

# South korea in a globalizing world



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For the Dutch version of Public Management I had to choose a Minor. When I was orientating on the different Minors I saw the Minor Globalization, Government and Governance in East Asia passing through. I have always been interested in the globalizing world and in improving my English, so this was the best choice for me. Because I am a “Lapper” and I work four days a week, it was a real struggle for me to put in all the time and effort that I wanted to make this a success. I hope I have prevailed, this will also be thanks to you, Mrs. Ines de Sousa.

For my research paper I had to choose an East – or Southeast – Asian country and had to write an analysis of that country in a specific policy field. I have chosen the country South Korea and Education as my policy field for my research paper. I would like to tell you why I have chosen this subject. Not so long ago I talked to someone who had studied in South Korea, in Seoul. He told me about the hard life of a South Korean student. The students are being drilled to perfection from kindergarten till the end of university. They are under such high pressure to perform, that their whole life is based on education. He told me that it is normal that students sometimes sleep during classes and that teachers are used to that sort of behavior. They have a rule that is called four against five. If you sleep four hours or less a day you will succeed, if you sleep five or more you won't make it. And when I read an article about South Korean Students who were given plastic surgery as a present for succeeding in their college entrance examinations I was intrigued by this strange phenomenon.

South Korea is considered to have one of the most rapidly aging populations in the world. In 1960 only 2.9% was over 65, this rose to 7.2% in 2000 and

nowadays it is already up to 11, 4% of the population. It is projected that this figure will reach 24. 1% in 2030. South Korea will have a great problem with the aging of the population, like for example Japan and the Netherlands also have.

In 2011, the Growth Domestic Product (GDP) of South Korea was 1. 467 trillion dollars. With this number they are ranked thirteenth in the world. 7. 1% of this GDP is spend on education. This is almost the highest in the world . Education also ranks first in the government budget and draws substantial nongovernmental funds.

Elementary and middle school education is compulsory in South Korea. By 2004 the Ministry of Education made compulsory education completely free. Of all elementary and secondary school education, 85 percent is funded by the central government, but still 15 percent is funded by parents. Junior colleges and universities are mostly private (80%). These private schools depend heavily on tuition from parents and other private and public organizations.

Besides the costs for private education for parents, there are the costs for private tutoring and other out of school supplementary education. Preschool and postsecondary education is entirely covered by individuals.

Hardly any secondary school student or regular college students in South Korea have paying jobs . And if they work it is usually privately, like tutoring or as a office assistant. All precollege costs and also many higher education costs are paid by the students' parents. The parents spend a large part of their income on their children's education. The burden and costs of a child's

education is one of the important reasons for the low birthrates in South Korea.

### **Culture:**

When you look at all the money that is spent on education, you have to conclude that education is a national priority of South Korea. The old saying “Don’t even step on the shadow of your teacher”, shows the respect that the traditional Korean Society has for teachers. Teaching is regarded as one of the most respected occupations in the South Korean society and grants teachers almost the same authority as parents. The Koreans also say that humans’ knowledge is the key to growth and prosperity. Obedience, cooperation, respect for the elders and filial piety. These values are the most important in South Korea during the raising of a child. South Korean children are still raised with traditional standards. For example, traditional gender role socialization and parents that depend on their children when they become old, is still in their culture. This is why the sex ratio at birth is in favour of the males (1.069 male/female). It is in the traditional social organization that sons are preferred. It began in the 1980’s with son-selective reproductive behaviours like prenatal sex screening and sex-selective abortion. The parents are responsible for their children throughout adolescence and until marriage. During this period they want to prepare their children as best as they can. Especially the college entrance examinations where the students can be admitted in prestigious Universities are stressful periods for students and their parents.

## **History of education:**

South Korea has a Confucian heritage. A Confucian society is a society based on hierarchy, patriarchy and virtue. Virtues like Duty, Manners, Wisdom and Faithfulness. Harmony and traditions are important in an Confucian society. Rather than developing new ideas, the society thinks traditional values are more important. Prosperity of the family is very important, interest of the family are always above everything else. Groups and communities are very important, it's communitarianism before individualism.

South Korea has a long history of providing formal education. The first formal institution of education was known as Teahak, National Confusion Academy, established in AD 372. During The Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), there was no state-supported system of primary education, but the government did establish a system of secondary schools. It was a Chinese-type Confusion Institutional design. This higher education was very elite and served mainly as an institution for soon to be politicians.

The first western type of education was in the Late Choson dynasty (1880-1910). Private schools were established, particularly by Western Christian missionaries. They brought the first experience of internationalization to Korea.

During the Japanese colonial period the Japanese emphasized its nationalism in education. All Western models of education were forbidden. For almost half a century its power meant that centralization was the most important aspect that was felt in the Korean society, especially seen in its uniformity.

After Korea was liberated by the United States in 1945 there was a turning point in the history of Korean education. The United States Military Government established a school system based on the American Education system. 6 years primary school, 6 years secondary school, 4 years higher education. Other reforms were co-education and compulsory education.

After the establishment of the Republic of South Korea in 1948 the government made a far-reaching Educational Law:

Development of a patriotic spirit for the preservation of national independence and enhancement of an ideal for the cause of world peace (Article 2: 2).

Succession and development of our national culture and contribution to the creation and growth of the world culture (Article 2: 3).

But the influence of the Japanese colonist was deep and existed for a long time and meant that students had no influence on their education at all.

The Korean War (1950-1953) made a huge increase of the internationalization of South Korean education possible. Various aid programs provided many Korean people with opportunities to gain American academic knowledge and advanced scientific skills in foreign countries.

## **What has been the American role in shaping the South Korean education system?**

South Korea is a major economic partner for the United States. Korea is the U. S. seventh-largest trading partner and its sixth-largest export market.

Korea has also become a significant investment site for American

companies, which have poured billion of U. S. dollars into the country. The latest sign of the good relationship between the countries is the proposed United States-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (or KORUS FTA).

The American influence on South Korea already began in 1945. The US implemented their education system, but also their Western culture. During the Korean War this influence grew. Obviously South Korea was of importance for the US, because of its war against Communism. The United States wanted to do everything in its power to stop the spreading of communism and South Korea was of much importance to them. After the Korean War the Cold War was in full progress and the relationship between the United States and South Korea progressed. South Korean soldiers fought in Vietnam with the United States and relations between Japan and South Korea normalized on behalf of the United States. Aided by American financial support Korea was able to industrialize quickly. The influence of American popular culture fueled industrialization and led to urbanization and consumerism. As Korea Westernized, important people reflected on American culture in order to improve their own standing in Korean society. The Americanization led to a more socially mobile society. The Koreans, who were used to a Confucian based society, were very appealed to this new American view on society

The Koreans always respected the role of the United States in their quickly developing country. The Koreans had respect for the United States and showed gratitude for being a “ liberator, philanthropist and protector”. The economic development that the Americans brought with them led to urbanization and cultural changes.

Besides the financial aid and the American culture, The US played an important role in the globalization of Korean Education. If you look at the list of Foreign agencies below that all have something to do with globalizing and developing the Korean educational system, you'll see how much effort the US has put into the relation:

United Nations Civil Assistance Command, Korea (UNCACK)

Korean Civil Assistance Corps (KCAC)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA)

International Co-operation Administration (ICA)

Agency for International Development (AID)

United States Operations Mission to Korea (USOM)

Most of these aid programs came from the United Nations. But the dominance of the United States was huge in the 1950's and 1960's.

Already in 1954 there was a contract between an American University and South Korea that offered graduate study and observation on the University for South Korean students. Nowadays almost every Korean University has implemented sisterhood relations with foreign Universities.

During 2005-2006 South Korean students were placed third worldwide on the number of foreign students who studied in post-secondary studies in the



United States. Only China and India, the two biggest countries in the world, had more students studying in the United States.

## **What is the competitive position of the South Korean education?**

South Korea has developed one of the world's best-educated workforces and fastest-growing economies in about 65 years. For example, In 1945 adult literacy was estimated 22 %. In 1970 it was about 87% a nowadays it is 97.9% for people aged 15 and over.

But the educational system of South Korea has its flaws. If you look at the international ranking of South Korean Universities you will see that they are not ranked high:

For instance, the best Korean university (Seoul National University) places 21st in Asia and 164th in the world according to Shanghai Jiao Tong University, while receiving a ranking of 51st in the world according to Himes Higher Education. Only seven Korean universities made it on the top-400 list of the world.

You have seen that there is no shortage of willingness of the South Koreans to invest in their education system. There are a couple of possibilities for the low competitiveness of South Korean education.

Before discussing the low ranking of South Korean Universities on the two lists it is important on what ground and criteria the two lists rate. For example the Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking system: “ measures research

excellence in part by the number of Nobel – and Fields-winning alumni”. The Times ranking system measures on a peer review basis.

The low rankings of the South Korean Universities can have something to do with the fact that Korean Universities mostly have professors of Korean origin. In 2010 only 3.75% of the total faculty was foreign. Also the Universities discriminate the Foreign faculties by paying foreign professors less than their Korean colleagues or by giving them a job title with a lower salary for the same work. Other forms of discrimination are: foreign professors are required to teach more hours for the same job title as an Korean professor, foreign professors are rarely given tenure and there is a lack of research opportunities.

Another point is the lack of foreign students in South Korea. South Korea has a very low foreign student enrolment. If you look at the numbers you will see that they are not high:

The number of foreign students studying in South Korea is increasing by the year, but you have to put these numbers in perspective. Only 5% of all South Korean students studied abroad in 2006, and foreign students in South Korea only represented 0.5%. If you compare this to Harvard, which had a foreign student enrolment of almost 20% of the total in 2010, 0.5% is very low.

Another point is that most of the classes are in Korean and approximately 60% of the foreign students in South Korea are from neighboring Asian countries.

A point that is harder to prove is the problem of the mentality and culture of the South Koreans. When looking at the American system, they support the

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best students rising to the top, the Korean education system is based on greater ability by the average student. If you look generally, you can conclude that the best Korean students peak before becoming adults.

The parents are too demanding on their children. Korean students are burned out even before they start higher education. For example, an American college student has endured 3-4 years of high pressure preparation before going to a University. In Korea, that student has been doing this since the 6th grade, at the minimum. A Korean student has a lot more years of high-intensity studying before even going to a University.

Another explanation is the mandatory Military service of 21 months for males in the very time in life when both physical and mental capacities are at their height. Knowing that military service awaits, is one reason that Korean men don't study during college because they all know that their freedom will soon be suspended for 21 months.

## **Conclusion:**

To keep up with globalization, South Korean education has to have a good competitive position in the world. How have they prevailed till now, and can they keep up with the global education in the future?

South Korea has the 13th largest economy in the world and has a literacy rate of 97, 9%. The country has been praised by foreign countries for its education. South Korea is a success story. It has managed to become a high educated country with students who want to achieve, all this in a generation time. In a globally competitive world the motivation and dedication of South Koreans is admirable. But If you look at the international rankings of South

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Korean universities, you will have to agree that South Korea has a long way to go in order to keep up with the global education.

South Korea has grown too quickly from a poor, uneducated country to one of the wealthiest in the world. But where the economy and education changed quickly, the traditions and cultural aspects didn't. The Confucian culture runs still deep in the South Korean society and interferes with the globalization of the country and its education. South Korean parents should let their children discover themselves and their talents, and education should be aiming on finding the strong points within their students instead of letting them do everything to the maximum.

The low birth rate and the aging of the population will bring huge problems they have to face. To get more foreign students and foreign professors could be a part of the solution to the problems they already have to keep up with the global education. More foreign professors means more classes in English. More classes in English means more foreign students. The Korean Universities should look more at the number one University in the world, Harvard. This University has almost 20% foreign students and hires the best qualified professors in the world, not looking at their nationality.

On paper South Korea has an educational system that can keep up with the globalizing world, but their mentality and culture have got to change.