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# PRESENTATION

*Theme: Education Korean*

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Gangnam-gu has some of the best schools in Korea and the ratio of local high school students entering prestigious universities is consistently higher than in other areas. Korea's secondary educational lottery system requires that students attend a school in the district where they live. As a result, many wealthy families have moved to Gangnam-gu to give their children access to better schools. Also, to recruit smart and rich students, some high schools moved to Gangnam-gu, which became a social issue. Now, in the 21st century, people from Gangnam-gu who graduated from prestigious colleges tend to play an important role in society.

As a highly Confucian society, Koreans place a great emphasis on education. Korea's literacy ranks among the highest in the world. Many parents make great sacrifices to ensure that their children can have the opportunity to attain a high level of education.

Students study very hard for most of the day, attending private lessons for language and music after regular school hours. From high school, most students spend all their time studying for the all-important college entrance examination to get into a good university. Even after graduating college, many workers continue to take language classes, study other interests, or pursue higher degrees.



Korean schools use a 1-6-3-3 approach (1 year for kindergarten, 6 years for elementary school, then 3 years each for middle and high school). The school year starts in early March and goes to February, with about 40 days for summer vacation and about 45

days for winter vacation. The Education Law mandates a minimum of 220 days of education each academic year for elementary through high school.

### **History of Education**

Formal education began in the 4th Century with the establishment of *Daehak* (대학, meaning "great school"). Pupils studied the teachings of Confucius. Other subjects were later added. Similar schools started appearing around the country to prepare children from upper class families for the civil service examination to enter government service. In the 1800s, several private institutions opened, making education available for other classes. Education became compulsory in 1948,

entitling all Koreans to pursue and education. As Korea's economy continued to grow, the government expanded educational facilities and personnel. During the 1990s, the government adopted a number of changes to further improve the education system, beginning foreign language instruction at earlier grades and revamping the college entrance examination.

### **Korean Schools**

Foreign residents wishing to enroll their children in a Korean elementary school must submit the child's Certificate of Alien Registration to the local school. To enroll in a Korean middle or high school, residents must apply to the local Education Office. Based on the child's previous education experience, the Education Office will determine the appropriate grade level. Students will need to have good proficiency with the Korean language.

### **Korean Universities**

Several Korean universities run graduate schools of international studies (GSIS), with degree programs taught in English. (A few also offer undergraduate programs and exchange programs with universities overseas.) Foreign students with strong Korean proficiency may also apply for admission to the regular Korean college programs. Contact the schools directly for information and application procedures. Students should apply for a student visa before coming to Korea. In certain cases, foreign residents with other long-term visas may apply with the Seoul Immigration office to receive permission to attend programs at Korean colleges.

The **Education in South Korea** is seen as the most important key to success and competition is consequently very heated and fierce.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> A centralized administration oversees the process for the education of children from kindergarten to third grade high school. Mathematics, science, Korean, social studies, and English are generally considered to be the most important subjects. Sometimes physical education is not considered important as it is not regarded to be education and therefore many schools lack high-quality gymnasiums and varsity athletics. South

Korea was the first country in the world to provide high-speed internet access from every primary, junior, and high school.

The school year is divided into two semesters. The first begins in the beginning of March and ends in mid-July; the second begins in late August and ends in mid-February. The schedules are not rigidly standardized, however, and can vary from school to school.

Kindergarten in South Korea is composed of children from ages three to five. Most children do not attend "preschool" but are lumped together in a kindergarten class with other children who may be within a three years age difference. When the child reaches about six years of age he/she is systematically moved on to the first year of elementary school. From kindergarten to high school, matriculating through the grade levels is not determined on knowledge, grades or passing of any tests, but is based purely upon the students age. Enrollment in kindergartens or preschools expanded impressively during the 1980s. In 1980 there were 66,433 children attending 901 kindergartens or preschools. By 1987 there were 397,020 children in 7,792 institutions. The number of kindergarten and preschool teachers rose from 3,339 to 11,920 during the same period. The overwhelming majority of these teachers--approximately 92 percent--were women. This growth was attributable to several factors: Ministry of Education encouragement of preschool education, the greater number of women entering the work force, growth in the number of nuclear families where a grandparent was often unavailable to take care of children, and the feeling that kindergarten might give children an "edge" in later educational competition. Kindergartens often paid homage to the expectations of parents with impressive graduation ceremonies, complete with diplomas, academic camhumps, and gowns.

### **Primary education**

In the late 1980s, primary schools were coeducational, although coeducation was quite rare at the middle-school and high-school levels. Enrollment figures for 1987 on the primary school level were 4,771,722 pupils in 6,531 schools, with 130,142

teachers. A decline from the 1980 figure of 5,658,002 pupils was caused by population trends. Some 54 percent of primary school teachers were male.

Elementary school consists of grades one to six. Students learn subjects including, but not limited to, Korean, mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, fine arts, and music. Usually, the homeroom teacher covers most of the subjects; however, there are some specialized teachers in professions such as physical education and foreign languages, including English.

Elementary schools are called 초등학교 (初等學校, *chodeung-hakgyo*), meaning *elementary school*. The South Korean government changed its name to the current form from 국민학교 (國民學校, *gukmin hakgyo*), meaning *citizens' school* in 1996. This was done as a gesture of restoring national pride, due to the negatively charged notions of the word (국민학교 was abbreviated from 황국신민의 학교 (皇國臣民의 學校/皇国臣民の学校), which means school for the subjects of the imperial state) carried over from Japanese colonial rule.

## **Secondary education**

In 1987 there were approximately 4,895,354 students enrolled in middle schools and high schools, with approximately 150,873 teachers. About 69 percent of these teachers were male. The secondary-school enrollment figure also reflected changing population trends--there were 3,959,975 students in secondary schools in 1979. Given the importance of entry into higher education, the majority of students attended general or academic high schools in 1987: 1,397,359 students, or 60 percent of the total, attended general or academic high schools, as compared with 840,265 students in vocational secondary schools. Vocational schools specialized in a number of fields: primarily agriculture, fishery, commerce, trades, merchant marine, engineering, and the arts.

Competitive entrance examinations at the middle-school level were abolished in 1968. Although as of the late 1980s, students still had to pass noncompetitive qualifying examinations, they were assigned to secondary institutions by lottery, or else by location within the boundary of the school district. Secondary schools, formerly ranked according to the quality of their students, have been equalized, with a portion of good, mediocre, and poor students being assigned to each one. The reform, however, did not equalize secondary schools completely. In Seoul, students who performed well in qualifying examinations were allowed to attend better quality schools in a "common" district, while other students attended schools in one of five geographical districts. The reforms applied equally to public and private schools whose enrollments were strictly controlled by the Ministry of Education.

Middle schools are called **중학교** (中學校, *jung hakgyo*), which means *middle school*.

High schools are called **고등학교** (高等學校, *godeung hakgyo*), meaning "high-level school."

## **High school**

High schools in South Korea teach students from first grade (age 15) to third grade (age 17), and students commonly graduate at age 18. As in middle school, students stay in their homerooms and are not tracked by ability. A student may choose, however, the class he or she wishes to take for liberal arts. High schools in Korea may also have subject specialty tracks. For example, university-bound students may choose to go to an academic science or foreign language specialty high school; while other students may choose a vocational track high school which emphasizes agriculture, commerce, or another technical curriculum. The art track is another popular route many aspiring artists take. Specializing in anything from Korean traditional music to drama, they serve as the alma mater of many of today's most famous celebrities. It is not abnormal for many students to arrive home from school at midnight. The curriculum is rigorous, and many students attend private academies

called 학원 (學院, pronounced hagwons) as supplements to boost academic performance.

High school is not strictly mandatory. However, according to a 2005 study of OECD member countries, some 97% of South Korea's young adults do complete high school. This was the highest percentage recorded in any country. [2]

### **After-school classes**

A large number of privately-owned institutions (hakwon/ 학원/學院) exist in order to provide after-school instruction in various subjects. As the university entrance examination 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. Although theoretically these private institutions are subject to the regulation of the Korean Ministry of Education, this system of private schools is often criticized for having little or no actual oversight, and many schools operate with sub-standard conditions. Many also worry that the existence of these schools allows wealthier parents to purchase better education for their children.

Private tutors have also become popular in recent years. Students who attend top-tier universities are the tutors of choice for many parents.

### **English education**

English is taught as a required subject from the third year of elementary school up to high school, including most universities, with the goal of performing well on the TOEIC and TOEFL, which are tests of reading, listening and grammar-based English. For students who achieve high scores, there is also a speaking evaluation.

With the recent changes to the TOEFL subject areas tested, many Koreans are heavily focusing on their speaking ability in English given the higher importance placed on this skill by universities for effective communication.

Most universities, schools, including public schools and hagwons, hire exclusively US and Canadian foreign teachers for their English education programs. While also employing other Caucasian English speakers (British, Irish, South African, Australians, and New Zealanders) at academies and institutes, Korean education recognizes that English as the global language.

### **Post-secondary education**

*Main articles: List of colleges and universities in South Korea, Category:Vocational education in South Korea*

Many students who complete high school education apply to be accepted in South Korea's various universities and technical colleges. There are many national universities as well as private universities. National universities are supported by the government and are usually regarded as providing better education than private ones. There are 10 major national universities in South Korea, which are taking a leading role on higher education in each metropolitan area or provinces as well as many other national universities. However, most of prestigious private universities are mainly located in Seoul with few exceptions. The acronym SKY is often used to indicate the three most prestigious and highly desired universities in Korea: Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University. Admissions into the "SKY" schools have traditionally been so competitive that a degree from one of the schools used to be regarded as a ticket to success and honor in Korean society.([3]) Other well-known universities include other leading national universities like Pusan National University, Kyungpook National University, highly recognized engineering institutes like Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) ,Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH), in addition to several private universities located in Seoul such as Sogang University, Ewha Womans University, Hanyang University, and Sungkyunkwan University.

### **University entrance examinations**

Korea retains many aspects of the Joseon Dynasty and Japanese education systems, the most influential of which is probably the use of entrance examinations to determine eligibility to attend the highest-level universities. The entrance examinations test most subjects taught in school, including math, science, English, history, and economics. From an early age, students prepare to take the university entrance examination, and the curriculum of most schools is determined by the content of the entrance examination to a large extent. In addition, many parents enroll their children in cram schools from an early age—many as early as elementary school.

In the late 1980s, the university a South Korean high school graduate attended was perhaps the single most important factor in determining his or her life chances. Thus, entrance into a prestigious institution was the focus of intense energy, dedication, and self-sacrifice. Prestigious institutions including National institutes like Seoul National University, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), Pusan National University, Kyungpook National University, and a handful of private institutions such as Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH), Korea University, Yonsei University, Sogang University, Hanyang University, Ewha Womans University, and Sungkyunkwan University.

Because college entrance depends upon ranking high in objectively graded examinations, high school students face an "examination hell", a harsh regiment of endless cramming and rote memorization of facts that is incomparably severe. Unlike the Confucian civil service examinations of the Choson Dynasty, their modern reincarnation is a matter of importance not for an elite, but for the substantial portion of the population with middle-class aspirations. In the late 1980s, over one-third of college-age men and women (35.2 percent in 1989) succeeded in entering and attending institutions of higher education; those who failed faced dramatically reduced prospects for social and economic advancement.

The number of students in higher education had risen from 100,000 in 1960 to 1.3 million in 1987, and the proportion of college-age students in higher-education institutions was second only to the United States. The institutions of higher education included regular four-year colleges and universities, two-year junior vocational colleges, four-year teachers' colleges, and graduate schools. The main drawback was that college graduates wanted careers that would bring them positions of leadership in society, but there simply were not enough positions to accommodate all graduates each year and many graduates were forced to accept lesser positions. Ambitious women especially were frustrated by traditional barriers of sex discrimination as well as the lack of positions.

Because tests given in high school (generally once every two or four weeks) were almost as important in determining college entrance as the final entrance examinations, students had no opportunity to relax from the study routine. According to one contemporary account, a student had to memorize 60 to 100 pages of facts to do well on these periodic tests. It's not uncommon to see students walking home from their studies at very late hours (still dressed in their high school uniforms). Family and social life generally were sacrificed to the supreme end of getting into the best university possible.

Examinations are very serious times of the year and they change the whole pattern of society. In the days leading up to exams, newspapers post articles asking girls not to wear perfume or high heeled shoes to the examinations as these are seen to be distracting. Businesses often start at 10 am to accommodate parents who have helped their children study late into the night and on the evenings before exams recreational facilities, such as tennis clubs, close early to facilitate study for these exams.

The costs of the "examination hell" have been evident not only in a grim and joyless adolescence for many, if not most, young South Koreans, but also in the number of suicides caused by the constant pressure of tests. Often suicides have been top achievers who despaired after experiencing a slump in test performance. Also, the

multiple choice format of periodic high school tests and university entrance examinations has left students little opportunity to develop their creative talents. A "facts only" orientation has promoted a cramped and unspontaneous view of the world that has tended to spill over into other areas of life than academic work.

The prospects for basic change in the system--a deemphasis on tests--were unlikely in the late 1980s. The great virtue of facts-based testing is its objectivity. Though harsh, the system is believed to be fair and impartial. The use of nonobjective criteria such as essays, personal recommendations, and the recognition of success in extracurricular activities or personal recommendations from teachers and others could open up all sorts of opportunities for corruption. In a society where social connections are extremely important, connections rather than merit might determine entry into a good university. Students who survive the numbing regimen of examinations under the modern system are at least universally acknowledged to have deserved their educational success. Top graduates who have assumed positions of responsibility in government and business have lent, through their talents, legitimacy to the whole system.

## **History**

Like other East Asian countries with a Confucian heritage, South Korea has had a long history of providing formal education. Although there was no state-supported system of primary education, the central government established a system of secondary schools in Seoul and the provinces during the Choson Dynasty. State schools suffered a decline in quality, however, and came to be supplanted in importance by the *sowon*, private academies that were the centers of a neo-Confucian revival in the sixteenth century. Students at both private and state-supported secondary schools were exempt from military service and had much the same social prestige as university students enjoy today in South Korea. Like modern students, they were frequently involved in politics. Higher education was provided by the Confucian national university in the capital, the Songgyungwan. Its enrollment was

limited to 200 students who had passed the lower civil service examinations and were preparing for the higher examinations.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern private schools were established both by Koreans and by foreign Christian missionaries. The latter were particularly important because they promoted the education of women and the diffusion of Western social and political ideas. Japanese educational policy after 1910 was designed to turn Koreans into obedient colonial subjects and to teach them limited technical skills. A state university modeled on Tokyo Imperial University was established in Seoul in 1923, but the number of Koreans allowed to study there never exceeded 40 percent of its enrollment; 60 percent of its students were Japanese expatriates.

When United States military forces occupied the southern half of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, they established a school system based on the American model: six years of primary school, six years of secondary school (divided into junior and senior levels), and four years of higher education. Other occupation period reforms included coeducation at all levels, popularly elected school boards in local areas, and compulsory education up to the ninth grade. The government of Syngman Rhee reversed many of these reforms after 1948, when only primary schools remained in most cases coeducational and, because of a lack of resources, education was compulsory only up to the sixth grade. The school system in 1990, however, reflects that which was established under the United States occupation.

During the years when Rhee and Park Chung Hee were in power, the control of education was gradually taken out of the hands of local school boards and concentrated in a centralized Ministry of Education. In the late 1980s, the ministry was responsible for administration of schools, allocation of resources, setting of enrollment quotas, certification of schools and teachers, curriculum development (including the issuance of textbook guidelines), and other basic policy decisions. Provincial and special city boards of education still existed. Although each board was

composed of seven members who were supposed to be selected by popularly elected legislative bodies, this arrangement ceased to function after 1973. Subsequently, school board members were approved by the minister of education.

Most observers agree that South Korea's spectacular progress in modernization and economic growth since the Korean War is largely attributable to the willingness of individuals to invest a large amount of resources in education: the improvement of "human capital." The traditional esteem for the educated man, originally confined to the Confucian scholar as a cultured generalists, now extend to scientists, technicians, and others working with specialized knowledge. Highly educated technocrats and economic planners could claim much of the credit for their country's economic successes since the 1960s. Scientific professions were generally regarded as the most prestigious by South Koreans in the 1980s.

Statistics demonstrate the success of South Korea's national education programs. In 1945 the adult literacy rate was estimated at 22 percent; by 1970 adult literacy was 87.6 percent, and by the late 1980s various sources estimated it at around 93 percent. South Korean students have performed exceedingly well in international competitions in mathematics and science. Although only primary school (grades one through six) was compulsory, percentages of age-groups of children and young people enrolled in primary, secondary, and tertiary level schools were equivalent to those found in industrialized countries, including Japan. Approximately 4.8 million students in the eligible age-group were attending primary school in 1985. The percentage of students going on to optional middle school the same year was more than 99 percent. Approximately 34 percent, one of the world's highest rates of secondary-school graduates attended institutions of higher education in 1987, a rate similar to Japan's (about 30 percent) and exceeding Britain's (20 percent).

Government expenditure on education has been generous. In 1975 it was W220 billion, the equivalent of 2.2 percent of the gross national product, or 13.9 percent of total government expenditure. By 1986 education expenditure had reached won 3.76

trillion, or 4.5 percent of the GNP, and 27.3 percent of government budget allocations.

### **Student activism**

Student activism has a long and honorable history in Korea. Students in Choson Dynasty secondary schools often became involved in the intense factional struggles of the scholarofficial class. Students played a major role in Korea's independence movement, particularly the March 1, 1919, countrywide demonstrations that were harshly suppressed by the Japanese military police. Students protested against the Rhee and Park regimes during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Observers noted, however, that while student activists in the past generally embraced liberal and democratic values, the new generation of militants in the 1980s were far more radical. Most participants have adopted some version of the minjung ideology that was heavily influenced by Marxism, Western dependency theory, and Christian "liberation theology", but was also animated by strong feelings of popular nationalism and xenophobia.

The most militant university students, perhaps about 5 percent of the total enrollment at Seoul National University and comparable figures at other institutions in the capital during the late 1980s, were organized into small circles or cells rarely containing more than fifty members. Police estimated that there were seventy-two such organizations of varying orientation.

### **Reforms in the 1980s**

Following the assumption of power by General Chun Doo Hwan in 1980, the Ministry of Education implemented a number of reforms designed to make the system more fair and to increase higher education opportunities for the population at large. In a very popular move, the ministry dramatically increased enrollment at large. The number of high school graduates accepted into colleges and universities was increased from almost 403,000 students in 1980 to more than 1.4 million in

1989. This reform decreased, temporarily, the acceptance ratio from one college place for every four applicants in 1980 to one for every three applicants in 1981. In 1980 the number of students attending all kinds of higher educational institutions was almost 600,000; that number grew almost 100 percent to 1,061,403 students by 1983. By 1987 there were 1,340,381 students attending higher educational institutions. By 1987 junior colleges had an enrollment of almost 260,000 students; colleges and universities had an enrollment of almost 990,000 students; other higher education institutions enrolled the balance.

A second reform was the prohibition of private, after-school tutoring. Formerly, private tutors could charge exorbitant rates if they had a good "track record" of getting students into the right schools through intensive coaching, especially in English and in mathematics. This situation gave wealthy families an unfair advantage in the competition. Under the new rules, students receiving tutoring could be suspended from school and their tutors dismissed from their jobs. There was ample evidence in the mid-1980s, however, that the law had simply driven the private tutoring system underground and made the fees more expensive. Some underpaid teachers and cash-starved students at prestigious institutions were willing to run the risk of punishment in order to earn as much as W300,000 to W500,000 a month. Students and their parents took the risk of being caught, believing that coaching in weak subject areas could give students the edge needed to get into a better university. By the late 1980s, however, the tutorial system seemed largely to have disappeared.

A third reform was much less popular. The ministry established a graduation quota system, in which increased freshman enrollments were counterbalanced by the requirement that each four-year college or university fail the lowest 30 percent of its students; junior colleges were required to fail the lowest 15 percent. These quotas were required no matter how well the lowest 30 or 15 percent of the students did in terms of objective standards. Ostensibly designed to ensure the quality of the increased number of college graduates, the system also served, for a while to discourage students from devoting their time to political movements. Resentment of

the quotas was widespread and family counterpressures intense. The government abolished the quotas in 1984.

Social emphasis on education was not, however, without its problems, as it tended to accentuate class differences. In the late 1980s, possession of a college degree was considered necessary for entering the middle class; there were no alternative pathways of social advancement, with the possible exception of a military career, outside higher education. People without a college education, including skilled workers with vocational school backgrounds, often were treated as second-class citizens by their white-collar, college-educated managers, despite the importance of their skills for economic development. Intense competition for places at the most prestigious universities--the sole gateway into elite circles--promoted, like the old Confucian system, a sterile emphasis on rote memorization in order to pass secondary school and college entrance examinations. Particularly after a dramatic expansion of college enrollments in the early 1980s, South Korea faced the problem of what to do about a large number of young people kept in school for a long time, usually at great sacrifice to themselves and their families, and then faced with limited job opportunities because their skills were not marketable.