

## **SOUTH KOREA (REPUBLIC OF KOREA)**

(July 2006)

### **Background**

South Koreans have traditionally attached great importance to education, a view that continues today. Formal education in Korea began during the Three Kingdoms period 57BC–AD668. (<http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/education.htm>). 'The South Korean mindset has been imbued with the belief that education and examination preparation represent the potential for social access and status selection.' (Shapiro, 2002, p.1).

In recent history from 1948–1961 the South Korean government tried to establish a national education system, with the aim of providing educational opportunities to all school aged children and high quality human resources to society. Despite the shortage of finance for education an education system was established through the financial support of parents. During this time the government concentrated on completing the primary school system and enacted the legislation necessary for the establishment of an education system. Primary education was made compulsory in 1953. (<http://aped.snu.ac.kr/cyberedu/cyberedul/eng/eng5-03.html>)

The first national curriculum was released in 1955 and since then has been reformed six times. History reveals the South Korean national curriculum has been changed in the main according to changes in leadership of the government: Revision 1 – After the military revolution in 1960, Revision 2 – Amendment of the national constitution, Revision 3 - New military officer in power after the assassination of the former president, Revision 5 – New democratic government in 1992.

The period from 1945–1970 witnessed a dramatic expansion of education and during this time illiteracy was virtually eliminated. Today South Korea boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the world. South Korea's well educated people have been the primary source of the rapid economic growth that the nation has achieved during the past five decades. (<http://www.internationaleducationmedia.com.korea/index.htm>)

In South Korea, primary education is compulsory and free. In some rural areas this also applies for the three years of middle school. (Kim, 2005, p.17).

South Korean students attend school for 220 days a year, the minimum required academic year length for primary, middle and high schools. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOEHRD) introduced the notion of having schools take off every other Saturday and in 2007 schools will follow a five day school week due to the spread of the forty hour week.

The academic year consists of two terms. Instructional hours vary from 24–34 periods per week depending on the school level. There are almost 20 000 schools in South Korea and of these schools 3000 are private, with about one third located in the Seoul area, according to 2003 data. In 2005 there were 9.64 m school aged children. The secondary enrolment rate was 97.2% and the university enrolment rate was 82.1%. The education budget attracted 17.1% of the government's overall budget. ([http://kice.re/kice/eng/info/info\\_1.jsp](http://kice.re/kice/eng/info/info_1.jsp))

In 2002 the MOEHRD decided to re-allow the use of corporal punishment. A detailed set of rules governing the procedure and methods of such punishment has been

formulated. (<http://www.wes.org/ewenr/02may/feature.htm>). The official government position is that corporal punishment is prohibited.

Overview of the National Curriculum:

#### Syllabus period under the US military administration – Democratic Education (1946–1954)

Until the development of the first national curriculum, Korean education followed the education system of the USA. The primary goal of this period was to overcome the existing imperial education system so far as to foster the democratic mind which was assimilated with the western mind at the time.

#### The first national curriculum (1955–1962)

As a result of the aftermath of the Korean War, a stronger educational policy was required and the most important purpose of this curriculum was to infuse anti communism into people's minds and to train skilled workers.

#### The second national curriculum Quantitative Expansion (1963–1972)

A policy was designed to emphasise the establishment of a national identity, the modernisation of the state and the non communist unification of North and South Korea.

#### The third national curriculum (1973–1981)

The objectives of this curriculum were to enhance national quality, humanity education and knowledge and technical education.

#### The fourth national curriculum (1982–1988)

This curriculum put various ideas together and was produced by the Korean Educational Development Institute rather than the central government; and reflected a public demand to stop following foreign curriculum models and to produce its own curriculum appropriate for the Korean context. As a result, this curriculum contained fresh ideas including curriculum integration, private companies producing text books and the localisation of the curriculum. The purpose of the curriculum was to establish a well organised educational program emphasising national spirit, science and technology; and education for the whole person.

#### The fifth national curriculum (1989–1994)

A ceremonial reform of the national curriculum was called however; the fourth national curriculum framework was maintained. The goals of this curriculum were to help educate people, attain subjectivity, autonomy, creativity and morality.

#### The sixth national curriculum (1995–1999)

The new democratic government aimed at the total reformation of the Korean school system and focused on strengthening competitive power. Parents and students were treated as consumers. The official objective of this curriculum was to cultivate morality and creativity.

#### The seventh national curriculum (2000- )

This curriculum has been implemented gradually since 2000. (Kim, 2004, p. 3–5). 'The main objective is to promote student's learning according to their aptitudes, talents and abilities. The common course is intended to equip students with basic life skills such as the traditional three R's, foreign language, literacy in information technology and interpersonal skills.' (Kim, 2002, p. 37).

### **Present**

South Korea's education system has undertaken significant reform in order to align the curriculum with the 'knowledge based society' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The MOEHRD,

established in 2001 by restructuring and expanding the scope of the former MOE, is the central government body responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies related to academic activities. The MOEHRD suggests intelligence based on human originality will determine the survival and prosperity of individuals, organisations and countries. (Suh, 2000, p.1).

This meant radical reorganisation of the previous education system, which worked well in the industrial society. The reorganisation included: building creative human resources; building self leading capacity in students; ensuring expanded autonomy for the local community, and schools in curriculum planning and operation; open education and lifelong learning. The implementation of these reforms is based on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education, with South Korea having the reputation as an e-Learning leader.

The 2000 White paper which addressed adapting education to the information age included the identification 'purpose and subjects of ICT in education...describes the transition of internal ICT education, gives the status of projects relating to ICT in education and outlines the policy and new vision of adapting education to the information age in the future.' (Suh, 2000, p.1). 'Educational ICT usage is to compose at least 10% of each subject.' (<http://english.moe.kr/html/policy/>). Various cyber home schooling programs are effectively assisting students from remote areas and low income families gain access to an affordable choice of learning opportunities.' (Choi, 2006, p.9).

The Public Education Enforcement Plan, a component of the seventh curriculum revision, was introduced in 2004 with the goal of South Korea becoming a strong nation firmly grounded on knowledge and information. 'In 2005, South Korea changed to an 'on demand' curriculum revision system, which whenever there is a need for curriculum or text book revision the appraisal is carried out immediately and the necessary changes applied accordingly. This flexibility helps to deliver knowledge that is up to date and alive ...'. (Choi, 2005, p.6).

South Korea has a highly centralised education system and standardised educational content. The 'existence of a curriculum evaluation system helps promote quality assurance.' (<http://english.moe.kr/html/policy/>). The evaluation system is responsible for:

- Development and implementation of national level achievement tests
- Participation in international comparative studies of student achievement
- Development and implementation of diagnostic tests for basic skills of elementary students
- Conducting studies on research and development in educational evaluation and long term development planning
- Conducting training on educational evaluations.  
([http://www.kice.re.kr/kice/eng/major/major2\\_3.jsp](http://www.kice.re.kr/kice/eng/major/major2_3.jsp))

Most South Korean children spend their entire high school life preparing for the all important college entrance examination. A large number of privately owned institutions exist in order to provide after school instruction in various subjects. As the university entrance exam is such an important factor in education, many parents spend a significant portion of their income to send their children to these institutes in order to prepare them for the exam. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_South\\_Korea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_South_Korea)).

### *Educational and Curriculum Organisation*

Pre school education is not included in the formal school system. However its importance justifies attention in relation to the formal school system. Kindergarten is the

main facility for pre school education in South Korea.  
(<http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/Korea/education.htm>).

Special schools are state funded offering primary and secondary education for students with learning difficulties.

The first ten years of school education from primary first grade to high school grade are set as a national common basic education period. During this period, students learn from a national curriculum. 'In revising the national curriculum, the MOEHRD judged that a flexible level differentiated curriculum would address each student's different ability, interest aptitude and career direction; and also promote gifted and talented education while satisfying the requirements of a common basic education.'  
(<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy>).

The types of level differentiated curriculum include:

- Step by Step Curriculum

Applied to the core subjects of mathematics and secondary level English. Mathematics is taught step by step with a curriculum divided into twenty levels for students in grades 1 – 10. The English curriculum has eight levels, taught from 7<sup>th</sup> through to 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

- Indepth and Supplementary Curriculum

This is for advancing or lagging students in the subjects of Korean language (1<sup>st</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grade, social studies (3<sup>rd</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grade) and primary English (3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade).

- Elective Curriculum

High school students in grades 11 and 12 can choose from a number of electives that reflect their differing abilities, aptitude, needs and interests. Selection is made by students according to their ability and career development.

(<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy>)

Teachers at the start of the year are given a clear, succinct and easy to follow syllabus of what should be taught. School text books and teacher training support such syllabuses and there is regular testing to ensure that all students are at or above the required standard. There is also a very clear expectation that all students by the end of each year level will have reached the required level of ability.

(<http://www.online.opinion.com.au/viewasp/article=585>)

High schools are separated into two types: general (academic) and vocational. In high school a flexible level differentiated curriculum is provided for second and third year students, choosing from seventy nine electives. Electives are set by each metropolitan/provincial education office and school at a minimum of twenty eight units each, for up to fifty percent of students. Schools are granted more autonomy in designing curriculum. Roles are divided between the MOEHRD, schools and metropolitan/provincial education offices in designing and operating the curriculum, so as to ensure efficiency and educational quality. (<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy/>).

The College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) is the higher education exam South Korean students sit for entrance into one of the three main South Korean universities.

Recent developments in educational and curriculum organisation include:

- Development of diversified text books
- Level differentiated evaluation system
- Enhancing the expertise of teachers through training programs and lessened workloads in order to develop expert teaching skills

- Improving the school environment to enhance level differentiated curriculum delivery through the provision of teaching and learning materials for each level
- Improvements in the administrative and financial system (<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy/>)
- Promoting English education:  
As from 2006, English will be taught from primary first grade; one native English teacher will be placed in every middle school by 2010; incentive points will be given to English teachers of Korean nationality who possess English certificates and qualifications and pilot based English immersion education.
- Possible change to the current single track system of 6 years primary education (elementary school), which may be preceded by one to three years in nursery school or kindergarten; 3 years middle school education, 3 years high school education (students usually complete grades 1 – 12 by 19 years of age) and 4 years college education; by adopting a more flexible school system that moves freely between vocational and academic areas, such as Australia. (Choi, 2006, p.15).

### *School Committee/ Council*

The school committee system was first introduced in 1995 in 355 schools initially to enhance autonomy in creative school management and develop education tailored to local characteristics and demands.

In 1998, all national primary and secondary schools were mandated to establish school committees.

In 2000 all private schools were mandated to establish school committees.

The school committee has five to fifteen members according to the school size with students and parents forming 40%–50%, teachers 30%-40% and local representatives 10%-30%. School principals are automatically included in the committees as teacher members and the president and vice president of the committee are elected from non teacher members.

Public school committees hold appraisal rights for the establishment and revision of school charter regulations; budgetary planning, which has strengthened the financial power of schools; accounts settlement; curricular operations including selection of textbook and educational material; after school and vacation classes; other extra curricular programs; and the formation and management of school committees, fees, school lunches etc. (<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy/>) (<http://aped.snu.ac.kr/cyberedu/cyberedu1/eng.eng5-03.html>).

### *Accountability*

Although the delegation of power to schools has been making schools more autonomous, it does not automatically guarantee the results of school management. As a school community has been empowered, it is necessary to ensure the accountability of school education. 'To ensure accountability, the evaluation policy of schools has been carried out throughout the country since 1997; however the results of this policy are obscure and controvertible.' (Jin, 2001). (<http://aped.snu.ac.kr/cyberedu/cyberedu1/eng/eng5-03.html>)

An external evaluation committee has been established with provincial and metropolitan offices of education administering school evaluations, usually on an annual basis but there are cases where the evaluation occurs once every two years. 'Each office is responsible for the preparation of evaluation areas, criteria and methods; and establishing an evaluation committee. The educational administrators, school principals

and vice principals, school teachers, university professors, researchers and parental representatives who are appointed to evaluation committees...receive no special training.' The school evaluation 'is focused on leaning and teaching, curriculum, student needs and community consciousness', however, the evaluations 'do not deal with all aspects of the school nor is there uniformity in the criteria used or the schedule because some offices include the results of achievement tests in the standards for the school evaluation while others do not.' 'Schools are given a grade based on all evaluation fields and a final rankings list of all schools. The results of school evaluations are used for supervision consultations and as a basis for providing financial awards to well-performing schools.' (De Grauwe and Naidoo, 2004, p.26).

### **Testing/Evaluation**

Previously most schools used a norm-referenced evaluation. Therefore students were ranked according to the average total score they received by combining grades from all subject areas. Class instruction was designed for students to achieve good grades on their test scores at the expense of achieving the genuine goals and objectives of education. As a consequence, it is reported that school education has failed to develop student abilities to understand and think in comprehensive and creative ways. In order to address this concern the MOEHRD introduced Diverse Student Evaluation Methods to school education that aligns to the curriculum for the knowledge based society. A prominent feature of this policy in relation to evaluation is the diversification of the criteria for evaluating students. (<http://aped.snu.ac.kr/cyberedu/cyberedu1/eng/eng5-03.html>)

'The aim of the National Assessment of Educational Achievement (NAEA) established in 1998, is to produce specific and reliable resources required for the diagnosis and quality control of teaching and learning by measuring the level of student achievement based on the National Curriculum.' (Lee, Min, Kim, Son, 2004, p.61).

NAEA is also responsible for collecting background information affecting educational achievement and providing information on the achievement levels to students, teachers, parents and the government. (Lee and Shin, 2004, p.67). Since 1998, in primary and secondary education performance based evaluation methods are used to develop student's abilities to understand and think in comprehensive and creative ways. These include written exams, oral tests, discussions, demonstrations, lab experiments, interviews, clinical observations, written reports, research papers and portfolios. (<http://www.wes.org/ewenr/02may/feature.html>)

As indicated in the document *Quality Education for All Young People: Challenge, Trends and Priorities 2004*, an evaluation system is being developed and disseminated to assess student achievement in the basic scholastic abilities in reading, writing and problem solving. Through this evaluation system, sampling has been implemented to assess the basic scholastic abilities of third graders on a national level (3% of the applicable students are tested in October) which produces an index for the basic scholastic abilities of students and is used as reference material to establish and improve the basic scholastic abilities of students. Learning materials are developed and disseminated to assist the education of students lacking basic scholastic abilities.

Each school is to establish its own education plan tailored to its unique needs by establishing an accountability system of home room teachers for every subject and by educating students with the utilisation of diverse methods and aid from human and financial resources.

In 2004 testing was conducted in grades 6, 9 and 10 in Korean, maths, social studies, science and English (Listening is a component of the Korean and English evaluation) on

a random sample of 300–400 middle schools and eleven high schools. An indepth analysis of the results was reported in December 2005. Further plans for testing beyond 2006 are organised through the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation.

Data from the national basic scholastic abilities assessment sampling is used to identify students lacking in basic scholastic abilities. Learning materials for identified students are available from the Centre for Scholastic Assistance of Teachers. Schools undergo examination and are reassessed annually at the end of the academic year. Individual academic record cards for students have been created. Every school is to operate its own special program after school and during school vacations for the education of struggling students.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE47/English/Natreps/reports/Korearep.pdf>

### *Teacher Evaluation*

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) found that in Korea, evaluation on teacher performance failed to provide systemic influence on their career development and that the country lacked a tool to differentiate between teachers according to their performance ability. The recommendation was to set up an objective evaluation standard; and make use of the standard as a tool for school development and improvement not punishment. The majority of primary school teachers are graduates of four years of college education. 'Previously the principal evaluated teachers and reflected evaluation results in teacher promotion.' (Choi, 2006, p.11).

Also, the MOEHRD recognised the growing need for the improvement of teacher quality and professionalism, in particular people's trust for the teaching profession

through teacher evaluation that is both appropriate and impartial. A survey conducted in 2005, revealed 77.4% of South Korean's agreed to the necessity of a teacher evaluation system.

The major features included:

- A focus on classroom teaching and everyday guidance for children. 'Teachers make use of the evaluation results as a tool for self development and improved class instruction.' (Choi, 2006, p.11).
- Support for teachers with more opportunities and programs for capacity building and expertise enhancement.
- A multi faceted evaluation system whereby teachers, principals and vice principals engage in the assessment process.
- Surveys for parents and students on their degree of educational satisfaction.

Trial evaluations conducted at a selected number of schools in 2005/2006 prior to the system's full implementation enabled the MOEHRD to collect diverse opinions and suggestions for improvement.

When the trial evaluations are fully analysed, the MOEHRD will gather public opinion of each sector of society through public hearings and discussions. Through this process the aim is for teachers to be able to create self-lead capacity building opportunities aimed at enhancing their profession. (<http://english.moe.kr.html/policy/>).

'Previously, principals were appointed based on seniority. Under the new policy in a trial commencing in September 2006, principals will be selected partially through job offerings or open competition so as to recruit those who possess good management skills, in addition to expert knowledge in education.' (Choi, 2006, p.12).

'The whole process of teacher selection and training is also under review.' (Choi, 2006, p.10).

The Korean proverb 'One should not even step on the shadow of one's teacher' (<http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/eduaction.htm>) highlights the degree of respect traditionally given to teachers.

### **Strengths**

- South Korean people have a very high zeal for education and believe that 'human capital developed through education is their most valuable resource.' (Weidman and Park, 2002, p.1).
- There is a strong after school learning program for students' including arts, sports and foreign languages. This provides learning opportunities for low income students. The student participation rate in these programs is 60%.
- South Korean people have high respect for members of the teaching profession and the salary of teachers at all levels in South Korea is relatively high compared to other countries. (Weidman and Park, 2006, p.5).
- Special education in South Korea has made great strides both in number and quality of programs for the past twenty five years since the enactment of the Special Education Promotion Act in 1977. (Park, 2002, p.28).
- Introduction of the 'alternate school' policy for students with special needs.
- Promotion of educational development in remote areas and educational programs for gifted students. (Weidman and Park, 2006, p.1).
- A well developed and supported e-Learning focus.
- In 2005 South Korea was ranked in first place in the OECD rankings in terms of the number of younger people who have completed an upper secondary education, leading a small group of countries including Norway and Japan, where more than 90% of students reach this level...The South Korean success is also reflected in test results. (BBC News, 2005, p.1 and 2).
- South Korea spends about half the amount on school students as the USA but its performance in maths is much higher. (BBC News, 2005, p.3).
- South Korea has experienced a spectacular expansion of higher education during the last five decades. (Kim and Kim, 2004, p.1).

### **Weaknesses**

- In recent times there has been a strong emphasis on teacher evaluation; however school evaluation/accountability is in the process of development.
- Private education costs eg: The main focus in South Korea is in preparing students for college admissions exams and subsequent enrolment into preferred universities. This cost is one of the highest among OECD countries. (Choi, 2006, p.8).
- There have been so many reform measures and laws introduced within the last fifty years,...educational policies in South Korea are generally referred to as forever changing policies. (Weidman and Park, 2002, p.1).

- Drift of children from wealthy families to educational facilities outside South Korea. MOEHRD recently promulgated an independent private high school policy aimed at keeping more students at home. (Weidman and Park, 2002, p.2).
- A number of major changes to education in South Korea appear to have occurred as a result of political influences ie: seven major curriculum reviews since 1946.
- ‘The South Korean education system, despite its success in achieving high test scores has been criticised both for its treatment of students and for the content they receive. Students are encouraged to conceive of themselves as being in fierce competition with their friends and peers.’  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_South\\_Korea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_South_Korea))
- South Korean high school students suffer from high rates of depression and suicide; suicide rates spike around times of major exams. Many others are emotionally drained after they complete the CSAT.
- ‘South Korea is probably the most education–orientated country in the world. Seven out of ten students receive private tutoring for an average of 6.8 hours a week, and private expenditure for education accounts for an average 12.7% of household expenses.’ (Na, 2005, p.1).
- ...‘when globalisation progresses further, the current South Korean educational system will not be viable in terms of ensuring the continuity of public education and of producing a flexible and versatile workforce and a cadre of highly trained professionals. Only one solution seems workable: a big surgery on the statist educational system by means of a substantial degree of liberalisation, decentralisation and the emancipation of private education...South Korea, however, cannot go for the solution because of the entrenched statist economy of education – for the time being at least.’ (Kim,2005, p.17).

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