPOs can collaborate towards this goal. Achieving this requires continuous engagement between disabled and non-disabled peers, making it essential to create inclusive environments for communication and interaction.

Lastly, it is necessary to implement systems that enhance policies aimed at incorporating the perspectives of various minority groups, including students with acquired disabilities. Authorities must provide detailed policies in this regard. Currently, several methods have been introduced. One is a survey for evaluating educational welfare support for students with disabilities in universities, as discussed in Chapter Four. This survey highlights certain benefits, such as the positive evaluation universities receive when they support student disability unions. Further, authorities have implemented a special organization dedicated to supporting students with disabilities, based on the revised Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act Article 29. Lastly, a revision to the Special Education for Persons with Disabilities Act has been made in Article 33, which aimed to establish a centre for tertiary education to support students with disabilities at the governmental level. The last method is still in progress. Thus, details of the policy and budget have yet to be confirmed. For example, aspects such as how to establish, how to operate it, how to divide roles between the government and individual disability support centres, and the involvement of students with disabilities in this process, still need to be clarified.

Cultural and societal factors in Korea tend to weaken the voices of minority groups. Therefore, specific policies are crucial for ensuring feasibility. For example, universities should conduct research at their level and hold discussions and organise

conferences on this matter. In doing so, empowering students with disabilities becomes pivotal. Universities have a responsibility to educate these students effectively. Such processes will help identify and address gaps in welfare provision.

8.6 Suggestions for future research

This research suggests numerous points for future research. First of all, I expect much more research to be completed by persons with disabilities. Limited numbers of studies have dealt with students with disabilities in the tertiary education sector, and most research does not reflect students with disabilities' perspectives. Therefore, much more research should be done to address and investigate diverse perspectives. Secondly, I suggest future disability research should aim to have specific targets based on the periods the individuals acquired disability, types of disability, whether it is visible or not, targeted various factors of intersectionality such as gender, region, socio-economic status, or other personal factors. Thirdly, future research also should explore the impact of the Special Admission System and the Employment Quota System on internalising discrimination.

Fourthly, the phenomenon of disability unions in Korean Universities is predominantly organised by students without disabilities, who occupy the main roles, whereas those students with disabilities are reluctant to join or raise their voices. Connecting to this point, there is a lack of evidence of the reasons why students with disabilities are not joining disability unions, whether it is due to their lack of disability identity or comes from current youth trends. This phenomenon may show the reasons students with disabilities hide behind. This unique phenomenon should be explored within the whole context of Korean culture, considering intersectionality. It is also worth noting that although there are a lot of studies on youth trends, there is a dearth of research based on the voices of youth with disabilities and whether their thoughts are similar or different from those without disabilities. Starting from the addressed points of youth with disabilities, future research also needs to address this research field. Connecting to this, future research also needs to reveal the reason why student-led support organisations for students with disabilities cannot be continued.

Fifthly, as discussed in Chapter Three, the Korean government strives to find ways for its survival by changing the direction of education: from the *ivory tower* to lifelong education for all. Universities follow the directions as they are pivotal for their survival. However, still, it is necessary to distinguish the reason why the parents of students with autism and intellectual disabilities send their children to tertiary institutions, whether it is due to the lack of a social safety net or the parents' desire for their children to earn a high academic credential as possible following the cultural norms. This is an area of practice worth highlighting as a subject for future research. Sixthly, there is a unique phenomenon of mothers of students with disabilities getting into universities for their children. This phenomenon needs to be explored to determine if it is the result from Confucianism, why this phenomenon is acceptable in Korean society, and how students with disabilities themselves think about this. Based on the findings from this research, I suggest that future research perspectives should be based on each country's unique culture and history and explore various factors of intersectionality.

Finally, research about the industry of prosthetic limbs as a method of hiding disability, not a means as assistive technologies and the intersectionality of cultures is necessary. It is not just about the origin of it; rather, connecting to the ableism in society, deeper research would be necessary, comparison in various countries which do revitalise and those not.

In addition, as mentioned, future research would aim to discover the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic made access for those students who may not be aware of their situation even more difficult. However, the fact that still only a few studies have dealt with students with disabilities during the pandemic shows a lack of interest. Park (2020) showed that the pandemic led to students with disabilities in Korean universities experiencing further lack of support during lectures, and weakened their physical ability or isolated them because of disconnected relationships. Furthermore, since the demand for stenographers and sign language interpreters has risen due to the COVID-19 pandemic, universities have experienced a shortage of these assistants. According to Lee (2023), after the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing numbers of students with

disabilities dropped out, which indicates the barriers they faced from online education.

Many studies have dealt with the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students. However, again, only a few studies have dealt with the physical and social effects on students with disabilities. There are studies about persons with disabilities in Korea and the COVID-19 pandemic, but these are not targeted at students with disabilities in universities. So, again, the lack of interest in university students with disabilities is noticeable. Thus, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students with disabilities needs to be investigated in the future, and appropriate policies should be adopted from such research. Lastly, there should be further research about persons with disabilities who cannot reach tertiary education because of the severity of their disability. Future research should attend to these persons with disabilities, as there is a need to devise methods to include all excluded persons in the education system, in research, and in society.

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Appendix 1. Approved ethics application (project ID:18645/001)

UCL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
OFFICE FOR THE VICE PROVOST RESEARCH



9th October 2020

Dr Maria Kett
Department of Epidemiology and Public Health
UCL

Cc: Dahn Bee Park

Dear Dr Kett

Notification of Ethics Approval with Provisos

Project ID/Title: 18645/001: Support for tertiary education on students with disabilities in South Korea

Further to your satisfactory responses to the Committee's comments, I am pleased to confirm in my capacity as Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) that your study has been ethically approved by the UCL REC until 9th November 2021.

Ethical approval is subject to the following conditions:

Notification of Amendments to the Research

You must seek Chair's approval for proposed amendments (to include extensions to the duration of the project) to the research for which this approval has been given. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing an 'Amendment Approval Request Form'

<http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/responsibilities.php>

Adverse Event Reporting – Serious and Non-Serious

It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. The Ethics Committee should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator (ethics@ucl.ac.uk) immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse incident is unexpected and serious, the Joint Chairs will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. For non-serious adverse events the Joint Chairs of the Ethics Committee should again be notified via the Ethics Committee Administrator within ten days of the incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol. The Joint Chairs will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

Final Report

At the end of the data collection element of your research we ask that you submit a very brief report (1-2 paragraphs will suffice) which includes in particular issues relating to the ethical implications of the research i.e. issues obtaining consent, participants withdrawing from the research, confidentiality, protection of participants from physical and mental harm etc.

Office of the Vice Provost Research, 2 Tavilton Street
University College London
Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 8717
Email: ethics@ucl.ac.uk
<http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/>

In addition, please:

- ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in UCL's Code of Conduct for Research: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/file/579>
- note that you are required to adhere to all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed as part of your application. This will be expected even after completion of the study.

With best wishes for the research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn Ang". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink stamp or background behind it.

Professor Lynn Ang
Joint Chair, UCL Research Ethics Committee

APPROVED: Amendment Request: Ethics Application 18645/001

VPRO.Ethics <ethics@ucl.ac.uk>

Sun 19/09/2021 20:00

To: Kett, Maria <m.kett@ucl.ac.uk>

Cc: Park, Dahn Bee <dahn.park.19@ucl.ac.uk>

 1 attachments (1 MB)

Re: Issue of extension ethics approval (Ethics ID Number: 18645/001);

Maria,

The REC has approved your attached amendment and extension request. Please take this email as confirmation of that approval which includes extension of ethics approval until **9th November 2022**.

IMPORTANT: For projects collecting personal data only

You should inform the Data Protection Team – data-protection@ucl.ac.uk of your proposed amendments, including requests to extend ethics approval for an additional period.

With best wishes, Helen

Helen Dougal
UCL Research Ethics Co-ordinator
Office of the Vice-Provost (Research)
University College London
2 Taviton Street, London, WC1H 0BT
Email: ethics@ucl.ac.uk

Please note that I work from home on **Fridays**. My contact details for each day are as follows:
Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday: 020 7679 8717 | (Internal extension 28717)
Friday: 07738 009997

Appendix 2. Participant Information Sheet for students with disabilities/parents of students/staff of disability support centres/researchers/directors

LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

Department of Epidemiology and Public Health



Participant Information Sheet For [students with disabilities/parents of students/staff of disability centres/researchers/directors]

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 18645/001

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 18645/001

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Support in tertiary education for students with disabilities in South Korea

Department: Epidemiology and public health

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): Dahn Bee Park

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Dr Maria Kett

1. Invitation Paragraph

Dear Sir/Madam, hello. I am Dahn Bee Park, a research student at UCL, in the department of epidemiology and public health. You are being invited to take part in a research project, named "Support in tertiary education for students with disabilities in South Korea". Before you decide whether to take part, it is essential for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will

involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Your participation is totally voluntary. If you choose to participate in this research, a written consent form will be given to you for signature. Thank you for reading this.

2. What is the project's purpose?

This project aims to reveal the experience of students with disabilities at the tertiary level, including before university entrance. I have had experience of this myself, in 2006, while attending university. This study aims to explore what can be done to improve the situation of tertiary education access for students with disabilities in South Korea. The objectives of this project are ultimately to make suggestions for how students with disabilities can be supported in higher education. This project will take three years, including one year of field study in South Korea.

3. Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate in this study as you may have personal experience of university life as a student with disabilities, as a parent of a student with disabilities, as a staff member of a disability support centre or as a researcher or director in the disability field. For students with disabilities, even if your impairment is not one of the groups legally acknowledged in Korea, you are still able to participate in this research. However, if you do not feel that you have any specific memories related to your disability and your time at your university, this research may not be relevant to you, so please do tell me.

4. Do I have to take part?

As you read in the first paragraph, it is totally up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form – if applicable). You can withdraw your consent at any time without providing a reason and without it affecting any benefits

that you are entitled to. If you decide to withdraw, you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data you have provided up to that point. After all data has been collected, you will be contacted by the researcher again and should confirm whether you are happy to include the specific contents of the interview or not. Because of the nature and purpose of the data, if you want to withdraw your agreement, let me know up to 4 weeks after the interview.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to join the interview, you will be invited to join the meeting. For students with disabilities, the interviews will be done by narrative methodology, i.e. you will be asked to tell your story, including before university admission, and your university lives. The duration/number of times we meet will vary, according to your story. However, it will take at least one meeting of an hour. It may require more than one interview. **Please note: Because of the current Covid-19 virus situation and for your safety and convenience, the interview will take place online using MS Teams. However, if that is not available to you, Skype, Zoom or Face Talk can be used alternatively.** For all the participants, a “thank-you gift” will be provided, as a small token of my appreciation.

Each interview will be recorded and stored on the university OneDrive on the researcher’s laptop, and no one else will be able to access the data. You may join this study for a couple of months. Your personal data, kept securely, will include: your name (which will be changed for the final report); your contact details (phone numbers, emails) your university (if applicable); your age; your gender; your disability (if applicable); your major (if applicable); your personal background (if applicable); your years of employment (if applicable).

Since your interview will be recorded, you will be contacted again later to check the contents of the interview. Furthermore, you might be contacted by the researcher for future studies, to be agreed, for publication such as articles or presentations.

6. Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio and/or video (if applicable) recordings of your interview made during this research are necessary but will be used only for analysis and may be used after this research, for example, in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Again, all data will be pseudonymised, at the end of the project. When the project is ended, all recording files will be destroyed.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

You may have uncomfortable feelings through telling your personal story, including before and after on campus, or during the interviews. Specific contents of the interview may cause you mood changes. If this happens, we can stop, take some time to regulate your feelings, or you can ask me to avoid further questions on any topic. Please do not hesitate to tell me if anything makes you uncomfortable. If your feelings persist, you can also withdraw your agreement to participate. It is entirely your choice. Further, you may be contacted by the researcher for further support or to check your interview contents, when the thesis is published. If you feel that there are any risks to you during the interview, you can escalate your feelings and thoughts directly to the primary researcher at UCL, as noted in the participation information sheet.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

While there may be no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have benefits for students with disabilities in the future, in relation to suggestions for changes to policies for students with disabilities.

9. What if something goes wrong?

During your participation, you may want to escalate your complaint to the researcher of this project. If that is the case, you can complain directly to the researcher, but if you feel that it is not appropriate to discuss your complains with her, you can raise them directly to the principal researcher at UCL. After that, if you are still not satisfied with the resolution, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the research in South Korea will be kept strictly confidential, based on Article 15 of the Personal Information Protection Act. If you agree, recording an interview is necessary for analysis of the interview contents. There will be no use of personal data for private purposes without your written agreement. The audio/video recording will only be used for analysis of the contents of interviews, so it is necessary to store your interviews but, at the end of the research, information will be destroyed. Your name will be changed so that no one will be able to recognise you from the data at the publication stage.

Only the researcher and primary researcher can collect and access data that you give us permission to access. You will not be able to be identified in any subsequent reports or publications.

11. Limits to confidentiality

- Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases, the university may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.
- Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

12. What will happen to the results of the research project?

After the writing up of all the interviews, you can ask to see a copy of the transcript. You can ask the researcher to delete contents that you feel do not represent what you said, although please note that all personal data will be pseudonymised. Please also note that the data could also be used after publication of the thesis, such as in a presentation of the PhD thesis or in the publication of related articles. At this time, personal details will also be changed and/or removed.

13. Local Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The categories of personal data used will be as follows:

- name (which will be modified)
- contact details (phone numbers, emails, kept securely)
- university (if applicable)
- age
- gender
- disability (if applicable)
- major (if applicable)
- personal background (if applicable)
- years of employment (if applicable)

The lawful basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the performance of a task in the public interest.

The lawful basis used to process special category personal data will be for disability research or statistical purposes. Special category personal data is personal data that reveals health (the physical or mental, genetic or biometric data).

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. This will last until the PhD thesis published. If we are able to pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

This research will be conducted in South Korea so personal data will be collected in South Korea. The personal data will be protected under UCL data protection strictly.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

The University is organising this research. Please note that there is no funding for this research.

15. Contact for further information

Followings are contact details of the researcher. This information will be also presented in information sheet.

Principal investigator

Full name: Dr Maria Kett

telephone number:

email:

Data Collector

Full name: Dahn Bee Park

telephone number:

email:

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering to take part in this research study.

Appendix 3. Consent form

LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

Department of Epidemiology and Public Health



CONSENT FORM FOR /students with disabilities/parents of students with disabilities/staff of the staff of disability support centre/ researchers/directors/IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Support for tertiary education on students with disabilities in South Korea
Department: Epidemiology and Public Health
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): Dahn Bee Park
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Dr Maria Kett
Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Alexandra Potts data-protection@ucl.ac.uk
This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 18645/001

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	<p>*I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction</p> <p>[and would like to take part in (please tick one or more of the following)]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a group discussion - an individual interview - these methods would be done through online (Using programme e.g. the primary tool is MS Teams, but if it is not available to use it, Skype or Zoom, Face Talk could be used alternatively). 	
2.	*I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to <i>[4 weeks after interview]</i> .	
3.	*I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information ; name ;contact details (phone numbers, emails)(university(if applicable) ; age; gender; disability (if applicable); major(if applicable); personal background(if applicable) ; years of employment) (if applicable) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	

4.	<p>Use of the information for this project only</p> <p>*I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified (<i>unless you state otherwise, because of the research design or except as required by law</i>).</p> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications. - I understand that confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines - I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed during the [focus group] - I understand that confidentiality may be limited and conditional given that you have a duty of report to the relevant authorities possible harm/danger to participants or others. - I request that my comments are presented anonymously but give permission to connect my role/affiliation with my comments (but not the title of my position). 	
5.	*I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.	
6.	*I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, [<i>without the care I receive or my legal rights being affected</i>]. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
7.	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
8.	I understand the direct/indirect benefits of participating.	
9.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
10.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
11.	I understand that I will be compensated for the portion of time spent in the study (if applicable) or fully compensated if I choose to withdraw.	
12.	I agree that my pseudonymised research data may be used by others for future research. [No one will be able to identify you when this data is shared.]	
13.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
14.	<p>I consent to my interview being audio/video recorded and understand that the recordings will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Used pseudonymised, using password-protected software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes. <p>Please note that: If you don't want to record as a video file, you can still participate in, but if you do not allow your voice to be recorded, sadly you cannot participate in.</p>	
15.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
16.	<p>I hereby confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) I understand the exclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher; and (b) I do not fall under the exclusion criteria. 	
17.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
18.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	

Appendix 4. Consent form (Korean version) Google form-students with disabilities

한국 장애대학생의 고등교육 지원 인터뷰 동의서(장애대학생)

*귀하는 이 이메일주소로 동의서 사본을 받게됩니다.

1. 이메일 주소를 적어주세요. * 표시는 필수 질문임

2.귀하의 성별은 무엇인가요?*

*

남성

여성

3.이름을 적어주세요*

4.핸드폰 번호를 적어주세요*

5.대학 입학년도를 적어주세요*

6.재학중인 학년을 적어주세요*

1

2

3

4

기타: _____

7.대학교 명 및 재학중인 과를 적어주세요*

8.장애정보(장애명, 장애정도)를 적어주세요*

9.만 나이를 적어주세요*

10.특별전형을 통해 입학하셨나요? *

- 예
- 아니오

11.귀하가 제공한 개인 정보는 본 연구만을 위해 사용될 것입니다. 본 인터뷰는 인터뷰 내용 분석을 위해 녹화되며, 학위논문 제출 후 녹화가 폐기됩니다. 혹시 동영상 파일로 녹화하고 싶지 않으시면 계속 참여하실 수 있지만, 음성 녹음을 허용하지 않으시면 아쉽게도 참여하실 수 없습니다. 녹화를 원치 않으시면 즉시 말씀해주세요. 이에 동의하십니까? *

- 예
- 아니오

12. 나는 인터뷰 가이드를 사전에 받아 읽었으며, 나에게 기대되는 것이 무엇인지 (비대면 일대일 심층 인터뷰)에 대해 생각할 기회를 가졌습니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

13. 나는 이 인터뷰의 목적과 필수로 제공해야 하는 개인 정보(이름/연락처/대학명,전공/나이/성별/장애 정보)에 대해 알고 있습니다. 또한 나는 나의 개인정보 보호를 위해 나의 이름이 나중에 가명처리 됨을 알고 있습니다. 또한 내가 제공한 모든 정보는 이 연구의 목적으로만 사용될 것임을 안내받았습니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

14. 나는 법에 저촉되는 상황이 발생하지 않는 한 가명보장이 지속됨을 안내받았습니다.
*

- 예
- 아니오

15. 나는 나의 참여가 자발적이며, 참여를 선택한 시점으로부터 4 주 이내에 참여의사를 철회할 수 있음을 안내받았습니다. 나는 철회하기로 결정하는 경우, 달리 동의하지 않는 한 그 시점까지 제공한 모든 개인 데이터가 삭제됨을 이해합니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

16. 나는 나의 정서적 지원을 도울 수 있는 사람(부모, 보호자, 활동보조인 등)과 인터뷰를 함께 할 수 있음을 안내받았습니다. 또한 직/간접 이득에 대해 안내받았습니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

17. 나는 연구에 소요된 시간의 일부에 대해 보상을 받을 것임을 이해합니다. 나는 이외에 재정적 혜택을 받지 않을 것임을 이해하며, 결과는 미래에 발생할 수 있음을 이해합니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

18. 나는 다음을 확인합니다. (a) 나는 정보 시트에 자세히 설명되어 있고, 연구원이 나에게 설명하는 배제 기준을 이해하며 (b) 본인은 제외 기준에 해당하지 않습니다. 불만을 제기하려면 누구에게 연락해야 하는지 알고 있습니다. 이 프로젝트 및 그 이후의 정보 사용처가 UCL 드라이브에 보관됨을 알고 있습니다. 내가 제공한 오디오/사진/비디오가 UCL 드라이브에 보관됨을 알고 있습니다. 나는 다른 인증된 연구원이 내 정보에 액세스할 수 없음을 이해하며, 제공된 데이터는 연구 목적으로만 사용됨을 알고 있습니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

19. 참여를 결정해주셔서 다시 한 번 감사드립니다. 하시고 싶은 말이 있다면 자유롭게 적어주세요.

20. 서명 (성함을 적는 것으로 대체합니다) *

Appendix 5. Consent form (Korean version) Google form-
parents of students with disabilities/staff of the staff of disability
support centre/researchers/directors

한국 장애대학생의 고등교육 지원 인터뷰
동의서(현장연구자, 장애학생지원센터직원, 보호자
등)

*귀하는 이 이메일주소로 동의서 사본을 받게됩니다

1. 이메일 주소를 적어주세요. * 표시는 필수 질문임

2. 귀하가 제공한 개인 정보는 본 연구만을 위해 사용될 것입니다. 본 인터뷰는 인터뷰 내용 분석을 위해 녹화되며, 학위논문 제출 후 녹화가 폐기됩니다. 혹시 동영상 파일로 녹화하고 싶지 않으시면 계속 참여하실 수 있지만, 음성 녹음을 허용하지 않으시면 아쉽게도 참여하실 수 없습니다. 녹화를 원치 않으시면 즉시 말씀해주세요. 이에 동의하십니까?*

- 예
 아니오

3. 나는 인터뷰 가이드를 사전에 받아 읽었으며, 나에게 기대되는 것이 무엇인지 (비대면 일대일심층 인터뷰) 에 대해 생각할 기회를 가졌습니다.*

- 예
 아니오

4. 나는 이 인터뷰의 목적과 필수로 제공해야 하는 개인 정보(이름/연락처/ 직업/ 근무년수/ 성별)에 대해 알고 있습니다. 또한 나는 나의 개인정보 보호를 위해 이름이 나중에 가명처리 됨을 알고 있습니다. 또한 내가 제공한 모든 정보는 이 연구의 목적으로만 사용될 것임을 안내받았습니다.*

- 예
- 아니오

5. 나는 법에 저촉되는 상황이 발생하지 않는 한 가명보장이 지속됨을 안내받았습니다. *

- 예
- 아니오

6. 나는 나의 참여가 자발적이며, 참여를 선택한 시점으로부터 4 주 이내에 참여의사를 철회할 수있음을 안내받았습니다.나는 철회하기로 결정하는 경우, 달리 동의하지 않는 한 그 시점까지 제공한 모든 개인 데이터가 삭제됨을 이해합니다. *

- 예
- 아니오

7. 나는 다음을 확인합니다. (a) 나는 정보 시트에 자세히 설명되어 있고, 연구원이 나에게 설명하는 배제 기준을 이해하며 (b) 본인은 제외 기준에 해당하지 않습니다. 나는 불만을 제기하려면 누구에게 연락해야 하는지 알고 있습니다. 이 프로젝트 및 그 이후의 정보 사용처가 UCL One Drive 에 보관됨을 알고 있습니다. 내가 제공한 오디오/사진/비디오가 UCL One Drive 에 보관됨을 알고 있습니다. 나는 다른 인증된 연구원이 내 정보에 액세스할 수 없음을 이해하며, 제공된 데이터는 연구 목적으로만 사용됨을 알고 있습니다. *

- 예
- 아니오

8. 참여를 결정해주셔서 다시 한 번 감사드립니다. 하시고 싶은 말씀이 있으시다면 자유롭게 적어주십시오

9. 서명 (성함을 적으시는 것으로 대체하겠습니다) *

Appendix 6. Schedule of initial interview with students and students' mothers

	Name (Pseudonym)	Total Number of Interviews	Date	Length of interview
1	Woojae	2 (1 Initial+1focused)	22 Nov 2022	1:09:06
2	Jinho	2(1 Initial+1focused)	14 Dec 21	1:03:09
3	Taesan	3(1 Initial+2focused)	18 Dec 2021	1:21:24
4	Byeol	2(1 Initial+1focused)	20 Dec 2021	1:22:12
5	Dawon	2(1 Initial+1focused)	21 Dec 2021	1:33:15
6	Misun	2(1 Initial+1focused)	3 Jan 2022	1:54:30
7	Riahn	1 Initial	24 Jan 2022	1:08:49
8	Junghyun(mother)	1 Initial	25 Jan 2022	1:07:49
9	Suhyun(mother)	1 Initial	25 Jan 2022	35:53

Appendix 7. Examples of initial interview guides with students' mother

● Your child's experience before entering university

- Can you tell me the time that you noticed his disability and the process that registers the national disability system?
- Please share your child's experience before entering university
- What was the reason that you sent your child to general high school/?
- What is the motivation for you to let him apply for university?
- What is the reason for applying for his current major?

● Your child's experience after entering university

- Can you share your child's current experience while attending university?
- What kind of challenges did he face?
- How much does his university's disability centre support him?
- What are you most concerned about his university life or overall lives of him?
- Does it come from his experience such as in middle/ high school?
- What do you think about your child's career after graduation?

● Experience/thoughts about Korean disability policy/law

- What kind of support does your child currently get from the government?
- What is your desire in terms of governmental support?
- What is the usual experience of parents of children with disabilities in Korea?

Appendix 8. Schedule of focused interviews (students with disabilities)

	Name (Pseudonym)	Date	Length of interview
1	Woojae *	2 May 2022	1:09:06
2	Jinho*	10 Apr 2022	45:04
3	Taesan*	17 Mar 2022	1:22:35
		22 Mar 2022	1:24:14
4	Byeol*	2 Mar 2022	1:10:03
5	Dawon*	6 Mar 2022	56:37
6	Misun*	20 Mar 2022	1:21:29
7	Ain	1 Mar 2022	1:22:50
		16 Jan 2023	49:26
8	Woojin	16 Mar 2022	1:13:37
9	Yeoseon	9 Mar 2022	1:51:52
10	Hyun	6 Apr 2022	1:35:28
11	Junjae	14 Apr 2022	1:18:30
12	Nams	3 May 2022	1:41:04
13	Jaehyeon	6 May 2022	1:02:41
14	Won	6 Jul 2022	1:28:43

*those who interviewed both initial and focused

Appendix 9. Examples of focused interview guides with students with disabilities

● **Questions about how to develop yourself/ career planning**

- How much time did you spend studying in your high school life?
- Can I ask you about your specific plans when you apply for university?
- After entering university, how much did you plan for after graduating from university? From when did you plan? How much effort did you put into it?
- What do you think about the special admission system? Can you describe in detail the process, how you felt about it, or how easy it is to get information?
- What did you hear about from your parents while growing up?

● **Questions about university lives**

- Do you ever have experience with using an assistant system? What are your thoughts on it?

● **Questions about disabled identity**

- When do you feel your disability is natural?
- What is the meaning of disability to you? Does it allow you to hesitate? Or be confident?
- What kind of issues do you want to share with peers with disabilities?
- Please share your personal opinion of rallies of disability persons organizations.
- Did you ever meet peers with disabilities? How much do you have empathy?
- Did your disability be the motivation for studying/ applying for university?
- Do you think your gender is the factor that you have double discrimination?

Appendix 10. Schedule of focused interview (staff of disability support centre)

	Name (Pseudonym)	Date	Length of Interviews
1	Jin	10 Apr 2022	1:29:43
2	Sumin	5 Apr 2022	1:37:52

Appendix 11. Examples of focused interview guides with staff of disability support centre

● Questions about the official process

- Tell me about your role in the centre
- What is the process of applying for disability accommodation? How much do you think your centre satisfies students' needs?

● Questions about the support students with disabilities

- How diverse are the students' disability types?
- What is the common application for support needs from students with disabilities?
- Do you have any cases of students who were not enrolled in the national disability system but applied for support, therefore you had to refuse to provide?
- Were there any cases of students with disabilities asking for mental health support? If then, please share the cases of how you/your centre deal with it
- Is there a process for students with disabilities to escalate complaints in the official route?
- When students want to pause their studies or drop out of their courses, does your centre ask the students the reason why or just proceed with their requirements?

● Questions about the personal opinion of students with disabilities' disabled/disability identity

- Do you think students with disabilities can express their own needs to the disability centre?
- Were any cases of conflict between your centre and students?
- How about students versus assistant students?

● Questions about the personal opinion of the special admission system

- What is your personal opinion on the special admission system?
- What do you think are the systematic problems in operating disability centres?

Appendix 12. Schedule of focused interview (professional)

	Name (Pseudonym)	Date	Length of Interviews
1	Ti	18 Feb 2022	2:41:37
2	Pieta	28 Feb 2022	1:00:00
3	Jihoon	1 Mar 2022	1:00:00
4	Jay	4 Mar 2022	1:10:08
5	Gye-hyun	24 Mar 2022	Sent and Received as a written form
6	Seol-Hon	26 Apr 2022	1:51:49
7	Junho	7 May 2022	1:09:22
8	Paul	15 Nov 2022	58:22
9	Sungjin	16 Nov 2022	1:04:25
10	Jinwoo	23 Feb 2023	3:01:02

Appendix 13. Examples of focused interview guides with professionals

● Questions about the special selection system for students with disabilities and its impact

- What is your opinion on the special selection system for students with disabilities?
- What is your opinion on students with disabilities on your university campus? Do you think the students have a positive disabled identity and disability identity?
- What would be the reason for the special selection system still remaining after three decades of its implementation?
- What would be the reason why still a few same universities select students with disabilities but fail to persuade the majority of other universities of the positive effects on select students with disabilities?
- What should be the effects of the Guarantee of the Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act? What would be the limitations and supplementations of this act?
- In the past, universities avoid selecting students with disabilities. However, the phenomenon has changed to give offers to students with disabilities as a means of avoiding bankruptcy. What is your opinion about the side effects of selection without considering abilities?

● Questions about Korean society/culture and disability

- What is your opinion about how disability is accepted in Korean culture?
- What would be the most significant problem in current Korean society?
- What is your opinion about the side effect of affirmative action regarding students/persons with disabilities?