

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN SOUTH KOREA: CAUSES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Dr. SE-HO JANG¹, MIN-JI JANG², SOO-YOUNG JEONG³, Dr. MI-KYEONG JUNG⁴,
Dr. KANG-HYUN KIM⁵, Dr. MOO-JIN JEONG⁶ & *Dr. JUN-KI CHUNG⁷

¹Visiting Professor, Department of Coaching Psychology, Kwangshin University,
36, Yangsantaekjiso-ro, Buk-gu, Gwangju, South Korea.

²Youth counselor, Gwangju Seo-gu Youth Counseling & Welfare Center, 23,
Sangmuowol-ro, Seogu, Gwangju, South Korea.

³Doctoral Student, Department of Multicultural Education,
Kunsan National University, 558, Daehak-ro, Gunsan-si, Jeollabuk-do, South Korea.

⁴ Director of Korea Youth Protection Association, 28, Gwangsang-ro, 20beon-gil,
Gwangsang-gu, Gwangju, South Korea.

^{5,6,7}, Researcher at Institute for Pietatis Theologia, Kwangshin University. 36,
Yangsantaekjiso-ro, Buk-gu, Gwangju, South Korea.

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ABSTRACT

South Korea's remarkable economic growth and its profound cultural influence, particularly through the global phenomenon of Hallyu (the Korean Wave), have undoubtedly astounded the world. However, beneath this outward success lies a shadow of societal issues that impact the nation. The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, along with rampant school violence, have reached a point where they can no longer be ignored or left unaddressed. This paper focuses specifically on one of the most devastating consequences of this cultural backdrop: the suicides of teachers. It aims to investigate the underlying causes of these suicides and to propose potential solutions. Among the solutions, one of the most critical issues is how individual teachers, the victims of these circumstances, can overcome the temptation of suicide. To address this, the paper argues that Viktor Frankl's concept of logotherapy, which emphasizes finding meaning in suffering, offers a significant and valuable approach to help teachers reclaim a sense of purpose and hope amidst their struggles.

Keywords: Korea, logotherapy, school violence, suicide, teacher, Viktor Frankl

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Due to its geopolitical location, sandwiched between powerful countries like China, Russia, and Japan, Koreans have historically endured persistent invasions, living under constant tension. Moreover, after the Korean War (1950-1953), which claimed countless lives and devastated the entire country, Korea were left in ruins, and Korea fell into one of the poorest and most unfortunate nations on Earth (Jeong & Chung, 2022; Kang et al., 2025). Despite these challenges, since the 1960s, South Korea has demonstrated a strong will to achieve self-reliance, attaining political and economic democratization, and by 2000, it joined the ranks of advanced nations (hereafter Korea). Korea became a nation that accomplished political, economic, and cultural advancement — achievements that would typically take hundreds of years for other countries — in just 70 years. As evidence of this progress, Korea's GDP per capita reached \$34,000 in 2023 (Seok & Chung, 2023). By 2023, Korea had become the

world's 10th largest trading nation, with a total export volume of about \$630 billion, and it joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. Korea has participated in the G20 summit since 1999 and informally in the G7, playing an important role in global affairs. Furthermore, Korea's K-pop industry has grown to become the second-largest music market in the world by the early 2020s (Jeong & Chung, 2024). The Korean film *Parasite* won four Academy Awards in 2020, including Best Picture, Best Director (Joon-Ho Bong), Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film (Chung, 2025b). Korea also holds the 6th strongest military power in the world as of 2023 and is the 10th largest weapons exporter globally.

In light of such achievements, the global community has often referred to Korea's success as the 'Miracle on the Han River,' expressing both awe and a desire to emulate this success (Kang et al., 2021). However, behind this success, the hard work and sacrifices of the Korean people — their relentless pursuit, full of blood, sweat, and tears — have resulted in significant side effects. Among these effects, perhaps the most prominent in Korean society are economic inequality and school violence (Chung, 2025a). In 2019, Korea's Gini coefficient (a measure of income inequality) was 0.357, which is higher than the OECD average of 0.317 (OECD, 2019). School violence has become a major social issue in Korea: "An average of 20 teachers made the tragic decision to take their own lives each year from 2021 to 2023 ... sparking concern over the mental health and well-being of teachers in South Korea" (Choi, 2024). Such violence has a profound impact on the mental health of both students and teachers, fueling the tragic phenomenon of teacher suicides (Chung, 2023; Seok & Chung, 2023; Park et al., 2024).

This study aims to examine the causes and solutions for teacher suicides, which serve as a shadow in Korean society. It will specifically introduce the healing methods of Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), an Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, and the founder of logotherapy, as an effective approach to preventing teacher suicides.

2.0. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The methodology of this study will primarily employ Frankl's "logotherapy." The reason for this choice is that logotherapy aligns with the core values emphasized by major world religions and high-level philosophies, which universally advocate for the ideal purpose of human existence not as the pursuit of artificial "success," but as the fulfillment of "meaning." This common pursuit leads to similar paths and situational contexts (Frankl, 1992; 2014; 2019). In other words, Frankl's therapeutic approach does not treat disciplines such as religion, philosophy, and medicine as mutually exclusive, but rather recognizes their interdependence while preserving their autonomy, facilitating both exchange and complementary relationships. This interdisciplinary therapeutic attitude is not only highly effective in addressing the mental and physical health issues faced by postmodern individuals, but also fosters constructive and practical cooperation. Consequently, those who claim that Frankl's therapy is unrelated to religious spirituality are overlooking key aspects of his method. Jeremias Marseille's (1997) view, which persuasively analyzes Frankl's logotherapy as simultaneously medical, psychological, and even religious, offers a more comprehensive understanding. In brief, Frankl's logotherapy holds transcendent applicability across various sectors of Korean society. However, considering the pressing reality of the situation, it can be especially beneficial in the fields of medical psychiatry, practical counseling, and theology, which address

both physical and transcendent issues. Therefore, the core methodology of this research, as well as its key findings, will underscore the need for the dedication and efforts of professionals actively working in these fields to address the issue of teacher suicides in Korea.

3.0. FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES OF TEACHER SUICIDES IN KOREA

3.1 The Extreme Competitive Culture of Korean Society

Korean society is widely known for its extreme competitive culture, a product of both the aftermath of the Korean War and the country's industrialization process. After the war, Korea went through a period of poverty and turmoil, during which the government implemented a powerful export-oriented industrialization policy aimed at economic reconstruction (Seon & Chung, 2025). The central goal during this time was rapid economic growth and the acquisition of international competitiveness, both of which required a high level of skilled human capital (Kim & Chung, 2021). In response to this need, Korea developed an intensely competitive society focused on nurturing talent through higher education and various standardized exams. In Korea, students face immense pressure from a very young age. Their lives are filled with regular school education, private academy classes, special tutoring, and exam preparation, a cycle that begins in kindergarten, continues through university entrance, and extends into post-graduation job hunts. The entrance exams for schools and the job application process are crucial competitive arenas in Korean society, where students and young adults experience extreme mental and physical exhaustion and stress.

Among the numerous societal issues resulting from Korea's extreme competitive culture, school violence and teacher suicides have become pressing problems that need urgent resolution. As competition intensifies, students often experience heightened psychological pressure, which can manifest as violence or disrespect toward teachers. When teachers attempt to correct this behavior, parents may accuse them of child abuse. Consequently, the competitive culture in South Korea has transformed students, teachers, and parents into victims of this relentless system.

3.2 The Overwhelming Workload Faced by Teachers

One of the key reasons behind the high suicide rate among Korean teachers is the excessive administrative workload that is often unrelated to their core teaching duties. In addition to managing students and preparing lessons, teachers in Korea are required to handle various non-educational tasks such as student records management, preparing and organizing administrative documents, and coordinating and managing school events (Choi & Chung, 2023). These administrative duties consume a significant amount of teachers' time and energy, which ultimately limits the time they can dedicate to actual teaching and student engagement. This excessive administrative burden becomes a major factor contributing to the overwhelming stress and job dissatisfaction experienced by teachers. In many cases, the constant pressure and mental strain result in severe mental health issues, which lead some teachers to take their own lives (Lee, 2024).

3.3 Issues with Parents

In postmodern Korean society, many parents choose to have only one child or, in some cases, decide not to have children at all. Even when parents do have a child, they face significant financial pressure, as they must balance the demands of their careers while simultaneously paying for expensive private tutoring and academy fees. As a result, having more than one child becomes an unrealistic option. Therefore, many parents focus all of their resources and attention on a single child, investing heavily in their success in the highly competitive college entrance process. These parents believe that if their child does not succeed, it will negatively affect both the child's future and their own social status (Chung, 1992; Kim & Chung, 2021).

This intense investment and protective strategy often leads to children growing up with a sense of entitlement, like royalty, without learning to respect teachers. These children may resist correction from teachers, and at times, they may even insult or resort to violence against them. A significant number of parents have gone as far as accusing teachers of child abuse or harassing them in various ways (MacKenzie, 2023). In July 2023, a 23-year-old elementary school teacher, who had only been teaching for a year, tragically took her own life. She had always dreamed of becoming a teacher and loved children deeply. In the months leading up to her tragic decision, she had been constantly harassed by parents, particularly after one of her students caused another student a head injury with a pencil. As a result, she received numerous calls and messages from parents late into the night. Today, teachers in Korea are often bombarded by phone calls from parents at all hours, both during the week and on weekends, listening to unreasonable complaints. One parent demanded that a teacher call every morning to wake their child up, while another teacher was reported for emotional abuse after scolding a student who had fought violently with another (Seok & Chung, 2023, 2024). When teachers are accused of child abuse, they are automatically suspended from their duties until the trial concludes (MacKenzie, 2023). This atmosphere significantly lowers job satisfaction among teachers, leading some to leave the profession or, in the most tragic cases, succumb to the pressures and take their own lives.

3.4 The Inequitable Environment within Schools

When incidents of school violence occur in Korean public schools, those in positions of authority, such as principals, often try to conceal or downplay the situation out of fear that the school's reputation and honor will be damaged if the matter becomes public (Chung, 2025). In such cases, the teachers are often the ones who bear the brunt of the consequences. The stress and mental strain caused by this violence severely affect the teachers' mental health, contributing to an increase in suicide rates among educators. This hidden or minimized approach to dealing with school violence not only undermines the safety and well-being of the students but also places teachers in incredibly difficult positions, where they are forced to navigate an environment of secrecy, pressure, and inadequate support. As a result, the combination of these factors exacerbates the emotional and psychological toll on teachers, leading to tragic outcomes, including suicide.

4.0 SOLUTIONS

4.1 National-Level Solutions

4.1.1 Creating a Healthy Social Culture across All Sectors of Korean Society

As competition intensifies, moral values and ethics are being sacrificed in Korean society. People tend to prioritize achieving their goals over maintaining honesty or making ethical judgments. In this context, there is a need for a reassessment of the country's competitive culture. Frankl (1992) emphasizes the importance of finding meaning in life rather than pursuing wealth, fame, or power. He argues for a shift toward a value system that prioritizes meaning. Education should no longer solely prepare individuals for success in the competitive job market, but should guide them toward personal growth and a deeper understanding of life's meaning. Schools must foster values such as equality, cooperation, and spiritual development. An enlightened movement is needed at the national level to redefine the goals of education in light of these broader values.

Creating a healthy social culture across all sectors of Korean society is essential, but the efforts of medical psychotherapists, counselors, and clergy are particularly crucial. Christian clergy, for example, should move away from promoting worldly blessings like "believe in Jesus and receive material wealth and honor" and focus instead on guiding people toward a meaningful life rooted in self-denial, humility, and bearing the cross. Jesus teaches that success is not found in wealth, fame, or power, but in living a life of love for others, selflessness, and sacrifice. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus emphasizes that the greatest commandments are to love God and love one's neighbor. Matthew 16:24-25 teaches that true success comes through self-denial and sacrifice. Mark 10:43-45 and Luke 9:48 further define greatness as humility and service to others, not through authority or wealth. While Jesus prioritizes spiritual values over material ones, He, like Frankl (1992), acknowledges that blessings may naturally follow those who live according to His teachings. In Matthew 6:33, He assures that if one seeks God's kingdom first, material blessings will follow. Matthew 19:29 promises rewards for those who sacrifice for Christ, both spiritually and materially. Luke 6:38 speaks of the abundance that comes from generosity, both spiritually and materially. These passages suggest that while spiritual values are paramount, those who live according to God's will may experience worldly success and blessings as a natural result, though these should always be secondary to seeking God's kingdom first. Christians should understand that Jesus' core teachings center on love for God and love for others (Lee & Chung, 2024). Christian parents, in particular, should set a positive example in their attitude toward teachers, influencing society for good. When they see other parents making mistakes, they should encourage respect for teachers and act as a positive social force.

4.1.2 Improvement of Teacher Authority and Treatment

Until the early 20th century, teachers in Korean society were highly respected and loved figures. Teachers were seen as moral pillars of the state and leaders of the local community. Parents, even when teachers disciplined their children with light corporal punishment, such as a gentle spanking on the calf or palm, considered it an act of "tough love." They understood this as the teacher's special concern and care for their child, which was met with gratitude. Teachers were recognized as individuals with much higher knowledge than ordinary people and played a crucial role in shaping the moral foundation of the nation. However, this trend began to change as Korea underwent modernization and developed an education system and economic structure on par with many countries around the world. As the competitive society emerged, the focus of education shifted from humanities, which had been emphasized in traditional society, to fields such as medicine, economics, engineering, science, and law. As a

result, students flocked to careers as doctors, lawyers, professors in scientific fields, and executives in large corporations, all of which offered higher salaries and greater prestige than teaching. To reduce teacher suicides, a societal consensus must form around the idea that teachers play a critically important role as leaders in society. It is essential to create a social structure in which teachers are afforded the same economic treatment and recognition as doctors, lawyers, and corporate executives.

Recent trends show that the percentage of female teachers in Korean public schools has significantly outpaced male teachers, leading to discussions about the feminization of education. This has occurred because the current system selects teachers primarily based on academic performance. While intellectual ability is important for teaching, teachers also need to be moral role models and possess good physical health. Therefore, it is crucial that universities carefully select candidates for teacher training programs, ensuring that prospective teachers demonstrate not only academic excellence but also the necessary character and ethics. A period of observation should be established to assess whether candidates have the qualities required for the teaching profession. If candidates fail to meet these standards, they should be transferred to another field of study. Moreover, practical measures such as introducing a system where teachers take a break for research after serving for a specific period, providing sufficient maternity leave for female teachers, offering counseling and healing programs for students and parents when school violence occurs, and ensuring fair and unbiased legal treatment in cases of school violence are essential. These concrete actions can improve the work environment and overall well-being of teachers, ultimately contributing to reducing suicide rates among educators.

4.1.3 Compliance with Existing Educational Laws and Regulations

Teachers are tasked with guiding students in learning ethics, helping them acquire knowledge (as outlined in the Basic Education Act), educating and counseling students in both academic and daily life matters (as stipulated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), and managing the classroom as class homeroom teachers, overseeing the educational activities and counseling for the students under their care (according to the Enforcement Decree of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). These provisions must be fully adhered to (Lee, 2024). However, despite the existence of these laws, they are not strictly enforced in practice. Teachers' duties outlined by these regulations are often overshadowed by an overwhelming number of administrative tasks, which detracts from their core responsibilities and compromises their ability to focus on the well-being and educational needs of students. Ensuring that these laws are followed is crucial to not only improving the teaching environment but also to protecting the mental health and safety of teachers, reducing stress, and ultimately addressing the rising rates of teacher suicides. It is imperative that these regulations be properly implemented and monitored to reduce the strain on educators and allow them to focus on their primary educational mission.

4.2 The Teacher's Journey to Finding Purpose

4.2.1 Therapeutic Approaches to Meaning Making

The ultimate solution to the issue of teacher suicides in Korea lies in the teachers themselves choosing not to take their own lives, because "suicide is in no way the answer to any question;

suicide is never able to solve a problem" (Frankl, 2019: 41). Despite being overwhelmed by inner struggles such as helplessness, fear, stress, depression, and de-motivation, if they overcome these challenges, a new dimension of life will unfold for them. How can humans possess such strength? Frankl's perspective asserts that human beings consist of three interconnected components: the physical, the somatic, and the noetic (or noological). The physical and psychological elements together create the individual's psychosomatic framework, while the noetic dimension pertains to the transcendent aspects beyond the psychosomatic. Rather than being a mere aggregation of these three aspects, the individual is conceived as an integrated whole (García Alandete, 2024: 8).

One can find a decisive meaning in life if one tries to discover the life sources and cultivate them for personal growth. Frankl, using Kant's maxim, strongly argues: "Live as if you were living for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!" (2019: 46). By doing so, one can gain this power through the "noetic source," which connects one to "the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life" to define human existence (Frankl, 2014: 3-4).

The freedom of will "means the freedom of human will, and human will is the will of a finite being" (Frankl, 2014: 4). This means that humans are constrained by the conditions of their environment. However, this does not mean that humans must blindly succumb to their environment. Rather, humans can transcend these constraints and exhibit abilities such as humor and heroism.

At this juncture, it is necessary to provide a detailed explanation of the concept of the "noetic source." Frankl understands the "noetic source" as a transcendental element inherent within human beings. Though humans engage in actions by awakening their instincts through self-reflection, this element also encompasses a noological unconscious, wherein traits such as responsibility and conscience are deeply embedded. In this context, Frankl posits that it is both the duty and privilege of individuals to become conscious of this transcendental element within themselves and to actively apply it in their lives. The task of awakening this latent transcendental element, which resides in the unconscious, is not just a personal endeavor, but a fundamental responsibility that shapes human existence.

While Frankl's therapeutic approach is often seen as separate from traditional religious doctrine, he acknowledges that the inner transcendence he describes is fundamentally a human phenomenon that resonates with religious experience. His emphasis on the human capacity for self-transcendence points to something that, although not strictly tied to a particular religion, can be deeply spiritual in nature. Frankl's perspective on religion diverges from the traditional beliefs held by most religious clergy, yet he recognizes religion as a vital aspect of the human condition. In his work, he identifies a transcendental unconscious within humans, emphasizing the responsibility individual's bear in finding meaning in life. This conceptualization clearly distinguishes his views from conventional religious spirituality (Frankl, 2014: 5).

Some critics may have argued that Frankl's logotherapy is essentially non-religious, focusing primarily on a psychological approach to human suffering and the search for meaning. However, Frankl's personal experiences—particularly as a Jewish man enduring extreme suffering in Nazi concentration camps during World War II—shaped his views in a profound way. In the camps, he witnessed the extraordinary resilience of individuals who were able to

transcend their immediate suffering. Among these individuals, some found strength through their faith, while others maintained composure in the face of death, singing hymns and upholding their dignity until the end. These experiences led Frankl to an important realization: belief in transcendence, in a reality beyond the physical world, is crucial in overcoming life's greatest challenges (Frankl, 1992: 123). In essence, the concept of transcendence in Frankl's logo-therapy is twofold. On the one hand, he suggests that individuals can overcome suffering by cultivating and developing the transcendental potential within their own unconscious, which is an inherent part of the human experience. On the other hand, Frankl does not dismiss the possibility that human beings can also draw strength from external transcendence, such as the belief in a higher power or divine force, as suggested by religious teachings. While he sees this external transcendence as a human phenomenon, he recognizes that such beliefs, rooted in faith, can provide significant psychological support for individuals facing suffering. Thus, although Frankl's view of religion diverges from the traditional belief in a personal God, he affirms its role as an essential part of human experience, whether it manifests through the inner transcendence found within the unconscious or through faith in an external transcendent power. Both sources of transcendence, whether internal or external, are integral to his understanding of how humans find meaning in suffering.

Frankl's concept of the "will to meaning" represents the fundamental human desire to find and pursue deeper meaning and purpose in life. This idea is based on the premise that humans inherently tend to seek and build meaning in life. Frankl argues that concepts such as pleasure, power, happiness, and success are not the ultimate goals of life; rather, they are secondary outcomes that naturally arise through engaging in meaningful activities. This pursuit cannot be the ultimate purpose of life because it ultimately leads to emptiness and despair, preventing true fulfillment. Therefore, Frankl emphasizes that the search for meaning is the essential and central motivation of human existence. Unlike Freud's theory of the pleasure principle (1920) or Adler's emphasis on the will to power (1937), Frankl proposes that the fundamental drive of human behavior is the "will to meaning." He explains that when this desire for meaning is thwarted, humans often engage in destructive behaviors, such as smoking or falling into prostitution, as a compensatory mechanism to alleviate psychological suffering. For Frankl, self-actualization and happiness are not the ultimate goals of human existence; instead, humans must transcend temporary desires and superficial achievements to explore the true meaning of life itself.

For Frankl, "the meaning of life" refers to the inherent human will to find meaning, meaning that people possess an instinctive drive to search for significance in their lives. Regardless of the situation or place, people can discover and fulfill their sense of meaning according to their own will. He described the discovery of this meaning in terms of three values: "An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces ... If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an eradicable part of life, even as fate and death" (Frankl, 1992: 70). From this quotation, we can see that Frankl (1992, 2014) divides the ways of discovering the meaning of life into three values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal values.

Creative values are achieved through an active life. That is, individuals realize their values through creative work, finding meaning in their lives through activities such as art, science, or professional achievements. These creative endeavors allow people to fulfill themselves and actualize their existence. According to this view, it is problematic that children in Korea, driven by their parents' strong pressure, neglect their own aptitudes and become absorbed in studying for professions such as doctors, lawyers, or careers that focus on future power and honor. Parents should avoid making this mistake and instead take time to observe what their children are truly good at and enjoy, helping them choose a career that holds real meaning in their lives.

Experiential values represent a relatively passive form of life where individuals find meaning in experiencing beauty or nature. Through these experiences, humans gain inner richness and fulfillment, which itself becomes the meaning of their lives. For instance, one can find meaning in appreciating beautiful landscapes or immersing oneself in art. These experiences often lead to a profound sense of connection, not only to the world around us but also to something greater than ourselves. This is especially evident in the case of Frankl's observation of a woman in a Nazi concentration camp. Amid the unimaginable horrors of her surroundings, she discovered a remarkable solace by simply gazing at a tree near the camp. In that moment, nature's beauty became her escape, allowing her to transcend the dire circumstances she faced. It was through the contemplation of this natural beauty that she overcame the fear of death and maintained a peaceful mind each day (Frankl, 1992). This act of merging with nature illustrates how art and beauty—whether in a tree, a painting, or a landscape—can offer a sanctuary from the demands of everyday life. Unlike the repetitive work of labor, which is often driven by necessity and practicality, the experience of engaging with beauty in nature or art transports the individual into a state of awe and wonder. In these moments, one is not concerned with achieving tangible results but instead with embracing the present, feeling a deep connection to the world and to oneself. This transcendence, facilitated by the contemplation of beauty, is a testament to art's unique ability to uplift the human spirit, offering solace and meaning in ways that ordinary labor simply cannot (Chung, 1997).

Finally, attitudinal values refer to finding meaning in one's attitude toward existence, even amid external constraints and suffering. In other words, regardless of life's hardships, pain, or unfortunate situations, the way one approaches these circumstances can transform them into meaningful experiences. Suffering is an unavoidable part of life, but through our attitude toward it and the lessons or reflections we gain, we derive this attitudinal value. This value emphasizes that, even in restrictive environments, humans can choose their attitudes and find meaning in the process. These three values interact, offering a framework for how humans can discover meaning in life. Now let us see Frankl's logotherapy, or meaning therapy in practical ways that may be applied by a teacher experiencing suicidal impulses?

4.2.2 Discovering the Teacher's Inner Resources

From the perspective of Frankl's logotherapy, the process of discovering the teacher's inner resources is an essential aspect of finding meaning in one's life and work, which can lead to a profound sense of fulfillment and resilience, particularly in the face of suffering. Meaning is not passively given to a person but must be actively discovered and created through his/her reflection and action. For educators, this means that clarifying the meaning behind their role as teachers, as well as their broader life goals, is a crucial step in overcoming the mental suffering

that often arises in the demanding nature of the profession. In the framework of logotherapy, teachers are encouraged to explore and identify the deeper sources of meaning within their lives, which Frankl terms "noetic" resources—elements of the human psyche related to consciousness, responsibility, and moral striving. When teachers engage in deep self-reflection, they may discover these inner resources and, in doing so, unlock the strength to endure challenges in their work. The process begins by contemplating and reassessing their educational objectives, asking themselves not only why they teach, but what drives them to pursue this profession in the first place. This reflective practice allows teachers to reconnect with their original sense of purpose, which often becomes clouded by the pressures of day-to-day responsibilities.

Additionally, revisiting past experiences where teachers have made a positive impact on their students is a powerful means of reconnecting with one's purpose and affirming the intrinsic value of their role. By reflecting on moments where they witnessed tangible growth, transformation, or progress in their students, educators are able to find meaning and satisfaction, even in the midst of difficult or seemingly thankless circumstances. In line with Frankl's philosophy, these experiences serve as vital reminders that their work is not only about the daily grind of lesson plans or grading, but about contributing to the personal and intellectual development of others, which is itself a profound source of meaning. When the teachers recognize the positive influence they have had on their students' growth—whether through moments of encouragement, inspiration, or guidance—they come to appreciate that their role as educators is an integral part of something greater than themselves. In this way, by acknowledging and affirming the value of their contributions, teachers can bolster their sense of purpose and develop the mental fortitude necessary to overcome any existential or emotional suffering they may experience in their profession. Ultimately, the journey of discovering one's inner resources in the context of teaching is not just about overcoming suffering but about transforming it. Through the lens of logotherapy, teachers can learn to see their work as a meaningful mission, finding strength not only in their accomplishments but also in the potential to continue shaping lives and making a difference, no matter how small. In doing so, educators can cultivate a deeper sense of fulfillment and resilience that enables them to persist, grow, and thrive in their profession.

4.2.3 Teachers Establishing the Concept of Personal Responsibility

Frankl's existential logotherapy asserts that people possess the ability to find meaning in any situation, even in the most painful or challenging of circumstances. For teachers, recognizing and embracing their personal responsibility is crucial, as it can serve as a transformative force that enables them to navigate the difficulties inherent in their profession. In Frankl's view, meaning can be found in any situation through the exercise of human freedom—the freedom to choose one's attitude in response to life's challenges. Teachers often face high levels of stress, pressure, and frustration, but rather than feeling powerless in the face of these challenges, they must recognize that they have the power to influence the outcome of their circumstances. This shift in perspective is a central theme of logotherapy, as Frankl emphasizes that people always have the ability to find meaning in their suffering by choosing how they respond to it. For educators, the recognition of their responsibility is not about controlling every external factor but about recognizing that they hold the key to how they perceive and interpret these challenges.

Teachers may often feel that external factors—such as overwhelming workloads, difficult students, or unsupportive parents—are beyond their control. However, according to Frankl, the true power lies in the ability to choose one's response to these external pressures. Rather than succumbing to a sense of helplessness or frustration, teachers can develop the ability to reframe their experiences and find opportunities for growth. By recognizing their responsibility in shaping their own responses to challenges, teachers can begin to see difficult situations not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities for personal transformation. In this sense, Frankl's logo-therapy emphasizes the idea that suffering is not inherently meaningless. Rather, it is through the interpretation of suffering that meaning is created. Teachers, in particular, may experience a great deal of stress or difficulty in their profession, whether it is related to student behavior, institutional expectations, or external pressures. However, how teachers choose to interpret and respond to these stressors can profoundly affect their well-being and professional fulfillment. If teachers view their suffering—be it emotional, psychological, or professional—not as something to be endured passively but as an opportunity for self-exploration, they can cultivate a sense of personal responsibility and agency that empowers them to create positive change, both within themselves and in their classrooms. For example, when facing job stress or conflicts with parents, teachers can adopt the mindset that these challenges are not simply barriers to overcome but opportunities for personal growth. By embracing the role of an active participant in their own lives, teachers can learn to see such stressors as catalysts for developing resilience, empathy, or even new strategies for effective teaching. Frankl's philosophy suggests that when individuals change the way they interpret their suffering—seeing it as an opportunity for growth rather than a burden—they can alleviate the psychological weight of that suffering.

Through this process, teachers can regain their self-esteem and sense of purpose. By recognizing that they are not passive victims of external circumstances but active agents in shaping their experiences, educators can reassert control over their emotional and professional lives. This, in turn, can foster a more positive outlook on life, both within and outside the classroom. In essence, the act of accepting personal responsibility for their responses to stress and suffering enables teachers to transcend their challenges, using them as stepping stones toward personal growth and greater fulfillment in their work. Thus, from Frankl's logo-therapeutic perspective, personal responsibility is not merely a matter of fulfilling duties; it is an act of existential meaning-making. Teachers who embrace this responsibility are not only empowered to improve their own lives but also to positively influence the lives of their students. By finding meaning in their suffering and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth, teachers can maintain a positive attitude toward life and continue to engage meaningfully in their profession, even amidst adversity.

4.2.4 Seeking Help from Mental Health Professionals

Frankl's logo-therapy offers a powerful self-exploratory approach, but there are cases where self-therapy alone may not be sufficient. In particular, for teachers experiencing severe mental health issues, professional assistance is essential. Mental health professionals play an important role in helping teachers address their suffering and reassess the meaning of their lives. They can alleviate the psychological distress teachers experience and provide guidance on how to find a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Counselors play a crucial role in understanding the pain and stress teachers are experiencing, and in the process of exploring their emotions. By actively listening to the teacher's experiences and feelings, counselors help the teachers better understand and accept themselves. This process allows teachers to identify the sources of their pain and find ways to cope with it. Counselors offer psychological techniques and approaches necessary to resolve emotional difficulties and support teachers in achieving a better mental and emotional state. Additionally, counselors teach teachers stress management techniques, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and emotional regulation skills, helping them overcome difficulties and find their inner strength. When teachers are struggling with suicidal thoughts, counselors often recommend a crucial strategy: instead of allowing themselves to be consumed by the overwhelming stress, anger, and frustration brought on by bullying and other external pressures, the best immediate action is to physically step away from the situation. Counselors would suggest that teachers take a deliberate break, stepping outside into the school's playground or along a quiet, peaceful path near their home. This act of physically distancing themselves from the emotional chaos provides the space needed to break the cycle of negative thoughts. By moving their hands and feet, breathing in fresh, revitalizing air, and allowing their faces and bodies to soak in the sunlight, they can activate a natural reset (Seok et al., 2024). Sunlight, in particular, serves as a powerful tool in stabilizing emotions, offering an almost immediate calming effect. The warmth of the sun on the skin and the exposure to natural light have been shown to regulate mood and reduce stress, helping to restore balance and perspective to a weary mind. In this way, counselors not only guide teachers through a moment of relief but also empower them to reconnect with their inner calm. This practice serves as an essential tool in preventing teachers from feeling overwhelmed and isolated during their most challenging moments, ensuring that they don't feel trapped in their struggles.

Doctors, especially those trained in meaning-centered therapies like logotherapy, play a crucial role in diagnosing and addressing both the mental and physical symptoms that teachers may experience. Given that mental health challenges often manifest as physical ailments, doctors take a holistic approach, considering the interconnectedness of mind and body. They are not only responsible for assessing the teacher's symptoms but also for offering tailored treatment strategies that account for the unique emotional and psychological needs of each individual. Through the use of medication, psychotherapy, and logotherapy techniques such as de-reflection and paradoxical intention, doctors help facilitate emotional and mental healing. For example, de-reflection encourages teachers to shift their focus away from their symptoms, allowing them to regain perspective and meaning in their lives, while paradoxical intention helps them confront their fears or anxieties by deliberately engaging with them in a controlled manner (Frankl, 2014: 75-87). These techniques, combined with traditional therapeutic approaches, help teachers develop a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. In this way, doctors offer invaluable support in addressing the root causes of distress, aiding teachers in overcoming both mental suffering and its physical repercussions, and ultimately empowering them to lead healthier, more fulfilled lives.

Religious clergy play a vital role in connecting teachers' suffering to a psychological support network, assisting them in finding life's meaning from a faith-based perspective (Chung, 1996; Chung, 1997; Chung, 2003). Frankl (1992) also emphasized the importance of religion in logotherapy, but his focus was on religion as a psychological resource rather than a doctrinal belief. Frankl's central idea was that when individuals seek meaning in life, religion can provide

essential support and a framework for resilience, particularly during times of suffering and crisis. For Frankl, religion serves as a human phenomenon that helps individuals navigate their suffering by offering a sense of purpose, stability, courage, and hope, without necessarily being tied to belief in a personal God in the traditional religious sense (Frankl, 2014: 108). Drawing from his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, Frankl observed that individuals with religious beliefs appeared to be more resilient in the face of extreme suffering and death. This resilience, for Frankl, arose from the transcendent connection that religion offers, which helps people make sense of their existence even in the harshest circumstances. However, while Frankl viewed religion as a logo-therapy tool for finding meaning, religious clergy approach suffering from a faith-based perspective, where they firmly believe in the healing power of faith. This faith-driven approach can be crucial in offering genuine healing to individuals, as religious leaders are not only providing psychological support but also reinforcing the spiritual and moral strength that belief in God can offer (Seo & Chung, 2021; Yang & Chung, 2023). In this way, ministers assist individuals in finding both meaning and comfort in their faith, helping them navigate crises with the belief that healing and transcendence are possible through a deeper spiritual connection.

4.2.5 Utilizing Social Support Networks

For Frankl, the concept of utilizing social support networks is not just a strategy for managing stress or obtaining assistance; it is an integral part of finding and creating meaning in one's life. Frankl stresses the importance of human relationships in the quest for meaning, particularly during times of suffering or hardship. For teachers, forming and utilizing social support networks composed of colleagues, family, and friends can serve as a vital resource for emotional resilience, helping them reconstruct meaning in their professional and personal lives when faced with challenges (Lee et al., 2024; Jang et al., 2025). In Frankl's view, relationships formed within support networks can provide crucial emotional and psychological sustenance. However, Frankl also offers practical and ethical guidance on how these relationships should be nurtured. He emphasizes the necessity of humility when establishing and maintaining connections with others. This is especially important when interacting with friends, colleagues, or even family members. Frankl cautions against behaviors such as bragging or projecting superiority, as these attitudes can create an imbalance in the relationship, making it difficult for the other person to relate to you on an equal level. If a teacher, for example, presents themselves or their family as being superior in any way, the other person may experience feelings of inferiority, which could manifest as resentment, bitterness, or even hostility. According to Frankl, such dynamics prevent the development of true, supportive friendships, as the person who feels inferior may be unable to offer genuine help or emotional support. Frankl's own experiences during his time in the Nazi concentration camps serve as a poignant example of how humility can foster the right kind of social support. In the brutal conditions of the camps, Frankl, a trained doctor, refrained from boasting about his academic background or professional achievements. Instead, he humbly identified himself simply as a medical doctor. This humility allowed him to avoid provoking resentment or mistreatment from camp authorities, who were often brutal and dehumanizing. Frankl observed that individuals who excessively boasted about their status or past accomplishments were often the first to perish, as their pride made them vulnerable to contempt from others. In contrast, those who displayed humility and maintained an attitude of modesty tended to survive the harshest conditions.

Frankl's reflections on these experiences highlight that genuine relationships and support networks are rooted in mutual respect and equality, not in hierarchical superiority.

Furthermore, Frankl recognized that human nature has a tendency to associate success with jealousy or envy, rather than celebrating the achievements of others. This observation is especially pertinent when building social support networks. Teachers, like anyone else, may face envy or resentment when they achieve success, whether in their career or personal life. In order to mitigate these negative tendencies, it is essential to approach relationships with an attitude of humility and modesty. By doing so, teachers can create a conducive environment in which genuine, unconditional support is possible. Humility, in this context, is not about diminishing one's worth or achievements but about recognizing that true support and meaningful relationships emerge from an authentic, egalitarian approach to human connection (Chung, 2023; Go et al., 2021). In times of crisis or stress, teachers can benefit immensely from these supportive relationships. When they approach others with a mindset of equality and humility, they not only prevent the alienation that often accompanies pride or boastfulness but also open the door to receiving meaningful help. Frankl's insights suggest that it is precisely through these balanced, humble relationships that teachers can access the strength and resilience they need to overcome challenges. In times of emotional or professional difficulty, a teacher who has fostered genuine, equal relationships with colleagues, family, and friends can find the support necessary to regain their sense of purpose and meaning in their work.

Thus, in the context of logotherapy, the importance of social support networks goes beyond mere practical assistance. It is about creating and sustaining relationships that provide both emotional and existential support, enabling individuals to find meaning, resilience, and strength in the face of adversity. For teachers, this process begins with humility and equality, both in how they interact with others and in how they allow themselves to receive help when needed. Through this approach, they can build the social connections that not only help them survive difficult times but also enrich their lives and their ability to make a positive impact in the classroom.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The root cause of teacher suicides in Korea is deeply embedded in the competitive culture that distorts societal values. Parents often view children as possessions to be perfected at all costs, leading to violence from students and unjust accusations against teachers when they attempt to correct such behavior. This systemic issue cannot be solved by addressing individual problems alone but requires national reform. The government must take the lead in addressing this with policies that elevate the economic and social status of teachers, provide psychological support, and implement clear legal frameworks to hold students and parents accountable. Frankl's logotherapy provides a valuable perspective in this context. Teachers, despite facing immense pressure and violence, must be supported in finding meaning in their work. Frankl's concept of "attitudinal values"—the ability to choose one's attitude in the face of suffering—can empower teachers to reframe their experiences as opportunities for growth. This approach fosters an educational environment of mutual respect and compassion, where teachers rediscover the intrinsic purpose of their vocation.

In addition, teachers must find meaning in their lives through a deeper attachment to their work, cultivating practical decisions that reaffirm their commitment despite adversity. In this regard,

the absolute need for psychological counselors and medical doctors cannot be overstated. These professionals are crucial in offering emotional support, helping teachers process trauma, and providing strategies to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression. Their guidance enables teachers to develop resilience, enhance their mental well-being, and regain a sense of purpose in their work. Religious leaders also have a role in this transformation, helping both teachers and students find meaning beyond immediate struggles, offering spiritual support to cope with challenges, and promoting empathy and responsibility among students and parents.

In conclusion, addressing teacher suicides and violence requires systemic reform, a shift in societal attitudes toward teachers, and the application of logo-therapy. By supporting teachers with practical solutions, mental health support from counselors and medical doctors, and fostering a culture of mutual respect and meaning, we can create a healthier educational environment where teachers and students thrive.

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