

THE EDUCATIONAL ROLES OF GEOJASSI CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

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Abstract

The manifestation of extraordinary spirituality in both individual and societal realms has been the fundamental factor behind Christianity's substantial impact as one of the world's prominent religions, with a historical trajectory exceeding 2,000 years. When an individual embraces the teachings of traditional Christian Scripture and joins a community of believers known as the Church, they cultivate personal spirituality. Through this, they strive to transcend themselves and establish a connection with God. Socially, it involves implementing public justice through prophetic expression, advocating for the numerous individuals who face social marginalisation and hardship. Korean Protestantism upheld this spiritual equilibrium until the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as South Korea undergoes a transition into a more competitive postmodern society, its spirituality gradually diminishes in appeal. This study will examine the efforts of a Christian alternative school in South Korea to support Korean Protestantism during a challenging period and reinstate its prior positive impact. This study will use a theological framework to assess the institution's spirituality and educational social responsibility. Specifically, we will examine the effectiveness with which this school tackles two significant issues that Korean society is currently facing: school violence and the exorbitant cost of private education.

Keywords: Gyeojassi Christian School (GCS), Korea, Protestantism, social responsibility, spirituality

1. Introduction

The introduction of the Protestant Church in Korea in the late 19th century had a notably beneficial influence on Korean history. Around 20% of South Korea's population had the opportunity to adopt Protestantism during the mid-20th century [1]. Many Koreans widely recognised the establishment of hospitals and democratic educational institutions by missionaries as essential for the enlightenment and defiance of Korean society against Japanese imperialism. Following the liberation from Japan in 1945 and surviving the Korean War (1950–1953), the Church persisted as a patriotic faith that swiftly spread throughout Korean society [2].

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However, beginning in the middle of the 1980s, Korean Protestantism's development and influence substantially decreased. As a scholar has noted, these events, particularly the exodus of young people from the Church, are mostly the result of the rapid secularisation of the Church, in which the saints moved away from the organised Christian religion [3]. Hence, it would be beneficial to promote the provision of specialized spiritual education and training to young people. This would provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the pressing issues in Korean society, allowing them to recognize and implement suitable solutions. While South Korea (hereafter Korea) has made impressive advancements in both economic growth and its global cultural influence, especially through the widely celebrated Hallyu phenomenon, these outward successes obscure several serious challenges that the country faces internally. Although Korea may appear to be a flourishing and prosperous nation, it is grappling with pressing issues. In fact, compared to other OECD countries in 2024, Korea has the highest rates of suicide and poverty among older generations, along with one of the lowest happiness indices for young people [2, p. 58]. These underlying social issues persist alongside the nation's economic and cultural achievements, and addressing them is essential for the long-term well-being and stability of the country. It is crucial that Korean society, families, and educational institutions work together to create an environment that nurtures the well-being of young individuals. Korean Protestants, in particular, should actively contribute to this effort, as their involvement can play a significant role in fostering a supportive and positive atmosphere for future generations.

Pastor Eun-Jin Na's strong sense of mission, as well as the concern and support of the Gwangju Gyeojassi Church (GGC), led to the establishment of the Gyeojassi Christian School (GCS). In light of the critical issues we have just discussed, this school has the potential to inspire a spiritual awakening. This study aims to demonstrate that implementing similar Christian education in other places in Korea can spark a movement for social purity and church renewal. We anticipate that subsequent research on the GCS will build upon this work, which represents the initial scholarly inquiry into the issue. Furthermore, while numerous scholars have identified various shortcomings in Korean Protestantism and suggested theological remedies, there is a dearth of literature providing specific examples of effective solutions to these problems [4]. Within this particular context, this study could serve as a significant asset for Christians who are looking to effectively address and manage the present issues faced by their churches.

2. Research Method

The first step in preparing this study involved gathering and analysing historical primary sources related to the GCS. To do this, the author meticulously collected printed works published by GCS from early May 2023 to April 2024, as well as a variety of audiovisual materials documenting the activities of the GCS. In order to verify and further clarify the content of these materials, the author conducted interviews and exchanged emails as often as necessary with key

figures, including the headteacher, teachers, and ministers of the churches attended by the GCS students, from May 2023 to early January 2025. This was essential for ensuring the accuracy of the gathered data. To support this process, the author rigorously documented and organised all email correspondence, ensuring that metadata such as sender, recipient, and subject lines were captured alongside the content of the emails. Any supplementary materials, such as attachments, were also preserved for thorough examination. The emails were contextualised within the broader research objectives to verify their relevance, and any ambiguities or inconsistencies were cross-referenced with other sources, including interview transcripts and official documents. This allowed the author to ensure the authenticity of the email data and resolve any potential issues, contributing to the transparency and reliability of the study.

Furthermore, during this period, the author initially approached these materials through a theological lens, applying theological analysis. When this approach proved insufficient, the author broadened the analysis by incorporating frameworks from the humanities and social sciences. These frameworks included, but were not limited to, reading theory, concepts related to the maintenance of physical health, music theory, and both direct and indirect faith transmission models. The central focus of this investigation is to comprehensively understand the origins and the full context of the emergence of GCS, along with a detailed analysis of the school's core curriculum. In addition to this, the study will assess the degree of interest and engagement of teachers, students, and parents in the educational practices carried out within the school. A critical element of this research will involve examining the impact of this educational model on the potential revitalisation of Protestantism in South Korea, the societal perspective on school violence, and the escalating costs of private tuition.

The final section of this endeavour will identify specific areas where improvements are necessary for the school to expand and grow effectively. However, it is important to acknowledge a significant limitation of this study: the majority of the data has been provided by individuals directly associated with the institution, raising concerns regarding its objectivity. Despite this limitation, such research remains grounded in the author's academic integrity, theological reflection, and the methodological approaches of the humanities and social sciences. Although this study cannot claim to be entirely free from subjectivity, the author remains confident that it has been conducted and presented in an honest and thorough scholarly manner.

3. Background and Brief History of the GCS

The GCS is a Christian school that provides an alternative educational option. The alternative school movement in Korea gained momentum in the mid-1990s as a response to the establishment of institutional policies for middle school equalisation in 1969 and high school equalisation in 1974 within the framework of public education in Korean society. The movement aimed to address the various negative consequences resulting from these policies [Y.-J. Ham, *The history and meaning of Christian alternative schools*, 2016, <http://www.kidok.com/news/>

articleView.html?idxno=96411]. The rigid structure and uniformity of the educational curriculum have prioritised public access and equal opportunities in education, inadvertently suppressing students' academic autonomy and freedom, leading to unexpected outcomes. In addition, this form of public education fostered an environment that prioritised a basic cognitive education focused on preparing pupils for the college admission exam rather than offering them opportunities for creative thinking and experiential learning. Public alternative schools are subject to state regulation and approval, whereas autonomous private alternative schools operate independently, without state management or supervision. Currently, there are about 500 alternative Christian schools in Korea. These schools primarily aim to achieve the true value and objective of Christian education by avoiding unnecessary state control and interference. Recent research indicates that numerous alternative Christian schools are failing to achieve the intended outcomes for which they were originally established [5]. The primary factors contributing to this issue are excessive workload, an unsuitable school environment, interpersonal conflicts, financial instability, an imbalance between job and personal life, and emotional turmoil [6]. Thus, we will delve into a comprehensive analysis of the GCS, showcasing its potential for effectively resolving the challenges faced by these alternative educational institutions.

Pastor Eun-Jin Na introduced the idea of establishing a Christian school as an alternate option to two parents in Gwangju, Korea, on 1 November 2015. To revitalise the Korean Church, Na pursued degrees in theology (BA, M.Div., and Th.M.) at Kwangshin University in Korea. Amidst a surge in the decline of religious influence in the Church, he expressed profound concern about the diminishing spiritual and social impact of Korean Protestantism, as well as its lack of direction for the future [7]. He concluded that the most effective approach to tackling this problem was to cultivate the next cohort of leaders. He began working with children aged 3 to 5 in the GGC nursery school, where he served as educational minister. In May 2016, Na established the Gyeojassi International Christian School (GICS) with the approval of the GGC [7]. Initially, the school enrolled 13 children. Within a span of fewer than three years, the school has experienced substantial growth, accommodating approximately 120 pupils [7]. The school modified the acronym GICS to GCS in 2023. The enrolment at the GCS in 2023 is 361 pupils, distributed as follows: 116 in nursery school, 179 in elementary school, 50 in middle school, and 16 in high school [E.-J. Na, email letter to the author, 12 July 2023]. As of 2024, GCS has a total of 414 students, including nursery children and students from primary, secondary, and high schools. The total number of students expected to enrol in March 2025 is 452 [E.-J. Na, email to the author, 10 January 2025].

The GCS provides a much more comprehensive and rigorous education compared to the standard curriculum offered by the Korean public education system. The school employs over 70 teachers who possess nationally recognised teaching certifications. Among them, one teacher is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree, eleven teachers hold master's qualifications, and the remaining teachers have bachelor's qualifications. Currently, this institution is located near the entrance to Mudeungsan National Park. Due to its dense forests, clean air, and

uncontaminated water, this region is considered one of the most pristine regions in Korea. In this environment, the GCS students who enhance their academic capabilities in a cutting-edge facility situated on a 5,834-square-metre property will be regarded as the potential future leaders of Korea [7, p. 27-35].

4. Educational Goal and System of the GCS

The main goal of the GCS is to provide students with a holistic and cohesive education from a young age, empowering them to live a fulfilling life and ultimately contributing to the revival of Korean Protestantism. The GCS suggests that the biblical notion of abundant life places greater importance on the generation of ‘fruit’ than mere ‘success’. In contemporary society, success is typically characterized as the acquisition of wealth, social status, prestige, and comparable accomplishments, usually attained by surpassing others in a highly competitive setting [8]. However, the fruit extends beyond external achievements and encompasses the establishment of a strong community through qualities like humility, mutual understanding, and cooperation that reflect one’s inner spirituality [9]. This establishment strictly forbids the practise of subjecting or exploiting others.

The complete education of the GCS openly acknowledges that God has blessed humans with a strong mind and a healthy body, enabling them to fully utilise their powers and effectively manage the earth. Individuals establish communion with this deity through acts of worship conducted both in their own homes and at places of worship. Therefore, the family, as the fundamental and essential unit of society, possesses substantial importance as an institution that carries out its sacred mission and serves both God and fellow human beings. This scenario imparts a crucial insight: the breakdown of familial units might result in the breakdown of both the church and society. Home education, which is based on the spiritual beliefs and practises of parents, has a greater and more far-reaching influence on children compared to official education in religious institutions or society. To streamline the admission process for students raised in a nurturing spiritual environment at home and provide them with a more challenging education that encompasses both spiritual and intellectual subjects, the GCS is establishing an educational programme. To discourage applicants solely focused on achieving excellent academic grades, the institution has implemented admission policies. In essence, this school accepts students by thoroughly reviewing their religious upbringing at home and assessing their capacity to work together with their peers towards a common goal.

Now, let us examine a few of the spiritual education programmes offered by the GCS. Reciting the Bible is arguably one of the most effective spiritual practises in Christianity. Churches that have implemented Bible memorisation programmes are experiencing global growth. The Church Fathers, who engaged in the practise of reciting the Bible in the Egyptian desert, had a significant role in preserving Christianity throughout the early Church’s period of persecution [8]. Dr. Samuel Lee, the founder of the University Bible Fellowship (UBF), mandated that UBF leaders commit the Bible text to memory before delivering sermons on

its subjects. The profound devotion to the Bible has resulted in the expansion of UBF into a prominent worldwide student gospel movement at present [10]. Hak-Su Na, the esteemed leader of the GGC, captivates the crowd with his powerful sermons, effortlessly reciting Bible verses in a continuous flow like a cascading waterfall [11]. The GCS strongly promotes the memorisation of over 100 Bible verses within a single calendar year. Huth and others aptly proposed that those who commit the Bible to memory from a young age will be more equipped to adhere to its teachings and surmount obstacles [12].

One component of the GCS's spiritual education is engaging in discussions on Bible topics or verses, in addition to memorising passages from the Bible. On weekdays, from 9 a.m. to 9:25 a.m., teachers and students divide into groups to engage in discussions about different Bible texts or themes. Through engaging in discussions, students acquire a comprehensive understanding of various biblical themes from the viewpoints of their peers. Also, they develop the skills required to effectively convince others of their logical positions. Students will acquire an understanding of the importance of collaboration and have the opportunity to improve their abilities in guiding and directing others by engaging in further discussions within small cohorts [13]. The GCS schedules a weekly chapel session to provide students with the opportunity to engage with essential topics such as study, friendship, and family. This allows them to not only learn about key lessons from the Bible but also apply them to their lives. The GCS instructors and parents regularly arrange prayer sessions, and teachers and students/parents actively engage in short-term missionary service projects in foreign mission fields, such as the Philippines. These activities significantly contribute to the cultivation of spirituality and the fostering of a sense of community and fellowship [14].

The school effectively integrates its other primary goals, such as mentoring and service. The GCS is implementing a variety of measures to prepare students for active participation in Korea's ongoing execution of the 4th industrial revolution. For instance, each student in a given year is required to read at least 100 highly regarded academic books, encompassing both classic and liberal arts literature, under the supervision of their teachers. These readings will allow students to cultivate a thorough comprehension of human nature, society, and life, therefore promoting personal development.

Considering that English is presently a prominent global language, the GCS ensures that all children are equipped for worldwide endeavours by introducing English education rooted in "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency and Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills" from the first year of elementary school [7, p. 16]. Moreover, this institution teaches martial arts to the extent that every student can earn a professional black belt 2nd grade (dan) certification after graduating from high school. Additionally, music education is offered to ensure that each student can proficiently play at least one musical instrument [7, p. 27]. The GCS organises monthly excursions to various parts of Korea to improve and reinforce students' comprehension of the subjects they have learnt in class.

It is critical to assess the mentorship approach and amount of support offered by GCS educators, especially the principal, to achieve success in holistic education. These services can achieve favourable outcomes when they work

together closely, based on a foundation of humility. Apostle Paul has defined humility as the most effective way to embrace humanity (Philippians 2.3), and St. Augustine (354–430), a well-known theologian since ancient times, has also argued that humility is the only remedy for the harmful chaos of the world: “The first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility; and I would repeat this as often as you ask for guidance” [Augustine, Letter 118 (A.D. 410) to Dioscorus, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102118.htm>]. The GCS’s mentorship and service are more than just empty rhetoric. According to the school principal Na, the teachers’ teaching approach involves acquiring the virtue of humility, as exemplified by Jesus, and directly demonstrating it to the students. Some of the tasks performed by the principal and teachers at the GCS include cleaning and washing dishes. The students use large school buses driven by the teachers for regular school commutes and special educational activities. [Interview with the principal, 3 July 2023 at the GCS]. When instructors encounter challenging matters regarding the academic calendar, they turn to the principal for help and assign the responsibilities of ordinary teachers to the principal. As a result, the school administration operates as a service-oriented framework, carrying out tasks in a bottom-up manner instead of adhering to a top-down hierarchy. Greenleaf, along with Kozhimala and Nsiah, has provided clear definitions of the characteristics of this particular sort of leader, which are considered exemplary illustrations of ‘servant leadership’. His assessment seems to be precise and valid [15–17].

5. Research Results and Discussions

5.1. Possibility of Church Revival

The majority of students at GCS actively participate in Christian services, demonstrating respectful and engaged behaviour not only during Bible study in Sunday school but also in general adult worship sessions. This active participation has been observed and positively evaluated by a minister overseeing a Sunday school, who commented: “The students at GCS are well-acquainted with and dedicated to the Bible. Their engagement with the Word challenges and inspires other students. Worship is understood by GCS students as an opportunity to experience God. They lead by example, teaching others how to worship. Beyond Sunday school, they also attend Wednesday and Sunday evening services. They understand that their time in worship is the most joyful of all. The sincere desire for worship displayed by GCS students has a positive impact not only on their peers but also on adult members of the congregation. In many ways, GCS students serve as effective worship evangelists in the church” [Luke An, email to the author, 10 August 2023]. The testimony provided by Luke An, a leader overseeing a Sunday school programme, offers a credible and insightful evaluation of the GCS students’ engagement with worship. As someone deeply involved in the spiritual formation of these students, An’s observations are based on direct and consistent interactions with them. His comments about the students’ dedication to the Bible, their active participation in worship, and their leadership in guiding

others are not only detailed but also reflective of their genuine commitment. For An, GCS students are not only well-acquainted with the Bible but also deeply committed to applying it in their lives. He notes that their engagement with Scripture inspires and challenges other students. Their understanding of worship is described as more than a mere act; it is seen as an opportunity to experience God personally, and this perspective is one they share with others through their example. Minister An also highlights the students' regular attendance at church services beyond Sunday school, including Wednesday and Sunday evening services. This dedication to worship, according to him, has a historical impact on the church community. He describes how the GCS students' sincere desire for worship positively influences their peers as well as the adult members of the congregation. In fact, he goes so far as to refer to these students as 'effective worship evangelists' within the church, demonstrating their ability to inspire and lead others through their devotion. Given the minister's position and his first-hand experience with the students, this testimony provides a reliable and honest account of the students' involvement.

All GCS primary school students, from an early age, are required to study a specific musical instrument, and the potential impact on church worship and revival in the future could be immense. As these students grow and eventually participate in church choirs and worship teams, their musical expertise could play a significant role in revitalising the church's worship experience, fostering a deeper connection between the congregation and God. The richness of a worship team composed of individuals proficient in a wide variety of instruments could bring a new level of musical depth and creativity to church services. Imagine a choir or worship band where every member plays an instrument they have mastered, whether it is the violin, trumpet, or piano. This would elevate the overall sound of the worship experience, making it more dynamic and engaging. An instance that illustrates this fact is the magnificent and moving performance by the GCS Union Orchestra, made up of GCS students from primary to secondary school, who participated in the GGC adult worship service and contributed by playing a special piece [E.-J. Na, *The Performance of GCS Union Orchestra*, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZJOsNocDwo>]. The students, who have been trained at GCS, bring a high level of discipline, ensuring that each performance is precise and inspiring. Additionally, the presence of such musicians could encourage a more profound sense of unity and teamwork within the church. Music is a universal language, and when people come together to perform beautiful, harmonious pieces, it creates a collective atmosphere of worship. As the students from GCS grow and take on leadership roles in church music ministries, they could inspire others in the congregation to deepen their own commitment to faith and worship. This could create a snowball effect where the church community becomes more passionate and unified in their worship, drawing in new members and fostering spiritual growth. Moreover, the long-term effects of having such musically trained individuals in church leadership positions could contribute to a cultural revival within the church. These students would not only be skilled musicians but also leaders who understand the importance of worship in fostering a vibrant and spiritually healthy community. Their ability to creatively

engage with contemporary worship styles while remaining rooted in traditional practices could help bridge generational gaps, attracting both younger and older congregants. The church could see an influx of new energy, as well as a renewed commitment to evangelism and outreach, sparked by the inspiring and powerful worship services.

From these examples, we can see that GCS students are positively contributing to the spiritual atmosphere of their church community. While they may not be the sole force behind a broad revival in Korean local churches, their presence and involvement create a ripple effect that inspires others—both students and adults—to engage more deeply in their faith and worship. In light of the challenges faced by the Korean Protestant Church, this can be seen as a hopeful sign of renewal. According to social contagion theory, as discussed by M. S. Galvao, such changes often begin in small, close-knit groups and gradually spread to larger communities over time [M. S. Galvao, *Social Contagion*, 2023, <https://lisboacounselling.com/2023/02/14/social-contagion/?lang=en>]. While GCS's impact may be subtle, it is significant and holds potential for positive change within the church. This is further demonstrated by the notable growth of GGC, which, with over 5,000 members, stands out among many Protestant churches in Korea experiencing stagnation. GCS's role in supporting the spiritual and personal development of students has made a meaningful contribution to this growth, and though it may not be the only factor, its influence is an important part of GGC's ongoing progress [H.-S. Na, *Gwangju Geojassi Church*, 2025, <http://www.gyeojassi.com/Page/Index/16>].

5.2. Provide Basic Training for Students' Holistic Growth

Let us explore a comparison between the Korean public education system (for primary, secondary, and high school) and the educational approach at GCS. Renowned educator Young-Nam Hwang summarises the serious issues in Korea's public education system in three key points [Y.-N. Hwang, *What Is Wrong with Public Education?* 2023, <https://www.incheonilbo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1214690>].

First, while Korea's public education has played a crucial role in the nation's economic growth and democratisation over the past century, contributing significantly to its advancement as a developed country, it has undergone substantial restructuring in response to the technological innovation era marked by AI and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This transformation has shifted the focus primarily towards acquiring knowledge. However, this change has led to excessive competition among students and an overemphasis on career success, which limits the development of critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and effective communication skills. In their pursuit of success, students have resorted to after-school academies, paying exorbitant tuition fees, and adhering to standardised, uniform learning systems in an attempt to succeed in university entrance exams and job placement tests. As a result, they are failing to cultivate essential qualities such as creativity, moral character, interdisciplinary skills, collaboration, and communication—traits that are vital for healthy personal

development. Furthermore, Korea's public education system enforces uniform content and pacing for students of the same age, which exacerbates inequalities by disregarding individual capabilities and characteristics.

Second, while Korean public education institutions emphasise character education, they have not overcome the knowledge-centric approach in practice. Education on moral character and public consciousness has not evolved into habitual training, and values like tolerance and consideration are neglected in the curriculum. Consequently, public education lacks the responsibility to foster self-awareness, identity, and sustainable community development.

Third, there is a tendency to shift the educational responsibilities of the family onto public institutions, thereby overburdening teachers with unrealistic expectations. Basic life education and character development should begin at home, before students enter the public system. However, due to busy parental schedules or a lack of awareness about their roles, the importance of home education is often overlooked. Relying solely on schools and teachers to fulfil these duties is not only unrealistic but also creates new sources of social conflict.

In response to these challenges, GCS emphasises that the foundation of students' character and social skills must primarily be cultivated at home, ensuring that parental involvement is thorough and comprehensive. With this foundation, students at GCS are supported in becoming well-rounded individuals through activities like Bible memorisation, martial arts, music, and reading. We will now examine specific examples of this approach.

GCS strongly encourages students, who read 100 books per year with teacher support, to carefully analyse the abstract words and concepts in each book for a deeper understanding. This involves scrutinizing each word, evaluating its significance, and interpreting the symbols and metaphors presented. Engaging in this activity helps students improve their vocabulary and reading skills. A 2024 study by Professor Min-Ae Na, a reading theorist at Seoul National University, showed that fostering a comprehensive reading routine allows students to independently grasp any subject matter without relying on artificial intelligence [18].

To prevent students from developing an aggressive mindset, GCS offers martial arts instruction based on Christian principles of humility and compassion, available to all young children without restriction. By high school graduation, students have the potential to earn black-belt certification, attaining recognition as quasi-professional athletes. Why martial arts for young children? Martial arts offer numerous benefits, such as improving physical strength, cultivating self-confidence, and preparing individuals to face internal and external challenges. Ultimately, this practice instils the understanding that life is an ongoing quest for a balanced state of mental, physical, and spiritual health. According to a 2010 study by sports scholars Jikkemien Vertonghen and Marc Theeboom, martial arts can have either a significant positive impact or lead to negative outcomes, such as increased aggression, depending on the environment and quality of education, both at home and in school [19]. The positive aspects of GCS's martial arts program, grounded in Christian values and guided by spiritual mentors, are noteworthy.

As discussed earlier, GCS offers individualized music instruction for each student, allowing them to choose and diligently study a musical instrument. Music, which transcends linguistic barriers, enables the expression of human emotions and communication. Students who engage actively with music can create a consistent emotional environment that supports brain growth and maturation. Exploring different music genres deepens emotional understanding, fostering happiness and benefiting others around them. Furthermore, music plays an essential role in recognizing and understanding cultural differences. Each region's distinct music reflects its unique historical, cultural, and moral characteristics, offering new perspectives and enriching lives. Numerous studies by music experts Michael Trimble and Dale Hesdorffer have shown that music stimulates various parts of the brain, enhancing cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and creativity [20].

In brief, these approaches ultimately highlight how GCS differentiates itself from Korean public schools, suggesting that it represents a relatively appropriate, healthy, and well-balanced educational model, one that serves as an example of holistic education.

5.3. No Conflicts between Teachers and Students including their Parents

Young people in Korea widely harbour the dream of having a child. When raising just one child at home, parents are not embarrassed to treat the youngster like a princess or a prince. Children who grow up in these types of environments frequently misbehave in school and contribute to school violence by confronting or abusing instructors. When the teachers warn their children, these youngsters' parents accuse the teachers of abusing their children. The persistent harassment from parents has caused 8,413 teachers to suffer over the past five years (2017–2021), and 76 teachers have taken their own lives as a result [H. Jeon, The death of an elementary school teacher asks, 2023, <https://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=50859>]. One teacher summed up this instructional setting by saying, “Nothing is more important than the students' human rights in Korea right now, so it's usually impossible to discipline them when they misbehave. As a result, a lot of Korean instructors lose hope in their students; the nation's youthful teachers leave school early, and the nation's more seasoned teachers stop their profession too soon” [I.-R. Ha, email letter to the author, 25 July 2023]. The teacher's testimony offers an insightful look into the challenges currently faced by educators in South Korea, particularly in terms of maintaining classroom discipline. Based on the teacher's firsthand experience, it highlights a significant issue in the educational system: the conflict between safeguarding students' rights and managing their behaviour effectively. The teacher's statement that “nothing is more important than the students' human rights in Korea right now” reflects the cultural and legal pressures that educators navigate while attempting to enforce discipline. Additionally, the teacher notes that many instructors, disheartened by these struggles, either leave the profession prematurely or lose motivation. This points to a critical problem within Korea's education system: the high turnover rate among both new and experienced teachers. This exodus not only presents a

personal challenge for educators but also poses a broader concern for the nation's educational quality and the future of its students. Coming from someone directly involved in the classroom, this account offers a credible and poignant view of the current difficulties teachers face. By reflecting on this perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the tensions between human rights protections and effective discipline, contributing to a more comprehensive grasp of the pressures affecting South Korean educators today.

As previously said, the GCS thoroughly develops students' spirituality through Bible memorisation, teacher-student Bible debates, classic reading, seminars, mission field excursions with teachers and students/parents, personal counselling from teachers, and a humble commitment to service. As a result, no school violence has appeared. The vast majority of parents support the school's pedagogical procedures and express satisfaction with them. Parents have made comments stating that this school probably fulfils all the requirements for an ideal educational institution and overcomes the disadvantages of both public and private schools. The communication between teachers and students is highly effective, and the curriculum is comprehensive, encompassing academic studies, recreational activities, practical experiences, sports, music, character development, and physical growth [21].

The experiences shared by former public-school teachers now working at GCS provide a compelling picture of the school's unique environment, where students and teachers foster positive relationships and personal growth. One teacher, who focuses on a smaller group of students, explains her approach: "I target a limited number of students and monitor their development from childhood, even as I guide younger children. I believe that the gifted GCS students, with their diverse backgrounds and different futures, exemplify God's good plan" [I.-H. Choi, email to the author, 13 July 2023]. This emphasises a personalised, attentive approach to teaching at GCS, where educators invest deeply in the individual development of their students, allowing them to thrive both academically and personally.

Another teacher also points out the strong spiritual grounding that GCS students possess, noting that this foundation significantly improves their engagement in class. She observes that, in contrast to students in public schools, GCS students approach learning with greater enthusiasm and respect for their teachers. "There has never been any animosity between me and my students", she writes, further reinforcing the harmonious relationship between teachers and pupils at the school [M.-H. Park, email to the author, 5 July 2023]. Her testimony demonstrates that the spiritual and moral values instilled in GCS students contribute to an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, which is essential in creating a positive and productive learning environment.

In fact, this nurturing environment is not just an anecdotal observation but is also supported by research. Education scholars such as Khanam, Iqbal, and Kalsoom argue that when educational systems emphasise the importance of fostering strong human relationships, rather than focusing solely on worldly success and fame, the outcomes are both more enriching and enduring [22]. This aligns with the philosophy at GCS, where the emphasis is not just on academic

achievement, but also on the cultivation of character and social intelligence. The school's commitment to this holistic approach helps prevent common issues like bullying, which can often arise in more competitive or less emotionally supportive environments. At GCS, students and teachers alike work together in a spirit of cooperation and shared values, creating a school culture where discipline, respect, and kindness prevail. This combination of strong spiritual foundations, personalised attention, and a focus on holistic development ensures that GCS stands apart from other educational institutions. It not only nurtures academic excellence but also cultivates well-rounded individuals who are equipped to positively contribute to their communities and live out their values. The absence of school violence and the harmonious interactions between teachers and students at GCS reflect the success of this educational model, offering an example of how schools can function as supportive, thriving communities.

5.4. Decisive Help in Solving the Problem of Private Education Expenses

According to a report from March 2023, 8 out of 10 Korean elementary, middle, and high school students attend private academies, which cost an average of \$380 per student every month [A.-Y. Jang, Private education spending 26 trillion won, 2023, https://www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0103_202303071817416609]. March 2024 data indicate that the private education expenses are 460,000 KRW (approx. \$354) for elementary school, 590,000 KRW (approx. \$454) for middle school, and 740,000 KRW (approx. \$569) for high school, leaving parents feeling burdened by the high costs of private education fees [W.-R. Kang, Even though the number of students is decreasing, last year's private education expenses reached 27 trillion KRW, the highest ever [https://www.chosun.com/economy/economy_general/2024/03/14/YRD2G3YTOVGJJKT2KF44PLFPYE/]. If their children pursue separate arts and sports studies there, the cost of the academies will be close to \$1,000 or much more per month. Additionally, since summer and winter breaks in Korean public schools are typically two months long, the majority of students must pay extra private educational fees to continue their studies during these lengthy intervals. However, at the GCS, teachers sacrifice themselves to serve students by drastically reducing the vacation period to 5 weeks a year [Interview with the principal Na 3 July, 2023]. GCS has developed a unique and creative approach to alleviating the financial burden of private education. By arranging classes in such a way that all subjects required for the third year of public high school are completed by the end of the first year, GCS allows students in their second and third years to focus on university preparation, receiving thorough instruction for entrance exams without the need for expensive private academies. This approach not only saves parents from the extra cost of tutoring and after-school programs but also ensures that students are well-prepared academically. In addition, GCS regularly invites renowned academics to give special lectures, enriching students' knowledge while helping them grow in both faith and character.

Thanks to its thoughtful design, GCS enables students to pursue higher education without the financial burden of additional private education fees. While

not a free institution like Korea's public schools, GCS offers an educational model where students can thrive academically and personally at a reasonable cost. In 2023, the school charges 580,000 KRW (about \$446) per month to cover expenses [Interview with the principal, 3 July 2023], significantly lower than the combined costs of private academies, as GCS students do not require supplementary tutoring. This affordable tuition allows GCS to provide a comprehensive curriculum that includes public school subjects, advanced English, martial arts, and music, including instrumental training. Parents consistently express high satisfaction with the value GCS offers, noting that the tuition is "extremely unusual when compared to other foreign schools or alternative institutions" [21, p. 32]. They appreciate that their children receive a well-rounded, high-quality education without the excessive costs associated with private education. This balanced approach not only relieves financial strain but also ensures students are well-prepared for academic and personal success, making GCS a highly regarded institution within its community.

5.5. Academic Achievement in 2024

At GCS, the ultimate goal of life is not solely to excel academically or achieve worldly success, but to become true individuals who serve God and their fellow human beings. While success in the world is not deliberately excluded, it is seen as a natural result of honest effort, diligence, and perseverance. This principle was clearly demonstrated in 2024 at GCS. Students engage in rigorous intellectual pursuits, such as reading 100 classic and renowned books annually, which enhances their vocabulary and presentation skills. As a result, students often use advanced vocabulary in their book reports, and they have even published a collection of their writings [E.-J. Na, email to the author, 10 January 2025].

Additionally, in December 2024, middle school students who earned third Dan in Martial Arts went on a short-term mission trip to Thailand to participate in service-oriented mission activities [E.-J. Na, GCS Middle School Students' Short-term Mission Trip, 2024, <https://youtu.be/qsMtxBC6Fh0>].

Academically, GCS students continue to thrive. One student was the only GCS student accepted to a prestigious private school that has the highest number of students accepted into medical schools nationwide, including in Jeollanam Province and Gwangju. In early 2024, a ninth-grade student was accepted to the College of Engineering at Chonnam National University and the Department of Nursing at Chosun University. In 2025, a tenth-grade student was accepted to the Department of Statistics at both Jeonbuk National University and Chonnam National University. The second graduating class of GCS middle school students advanced to top-tier private high schools, with one student ranking first in the school-wide mock exams. A student who had been average in grades at GCS went on to a public high school in Sejong City, where he ranked first in his class's midterm exams. These accomplishments reflect GCS's holistic approach, where academic, personal, and spiritual growth are all valued and intertwined.

6. Suggestions

Primarily, we earnestly desire that the GCS young Christians will steadfastly uphold their commitment to the church and establish a devout spirituality [23]. To achieve this objective, the GCS will need to formulate multiple distinct strategies to assist the alumni of this school in fostering a strong affiliation with the church and cultivating their religious beliefs [24-25].

To have a substantial influence on both the church and society as a whole, Christians must establish educational institutions akin to the GCS across the entire country. This will facilitate the development of a widespread movement that can impart knowledge to a larger population of students.

Third, the GCS resolutely disproves the myth that elite schools are only open to the children of the wealthy and that obtaining a decent education requires paying exorbitant tuition. Therefore, the school charges a set tuition fee to allow children from average families to attend. Also, families with numerous children receive a sizable tuition discount. We do, however, hope that this institution will provide more chances for admission to the kids from the most underprivileged households who cannot even afford this price. The GCS should conduct further research on this matter and create a fund-raising programme to choose many scholarship recipients.

Fourth, Korea no longer consists of a single ethnic group. In Gwangju Metropolitan City, Wolgok-dong, for example, is home to 7,000 Goryeoin, Korean descendants from Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia. There are also many mixed-race families in Korea's rural and fishing communities. The GCS must therefore inform students of the goals and callings of Korean Protestantism in diversity and uphold strong ties with multicultural alternative schools [26-27].

Finally, in the context of Korean Protestantism's stagnation, the GCS has established itself to have a constructive impact on the church and society, and it is making good progress toward that direction. However, Christianity is not a religion that exclusively raises well-trained, healthy children in loving homes. Without exception, Jesus cared for and healed numerous troubled people in the gospel with great interest and affection. This gospel attitude requires the church to take on missionary responsibilities for children from broken or marginalised families who do not fit in at school or on the outskirts of society. Therefore, we strongly recommend that all Korean local churches collaborate to address these children's issues, irrespective of their doctrinal affiliation, instead of leaving this responsibility to the GCS, which fulfils a specific role. If churches delay this critical public concern and instead focus on increasing their physical size, the general public will desert them.

7. Conclusion

The GCS is making every effort to develop future Korean Protestant leaders by providing rigorous spiritual training and holistic education to young students. Because of this well-defined training, students have a high level of spirituality and an interest in social responsibility. Almost all GCS students attend Sunday school

and adult worship services, raising hopes for the revival of Korean Protestantism. Furthermore, GCS's expertise in student selection, ongoing dialogue and consultation with teachers, students, and parents throughout the educational process, promotion of a sense of community through various seminars and mission field trips in which they participate, and the humble dedication of teachers, including the principal, keep this school safe from school violence. Furthermore, GCS rigorously delivers English, physical education, and music to children at a low, generally acceptable tuition charge, resulting in a cutting-edge setting in which pupils do not require expensive separate private education after school. Students at GCS are gradually taking on the roles of 'light and salt' in the world. This appears to be a minor part, like the 'mustard seed' of the Bible. It will take some time for people to recognize that this seed can profoundly revolutionize both the Korean Church and society. Because this school's educational curriculum ends with high school, it seems critical to develop plans that will enable graduates to continue their studies in college and obtain jobs after graduation. If the GCS alumni association's successful structure and initiatives develop into a collaborative movement with Korean Protestant Church leaders, it will provide additional momentum to the institution's efforts to revitalize Korean Protestantism and achieve societal purity.

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