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UNDERSTANDING THE KOREAN CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF A PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT TOOL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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The present study examined how Korean professors understand the Korean culture of assessment. Grounded on the evaluation of the testing culture, the study also analyzed the underlying ideologies in the Korean testing culture from historical perspectives and investigated the possibility of implementing a writing performance assessment tool as an option for changing the backdrop of the Korean testing culture.

The analysis of the findings revealed three underlying ideologies in the Korean culture of assessment: elitism, meritocracy, and state control. The underpinning ideologies have been closely interwoven with historical and cultural backgrounds. That is, the historic value of the state examination and its symbolic importance of selecting qualified elites based on testing scores have been deeply situated in Koreans' ideology even though traditional aristocratic society was abolished. Thus, anyone who wishes to be an elite should prove his or her merit based on high scores on the state examination.

In addition, along with the Korean government's emphasis on English as a compulsory resource for the nation's globalization, the standardized English test scores, such as the TOEIC scores, became another important criteria of elitism and meritocracy, regardless of the fact that the TOEIC does not evaluate test-takers' actual language abilities.

In relation to the ideology of state control, the conventional status of the government that holds a strong central power has continued in modern society even though the decentralization of the educational policy and assessment system has been carried out since the 1980s (Chung, 2011). As a result, many professors' assessment decisions and practices had a strong relationship with the three underlying ideologies.

In terms of the possibility of implementing a performance assessment tool as an option for changing the Korean testing culture, the results of the study revealed that half of the English professors were against implementing it because of issues related to the current university's assessment system and practicality even though they all perceived that a performance assessment tool was more preferable than the existing TOEIC test to assess students' business English writing competences. Thus, this study concludes with suggestions of how the Korean testing culture can be changed.