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Evaluation and Assessment in English and South Korean Early Childhood Education: Divergent Policies and Warnings from the West to the East

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Abstract

Early years education has taken different forms in different countries. This paper argues that in two countries, England and South Korea, early childhood education (ECE) is diverging. For example, England's early years sector is fast moving towards a fixation of assessment, in line with the primary, secondary, and upper-secondary sectors in the country. South Korea has, much like other East Asian countries, a tradition of high-stakes testing in education. The importance of education in Korea, for historical and socio-cultural reasons, has resulted in a widely-documented 'education fever' (Kwon, Lee & Shin, 2015). A Korean "testocracy" (Kwon, Lee & Shin, 2015, p. 61) has had detrimental effects on society; thus, there have been recent policies to reverse the high-stakes testing culture in Korea. In the 2019 Revised Nuri Curriculum, the ECEC curriculum in Korea, evaluation is viewed as an improvement plan to break away from education that is overly centred on teachers' prescribed activities. The framework and method of observation and documentation are not predetermined; rather, the autonomy of teachers and institutions is emphasised (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Health and Welfare [MOE & MOHW], 2020). In contrast, England is moving in the opposite direction in terms of measurement and assessment of ECE. High-stakes testing at the primary, secondary, and upper secondary sectors has forced this accountability culture into the early years. The addition of reception baseline assessment at the age of four is one such example. This paper argues that England and Korea are moving in opposite directions, with England increasing testing in the ECE sector while Korea attempts to move away from testing culture and towards play-based ECE. Even international achievement studies now reach the ECE age level. For example, the International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study (IELS), or 'baby PISA' (Auld & Morris, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2019) illustrate how educational assessment culture has reached the early childhood sector. While English ECE is fast succumbing to evaluation and assessment culture, South Korean ECE is resisting this, providing a valuable policy lesson to view ECE policies with an internationally comparative lens.

Keywords *:* England, South Korea, Early Childhood Education, Evaluation, Assessment, Comparative Education

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Introduction

The early childhood education (ECE) sector has received significant attention worldwide since the turn of the millennium, notably from politicians and policymakers. The importance of ECE for children and societies has been supported by trans- and supra-national organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank (Lundkvist et al., 2017) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Kalliala, 2011). These organisations claim to prioritise children's happiness. However, critical examination is needed to unravel the contradictions between the assessments demanded by these organisations and research-informed ECE practice. These trans- and supra-national organisations define developmental standards, shape the discourse on quality as a necessary condition for maximising human capital, and influence countries to move toward achieving standardised outcomes of quality (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). Continued criticism of these organisations focuses upon the educational standards set without consideration of socio-cultural contexts, and whether the prescribed, formulaic benchmarks can guarantee so-called 'quality' (Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). The oversimplified view of 'quality' in ECE has been distilled to universalised features, reflecting a reductionist perspective within a mechanistic discourse. Additionally, these linear criteria of children's development compel early childhood teachers to focus on young children's weaknesses, rather than identify their strengths. This has resulted in the academisation and schoolification of some ECE systems (Jahreie, 2023); for example, England has moved its emphasis away from 'care' and towards 'education' on the Early Childhood Education and Care continuum (Mourão, 2019), as has South Korea. Furthermore, the global push for school readiness (Jahreie, 2023) and neoliberal turn in education in England (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021) and in South Korea (Choi, 2023; You & Choi, 2023) highlight the importance of exploring ECE trends across the globe. Despite these increasing pressures on the ECE sector, South Korea has started mounting resistance with attempts to de-emphasise neoliberalism in education (So & Kang, 2014; You & Choi, 2023), and, for the early years, emphasising play with the 2019 Revised Nuri Curriculum. This article asserts the importance of examining ECE systems across the globe to view favourable and/or alarming policy decisions. The English and South Korean cases provide an example of these trends in this

paper.

Early childhood education (ECE) in England follows an unusual pattern of emphasising assessment within the sector. This compulsory school-esque model of standardised assessment can be described as 'schoolification', and this early emphasis on ECE "statutory assessment" and "formalised curriculum" can be characterised as an "international outlier" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 7). In fact, this article argues that English and South Korean ECE are moving in opposite directions. England's ECE sector keeps escalating measurement, while South Korean education policy has made a strong effort to de-emphasise assessment and school readiness for ECE children. Despite the South Korean resistance to ECE evaluation, the strong culture of global assessment has been steadily increasing, as illustrated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study (IELS), nicknamed as 'baby PISA' (Auld & Morris, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2019). Furthermore, South Korea's (hereafter, Korea) aforementioned Nuri curriculum reforms of 2019, while moving in the opposite direction of England's ECE sector, finds itself within a larger, tangled battle against high-pressure exam culture. Global and national testing and evaluation culture has now begun pressurising the ECE sector, which is either embraced, as with the case of England, or resisted, as with the case of Korea.

The article thus views ECE in both England and Korea, highlighting the movements toward, in the case of England, and away, in the case of Korea, of evaluative assessment in the early years sector. The juxtaposition of both ECE systems offer a comprehensive framework for critically examining Eastern and Western trends in ECE. The divergent positions of nations are mirrored in the ECE policy actions taken by England and Korea, which serve as reflections of more extensive discussions concerning the balance between quantitative assessment and holistic development. The article argues that early years has now entered the "international education horserace" (Takayama, 2008, p. 389). England is heavily immersed in the race, but the revised Korean ECE curriculum has provided policy, but perhaps not cultural, resistance to these pressures. The examination of the Western and Eastern, and in this case, English and Korean ECE views of evaluative assessment provide a lesson for viewing the early years sector's movements and trends in an internationally

comparative manner, as warnings and lessons for education policy decisions.

ECE in England

All children, from birth to five years old in England's ECE settings fall under the umbrella of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Bradbury, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2015). While compulsory school in England technically begins the term after a child's fifth birthday with Year 1, most children in England attend Reception the September after their fourth birthday. The EYFS provides the framework for children in English ECE settings, providing assessments for developmental stages, culminating in an EYFS profile at the age of five. Children now begin Reception with a Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), arguably catalysing further measurement in the early years sector in England (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017). The large amount of data collected for England's pupils, including early years settings and in Reception, has impacted the view of children, view of education, and educational values in the country.

The impetus for the RBA began in order to provide a benchmark for children's start at primary school in England with their exit at age 11. This comparison would provide an insight into a primary school's so-called effectiveness (Bradbury, 2019; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). It has been argued that the RBA will become a "starting line" for assessing and measuring primary school quality, viewing children in a narrow, neoliberal, and future contributor to the market economy (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016, p. 601). This benchmark assessment at the age of four, then, potentially exposes English children to surveillance which lasts throughout their compulsory and post-compulsory education.

At the end of Reception, children are assessed against Early Learning Goals, set by the English government, as 'emerging, 'expected, or 'exceeding' the assessment criteria (Bradbury, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2015). Children's government-mandated assessments play a further role with educational surveillance in England. For example, it has been argued that the EYFS profile becomes fodder for external inspections (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017). In England, schools are inspected and assessed by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and given a so-called 'grade', such as Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, and Inadequate. Interestingly, Ofsted suggested

in a report entitled *Bold Beginnings*, that Reception classes should have more formal learning, increasing the pressure for schoolification of the early years (Bradbury, 2019). This "academic shovedown" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 10) and "accountability shove down" (Jahreie, 2023, p. 1), it is argued, was encouraged by English education policy initiatives. For example, *Bold Beginnings*, along with the narrowing of the EYFS focus on mathematics and reading literacy in order to further align English early years with the priorities of Key Stage 1, or Years 1 and 2 of English primary school, further incentivised the accountability measures of England's compulsory schools. Therefore, "early years results have become an important part of the whole school analysis of data and the school's narrative of progress" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 12), instead of a more holistic view of early childhood education. This inspection and surveillance culture had a negative impact on the holistic view of education, and especially the education of young children.

The assessment culture in England's early years sector has been detrimental to both teachers and children. Statutory assessments, such as the EYFS profile and the Reception Baseline Assessment, it is argued, require "that data become an important part of teachers' lives and their sense of worth" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 13). Teachers in government-funded settings must undertake these assessments. While the private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) early years providers in England are not required to undertake these statutory assessments, practitioners do need to benchmark children against a government-issued *Development Matters* framework (Bradbury, 2019; Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Therefore, both children and teachers fall prey to the assessment, feeding into this surveillance of teachers and of children. The evaluation of children designates them with labels, for example, such as "commencing", "emerging", and "secure" with different pre-designated, benchmarked skills (Bradbury, 2019, p. 13). Bradbury (2019) argues that this data is often 'distilled' into a profile, and passed on as a child progresses through various educational stages in England.

A descaling emphasis on play in early years settings signifies schoolification in English ECE, as does an over-emphasis on reading literacy and mathematics in pre-compulsory settings (Bradbury, 2019). This over-emphasis reduces the whole child's foundational development in ECE to preparation for compulsory school (Bradbury, 2019; Moss, 2016). The over-emphasis, therefore, has resulted in the aforementioned "academic shovedown"

(Bradbury, 2019, p. 10) and "accountability shove down" (Jahreie, 2023, p. 1) of compulsory school values into the early years sector. Bradbury (2019, p. 15) further argues that the dominant discourse of a "technical", "easily measured" ECE mirrors that of other sectors of English education.

ECE in South Korea

South Korea operates a dual system of education and care. Under the current system, kindergartens fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education (MOE), providing education for children aged three to five. Childcare centres, which used to be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) but were transferred to the Ministry of Education starting in 2024, are responsible for the care of children aged from birth to five (the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education [KICCE], 2021b). Kindergartens provide education for children before commencing compulsory school at age six. Childcare centres, however, offer childcare, due to increased female workforce participation and evolving family structures. Although not compulsory, most children attend either a kindergarten or a childcare centre. However, this dual system exacerbates the varied quality of education children receive depending on the type of institution (KICCE, 2019). Kindergartens and childcare centres had operated under separate curricula: the national kindergarten curriculum, established in 1969, and national standardised care curriculum, implemented in 2007, respectively (Na & Park, 2013). The two institutions have different minimum qualification standards for teachers, and differences in the educational environment contribute to concerns about quality differences in educational experiences for children of the same age depending on the types of educational institution (KICCE, 2021b). In 2013, the government aimed to strengthen its national responsibility for early childhood education and care, advocating for a unified common curriculum known as the *Nuri curriculum for 3 to 5-year-olds* (KICCE, 2013).

The Nuri curriculum aimed to minimise the differences between kindergartens and childcare centres. Nuri means 'world' in Korean, signifying a wish for all children to lead happy lives (KICCE, 2013). The implementation of the 2013 curriculum marked the expansion of government support for early childhood education and childcare expenses,

irrespective of socioeconomic status or the type of institution children attend. As Korea confronts the lowest fertility rate in the world (Anderson & Kohler, 2013), the Nuri curriculum attempted to address this issue with free childcare for infants and free education for young children, along with the nationwide, common curriculum for three to five-year-olds, in order to increase fertility and promote equity. While the Nuri curriculum advocated for child-centered and play-centered education (KICCE, 2013), it garnered criticism for not clearly mentioning the rights of young children (Na & Park, 2013). Furthermore, the contents of the curriculum had also been criticised for being excessively detailed, accompanied by an overwhelming number of instructional materials (KICCE, 2019). Consequently, the 2013 Nuri curriculum faced scrutiny for being teacher-driven and providing hindrances to child-led, emergent play, especially due to the detailed activity guidebooks (Lee, 2019). Furthermore, the curriculum had also been critiqued for its approach of excessively subdividing national-level curriculum content, which ostensibly led to the fragmentation and over-specification of educational content, thereby detracting from the attainment of holistic educational objectives (Lee, 2016). The highly structured and detailed activity plans (Lee, 2016) dictated by MOE resulted in teachers feeling like technicians, simply following a predetermined sequence of activities, rather than educators (Cho & Kim, 2017; KICCE, 2019).

The Nuri curriculum, it is argued, catalysed Korean ECE sector's shift away from evaluation and testing culture. The 2014 Korea Child Panel Study, conducted by KICCE, gathered data on the school readiness of six-year-olds in their first year of compulsory education (Panel Study on Korean Children [PSKC], 2023). Despite numerous studies on school readiness emerging from this data, there has not been a national policy mandating standardised testing for young children since this 2014 study. Initially, the promotion of a learner-centered curriculum was introduced in a 2015 revision of primary and secondary education curricula, emphasising competency-based education (KICCE, 2019). A change in government in 2017 resulted in the *Early Childhood Education Innovation Plan* (KICCE, 2019). The primary focus of this plan was to redesign the curriculum, shifting towards play-based education with a child-centered approach, and respecting the autonomy of teachers (KICCE, 2019). Also in 2017, the nationwide academic achievement assessment (NAEA) for elementary and secondary school students, previously part of compulsory education, was

abolished (Kim, 2017). Despite this, in response to the concerns about declining basic academic skills post-COVID-19, a sample of 3% of 9th-grade and 11th-grade students must participate in academic achievement assessments in 2024. Korea's aforementioned issue of extremely low fertility can be attributed to the so-called 'education fever' (Anderson & Kohler, 2013), as people are reluctant to bring children into the cutthroat education pressures. Therefore, implementing more assessments for Korean pupils faces much national resistance, and for young children, this resistance is particularly strong. All these factors push Korean ECE away from assessment pressures.

The Nuri curriculum, as stated previously, faced criticism for its overly linear, and reductive and mechanical prescriptions for Korean ECE teachers. The excessive amount of detail became burdensome (KICCE, 2019), and teacher-led activities took precedence over child-led play (Lee, 2019). Furthermore, portfolio assessment of the children became viewed as a collection of artwork (Lee, 2016) rather than documentation. Therefore, the new government of 2017 initiated ECE reforms in order to eliminate these issues (KICCE, 2021b). The revised 2019 Nuri curriculum emphasised child-led play and simplified evaluation (KICCE, 2019). Teachers could observe children's play, record it in their preferred way, and autonomously decide how to provide pedagogical support (MOE & MOHW, 2020), rather than spending significant time with planning.

The revision of Nuri curriculum in 2019 marks a shift in the Korean educational paradigm (KICCE, 2021a). Previously ECE was viewed as preparation for school and, in order to contribute to society, young children should achieve pre-defined achievement benchmarks. The 2019 revised Nuri curriculum, however, aligns more closely with the Nordic ECE model and moves away from the schoolification pressure. The revised curriculum reflects a more Nordic, socio-democratic (Esping-Anderson, 1990) view of ECE and utilises a "children's point of view" (Närvi et al., 2020, p. 138). Young children are seen as agentic, another Nordic value (Antikainen, 1990) and in charge of their own learning. Under the 2019 revised Nuri curriculum, teachers observe children's interests and scaffold appropriate extensions.

The 2019 revised Nuri curriculum also changed the evaluation of young children, aiming to understand the development of the children, and not to perform to targets. Teachers observe and research what interests young children and provide appropriate scaffolding. The national guidelines were broadened, and the evaluation aims to understand young children's

development. The revised curriculum states, “evaluation is a process for improvement for child-centered, play-enabled education in kindergartens and childcare centres” (MOE & MOHW, 2020, p. 52). In other words, evaluation no longer screened for early intervention or diagnosed the achievement results of individual children. The 2019 revised Nuri curriculum allows teachers to support children's unpredictable play by observing, documenting, and supporting it (MOE & MOHW, 2020). Although children's numeracy and literacy skills may be revealed through observation and documentation of play, the evaluation intends to understand children and their learning, not to evaluate the level of development they have reached.

Recently, Korean kindergartens have shifted to institutional self-evaluations (Seoul Early Childhood Education & Promotion Center, 2023). Individual kindergartens form their own evaluation committees and conduct assessments based on developed indicators. Self-evaluation also exists in Finland’s education system (Chung, 2019) allowing individual institutions to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, rather than by external scrutiny. The direction of the 2019 revised Nuri curriculum aligns with the principles of ECE evaluation, rather than for older pupils, by simplifying assessments, encouraging teacher autonomy, and observing and documenting young children while contemplating meaningful pedagogical support. Observation and documentation have become crucial indicators of early childhood teachers' professionalism through this transformation.

Over the past ten years, the Korean government's top priority has been to eliminate and integrate the quality gap between early childhood education and childcare. Korea’s ‘education fever’ (Kwon, Lee & Shin, 2015) and deeply entrenched shadow education culture via *hagwon*, private, for-profit educational institutions, have been well documented, with children in early childhood education receiving private tutoring (Beach, 2011; Yi & Yang, 2009). However, there have been attempts to downgrade the importance of Korean shadow education (Shon & Kang, 2020), along with a growing belief that young children should be protected from these pressures. Recent Korean education policy signifies an intention to depart from the strong testing and evaluation culture facilitated by transnational assessments such as PISA and IELS. The Korean government currently prioritises children’s rights, well-being, along with integrated and equitable education. This shift underpins the revised 2019 Nuri curriculum, which references the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN

Sustainable Development Goals, and OECD Education 2030 Learning Framework (KICCE, 2019). Departing from the traditionally-held developmental structuralism of Korean ECE, the national-level early childhood education curriculum aims to establish a foundation for true learning, aiming to catalyse transformation in the early childhood education sector.

The evaluation and assessment of education reflects the underpinning values and perspectives of learning (James, 2008) of an educational context. The revisions and reforms of Korean early years evaluation have reflected this. For example, the ECE sector in Korea has, in the past decade, attempted to consolidate the disparities within the dual system, resist schoolification, promote teacher autonomy, and reform the evaluation of young children's learning. The 2019 revised Nuri curriculum, for example, explicitly emphasises the simplification of recording and assessment. It prioritises respecting children's interests and thoughts over the significance of recording or assessing (MOE & MOHW, 2020). These ECE curricular revisions, nevertheless, face an uphill battle within a culture promoting 'education fever' within a "testocracy" (Kwon, Lee, & Shin, 2015, p. 61). The article recommends a Finnish "continuity and change" (Chung, 2019, p. 122, 123) approach to the Nuri 2019 curriculum, in order to see the policy ambitions to fruition. This further highlights the need to view Eastern and Western trends in early childhood education for both policy lessons and warnings.

Divergent Testing Cultures in English and Korean ECE

Educational policies and curricula in each country impact each other both directly and indirectly, illustrating the importance of viewing ECE policy trends through an internationally comparative lens. To ensure the happiness and meaningful learning of all young children, it is argued, early childhood educators worldwide must demonstrate greater 'response-ability'. The importance of education should be understood not through numerical logic but through responsiveness and resonance, requiring collaborative efforts from various stakeholders. Hopefully, while maintaining the direction of these assessment-resistant reforms, the Korean education system aspires to initiate a step-change in terms of exam-driven datafication. England's educational values, as expressed through extensive assessment, including ECE evaluation (James, 2008) is moving in a different direction.

The article thus far has highlighted the divergent trajectories of both the Korean and English ECE sectors in terms of schoolifcation and measurement. Korea's educational "testocracy" (Kwon, Lee, & Shin, 2015, p. 61) has been well documented, and there have been several policy movements to combat this, namely, the unsuccessful eradication of shadow education, or *hagwon* (You & Choi, 2023), and various policy changes at the middle and high school years to alleviate some academic pressure. As discussed earlier, the 2019 Nuri curriculum reforms slimmed down the level of prescription in order to encourage children's play and an organic method of evaluation and documentation. The 2011 EYFS reforms in England, while similarly reducing assessment points, managed to, as part of an "accountability reform" intended to reduce bureaucracy, replace the EYFS profile with the Reception Baseline Assessment, generating "compliance data" (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016, p. 600). This article argues that the 2019 Nuri reforms have placed Korean ECE on an opposite trajectory to England in terms of content and evaluative assessment. The recent date of the 2019 Korean ECE reforms, and the global Covid-19 pandemic's disruption of schooling worldwide, means it will take some years to see if the 2019 revised Nuri curriculum was able to resist the worldwide education pressures, which, it is argued, a recommended action after major policy reform.

The advent of international assessments has expedited the testing and evaluation culture in all sectors of education. As stated previously, the OECD, creators of PISA, initiated a cross-national assessment of young children, the IELS (Auld & Morris, 2019; Bradbury, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2019). PISA has been so influential in education policy that it has resulted in the aformentioned "international education horserace" (Takayama, 2008, p. 389), and "global measurement industry" (Biesta, 2017, p. 316). There have been many cases of countries using educational data to catalyse educational reform, such as with Germany, which illustrates the shift from a humanistic view of education to a neoliberal one (Chung, 2019), much like the trend now seen in early childhood education. Before PISA, the highly-regarded German system aimed to foster *Bildung*, often translated into 'education' in English. However, *Bildung* signifies an individual's holistic development (Neumann et al., 2010). As the German notion of *Bildung* did not align with PISA's form of measurement, this led to fundamental educational reform, favouring policies of educational output. Therefore, Germany's emphasis on *Bildung* eroded to an externally-evaluated, assessment-based view

of education (Chung, 2019). This article argues that the humanistic view of early childhood education is similarly eroding, due to an assessment-driven view of the sector. The creation of the IELS only exacerbates this. The measurement of education, while admittedly in place before the initiation of PISA, has spawned a testing frenzy on local, national, and international levels. The ECE sector is not immune.

The IELS, or "preschool PISA" (Moss et al., 2016, p. 345) illustrates the increased testing pressures on the ECE sector (Bradbury, 2019). The "horserace" (Takayama, 2008, p. 389) now in ECE has resulted in the "accountability shove down" (Jahreie, 2023, p. 1) and educational surveillance (Roberts-Holmes, 2015) of young children. England's ECE sector, it is argued, has been particularly compliant with testing and accountability, while Korea has been mounting resistance. The erosion of *Bildung* in Germany, it is argued, parallels the erosion of English early childhood education to the measurement of young children via assessment-driven data. Despite a wealth of academic literature upholding the early years sector's mission to support its child-centred values, despite the forces of accountability (Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016), these pressures continue. In contrast, the 2019 Nuri Curriculum has promoted child-centredness and play-based learning in Korean ECE. It is, therefore, essential to closely observe the trajectory of these policy initiatives in both England and Korea. The danger of viewing of early childhood education in terms of evaluative assessment, is that it "decontextualises and pathologises individual children, teachers and schools" (Roberts-Holmes, 2015, p. 303) and ignores the all-important social and emotional development of children.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article argues that the increasing evaluation and schoolification culture of the English ECE sector, in contrast to the increasingly child-centred and play-based Korean ECE, provides a firm warning for education policymakers worldwide. England's education system is "the most 'advanced' in Europe in terms of data production and use" (Ozga, 2009, p. 149). This affects education of young children with the intensifying focus on "essentials" such reading and mathematical skills, and, while raising thresholds for achievement in these target

areas, "mak[es] them harder to achieve" (Roberts-Holmes, 2015, p. 303-304). This suggests that the humanistic view of education is all but lost in the English early years sector. For example, Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018, p. 2) argue that this approach to education is "far too far from the judgments that teachers need to make about real children's progress towards greater, genuine understanding". Again, the English education system and ECE sector serve as a warning for the already-competitive education culture in Korea, and for the rest of the world.

English and Korean ECE, it has been argued, are going in opposite directions, for example, with the reforms to the 2019 Nuri curriculum emphasising play (KICCE, 2019) and the Reception Baseline Assessment in England (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017) emphasising measurement. Although the East Asian education systems exist in a different "ecosystem" (Kemmis & Heikkinen, 2012, p. 157) to the Western and English context, England's schoolification of ECE contrasts with the recent policy efforts in Korean ECE. The storing of educational data collected during ECE now "governs education" in English early years (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016, p. 601) and the "international educational horserace" (Takayama, 2008, p. 389) has now become a pre-school global education race (Roberts-Holmes, 2015). This has increased the influence of data on education policymaking (Chung, 2016) in the early years sector. As concretely illustrated by the OECD's IELS and England's RBA, the testing of young children has now entered a global competition.

Evaluation and assessment culture has now begun infiltrating the ECE sector; unfortunately, "free play and learning through play are no longer considered appropriate routes to knowledge" (Gunnarsdottir, 2014, p. 246), and England's ECE sector is a glaring example of this view. Therefore, it is argued that the Korea's most recent reforms to the Nuri curriculum highlights the country's brave resistance to global education trends. Therefore, the divergent ECE policies in England and Korea illustrate the importance of viewing ECE across the globe, examining both East and West in order to view both policy lessons and warnings. For example, previous research has uncovered England's tendency for a lack of commitment to education policy change, and reluctance towards seeing policies through to completion, as illustrated by the Master's in Teaching and Learning (Chung, 2019). This serves as a policy warning to other countries. Furthermore, educational research has also highlighted Finland's "continuity and change" vision of policy reform (Chung, 2019, p. 122,

123), illustrating the importance of seeing policy reform to completion, ideally over a generation, and not succumbing to policy makers' personal agendas. Therefore, it is recommended that Korea see through the most recent Nuri curriculum reforms to fruition, especially with the admirable resistance to education's evaluation and assessment pressures. The article has argued that the divergent policy directions of English and Korean ECE, therefore, highlight the essential nature of viewing education, and early childhood education, from a global and internationally comparative viewpoint, in order to view policy lessons and warnings.

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