

## ON THE CHANGES IN THE KOREAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE PAST 30 YEARS

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### Motto:

Education does not make life easier, but better and richer (Leopold, 1949, vol 3: 188)

**Abstract:** *The objective of our paper is to bring to light some changes that took place in the field of education in South Korea in the recent past, starting from the assumption that the rapid development of this country was triggered, among other factors, by an increased interest in education. To this aim, we have administered an online questionnaire containing some questions meant to offer us socio-demographic data concerning our respondents, followed by 10 scaled questions (or "opinionaires", because "[t]hese are often used to elicit opinions rather than facts" - McDonough & McDonough, 1997:176) focused on education. We obtained information from 322 respondents of various ages, levels of education, and professions. The data have been statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0); we also conducted frequency and cross analysis, as well as a t-test considering the gender, age, as well as the level of education of the respondents. The general results indicate that the Korean subjects are aware of the changes concerning various aspects related to education, such as the equal treatment of children with different social backgrounds, the evaluation of teachers by students, to mention just a few, and that most of these changes have been for the better, but at the same time that there are also differences in their opinions depending especially on the respondent's age.*

**Keywords:** *changes; South Korea; education; questionnaire survey; statistical analysis*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

No other country in the world has made such an astounding progress in the time span of a century like South Korea. While a mainly agrarian country at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, secluded from the rest of the world, nowadays the country boasts top technology, a booming economy, and the highest rate of university graduates in the world. Within this last century, the Korean society has been affected by a number of events that brought about changes in all domains of life, particularly in education. As Breen nicely explains:

In this century, Korea has been in such constant upheaval that each young generation has found itself faced with a completely different world from that of its parents. Christianity, Communism, colonialism, national division, war, industrialisation and communications have wreaked havoc on the old structures. (Breen, 2004:160).

Until the beginning of the 20th century, education in Korea was the benefit of children pertaining to the social elite, but the spread of Christianity and, later on, the Japanese colonization of the peninsula enabled children from all walks of

life to attend school. After the Korean War (1950-1953), when the country was in a dire situation, one solution out of poverty found by the country's leaders was industrialization. This made large masses of rural population move to the cities where they were given jobs in factories, but where they also had the chance to attend the evening classes of various vocational schools. Many female workers seized this opportunity to further their education, which for various reasons – the war or the Confucian social norm of sacrificing the girls' education for the sake of sending the sons to school when the family could not afford to keep all children in school - was put to a halt. Nowadays, globalization also has a say in the Korean field of education: while at the beginning of the century only a couple of Korean students could study abroad, mainly in Japan and in the USA, nowadays, as we shall see in the next section of the paper, a large number of Korean school children, some as young as 7 or 8, are sent to study in foreign countries, basically in English-speaking one. Moreover, nowadays there is also a large influx of foreign students and professors in Korean schools and universities, who contribute to a certain extent to the modernization of the Korean education system.

Despite the rapid changes, especially after the 1980s, when Korea managed to change itself inside out from a cultural and social point of view, not everything modernized at the same pace. The Korean mind-set is very much influenced by Confucianism, which, to our mind, becomes a barrier for development, at least in education. Nevertheless, what is to be praised about this old-age philosophy is that it considers education as a “primary value in Korean society (Peterson, Marguiles, 2009:xiv).

The main objective of this study is to offer a picture of the current state of Korean education and to point out how the Koreans perceive the changes that have taken place in this domain in the past three decades. The roadmap of the paper is as follows: section 2 is meant to familiarize the reader with facts concerning the beginning of institutional education in South Korea; section 3 contains the research methodology, the working hypothesis, and the research questions. Part 4 of the paper is dedicated to the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data: first the frequency analysis will be dealt with, followed by the identification of differences in terms of gender, age, and degree of education of the respondents. The last section of the paper comprises the answers to the research questions and some conclusions.

### 2. KOREAN EDUCATION IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Before embarking on the analysis of the data obtained by means of a questionnaire survey aimed at identifying the Korean people’s opinion about the changes in education in the past 30 years, a brief look at the state of education in the peninsular country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would provide the reader with a benchmark for the current situation.

The philosophy that was (and still is) the cornerstone of the Korean education system was that a successful and powerful country should have well-educated people. But despite this belief, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education in Joseon (former denomination of Korea) was meant only for boys and only for those belonging to affluent families, the so-called *janban*<sup>1</sup>. In the most fortunate cases, girls were educated at home, by their mothers, their education being limited to things pertaining to the household. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the situation started changing, but very slowly. The first to trigger this change were a

few Korean students and politicians who had the chance of studying or travelling abroad, where they witnessed female education. Thus, on their return to Korea and on meeting King Kojong<sup>2</sup>, “they recommended schooling for both boys and girls” (Yu, 1987:19). Apparently, Kojong was a very progressive monarch, as at the end of his reign he established in Seoul schools of all kinds – for law, engineering or medicine (Hamilton 1904, quoted in Cumings, 2005:312).

Another phenomenon that encouraged the education of children, in general and of girls, in particular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the spread of Christianity in Korea. The Western missionaries

built schools and universities (making modern education available in Korea), inaugurated equal education for women, (...) and encouraged the learning of English, which eventually opened graduate-level educational opportunities in Great Britain and the United States to (...) Korean students (Kohls, 2001:43).

English was not the only foreign language what started being taught, even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Language schools for Japanese and French “were opened in 1895; for Russian in 1896; and for Chinese and German in 1900” (Peterson, Marguiles, 2009:150). In 1884, Protestantism was introduced in the country and the early female missionaries thought that their mission was to educate women and to improve their status. Thus, they set up education programs, which started with bible classes and encouraged the participation of Korean women in church services. According to Yu (1987:19), between “1886 and 1908 twenty-five mission schools were founded, about half being girls’ schools.” One such female missionary was the American Mary F. Scranton, who in 1886 started the first modern school meant for girls in Korea. This school has developed into the current Ewha Girl’s High school and Ewha Women’s University, the latter being considered one of the largest universities in the world (Yu, 1987).

Later on, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education in Korea took a new turn under the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), although the Korean people would not readily acknowledge it. For most of the Koreans, the Japanese colonization was “anything but illegitimate and humiliating” (Cumings, 2005:336). This was because, among other things, the colonizers coerced the Korean

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<sup>1</sup> The term *janban* refers to the elite upper class in the Joseon dynasty.

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<sup>2</sup> Kojong (Romanized also as Gojong) was the last emperor of Korea, who was forced by the Japanese to abdicate, in 1907.

population to use the Japanese language instead of their mother tongue, they banned the use of *Hangeul*<sup>3</sup>, and burnt all Korean history books. But the little good the Japanese did was to enable education of non-elite people, girls included. It is true that the children of the Japanese colonizers and those of the Korean people studied in separate schools, and while at the beginning of the Japanese occupation the native children would be taught by Korean teachers, little by little these were replaced by Japanese ones, who, very often, had no training in this profession. Still, the Japanese put the Korean children in a regimen of public education and despite all the afore-mentioned disadvantages, many Koreans parents sent their children to school. So, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the point in which the Koreans started having the right to institutional education and also militated for social equality in this respect.

In the very beginning, schools were single-gendered. Co-educational schools began to appear during the Japanese occupation. The topics to be learned by the Korean children of all social strata were the Confucian norms and virtues, as well as the classical Chinese language and writing system, which implied rote memorization, this learning method being still the main way of accumulating knowledge among the Korean students.

As more and more Koreans realized the advantage of education, the level of literacy started increasing. While in 1945 only 20% of the Korean population could read and write (Breen, 2017), between 1945 and 1970, literacy among adults rose to 86.7% (Tudor, 2012). Today, illiteracy in the country is almost zero.

By the late 1970s, Korea had the highest level of education vis-à-vis wages in the world. Today, literacy is one hundred percent, thanks to the *Hangul* spelling system which is so uniform that a young person does not need to spend years learning how to read and write in it. Ninety-five percent of all Koreans graduate high school and, of these, four in five enrol in college. These figures make the Koreans the most highly educated in the world” (Breen, 2017: 245, epub).

As Kim (2017:39) explained, “South Korea’s unrivalled educational achievement is basically a family achievement”. What she means by that is that families are oftentimes sacrificed for the sake

of helping children become high-achievers. Thus, many young mothers give up their jobs (which they have studied hard for and fought hard to obtain) in order to stay at home and push their children to study. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the more affluent parents started sending their children to elementary, middle, and high schools abroad, mainly in English-speaking countries like the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where they could learn English with a native-speaker’s accent. In most of the cases the children would be accompanied by their mothers, the fathers living alone in South Korea and flying over now and then to see their families abroad. This is the reason why they were nicknamed “goose fathers”. In 2011, the number of Korean pupils studying abroad peaked to 262,465 (Breen, 2017).

The Korean parents, especially mothers, are known for constantly pressuring their children to do exceptionally in schools, because this will grant them an upper hand in their competition for entering the best universities, and later on for getting highly prized jobs in government and private companies. Very frequently parents would make recourse to corporal punishment in order to make the children keep their noses in the books.

Getting into one of Korea’s best universities totally depends on the results high school graduates obtain in the national exam called *suneung*<sup>4</sup>, which is the Korean abbreviation for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). This is a national examination organized every year on the third Thursday in November. Since the fate of the young people depends on this extremely difficult and long exam (8 hours), on this particular day airplanes are grounded, shops are closed, and students who are late are given a ride by motor bikers or by the police. While the candidates struggle with the questions connected to the subjects the exam is based on (Korean language, maths, English, Korean history and Chinese or a second foreign language), their mothers spend the day in Buddhist temples or in Christian churches, praying for their children’s success. In order to be successful in this exam, children prepare for it from as early as the age of 4. It is an extremely tough exam, meant to check whether the candidates have the ability to study in college. Not all candidates are fortunate to take the exam on their first attempt, so some will have to take it a number of times. Several others choose to commit suicide (Breen, 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> *Hangeul* is the Korean alphabet, invented by King Sejeong in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is a phonetic alphabet containing 14 consonants and 10 simple vowels, which are combined in syllables. According to scholars, it is the most logical and easiest to learn alphabet.

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<sup>4</sup> The Korean *suneung* is equivalent to the Romanian *baccalaureate*, but it is much longer and tougher.

Entering college or university is not a new trend among the Korean youth; it existed even in the 1950s and the 1960s, when despite the fact that literacy was pretty low as compared to other countries, such as the USA or the UK, “a far higher percentage of the populace attended college in Korea than in England (by 1965, 1 of every 280 Koreans was in college, compared with 1 in 425 people in England)” (Cumings, 2005:834 epub). What is new for the Korean youngsters is the tough competition to get into universities, which causes a high level of stress that is detrimental to the students’ mental wellbeing. According to a Seoul-based psychologist, quoted by Sharif (2018),

Korean children are forced to study hard and compete with their friends. They are growing up alone, just studying by themselves. This kind of isolation can cause depression and be a major factor in suicide (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46181240>).

After this overview of education in the Korean peninsula in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is now time to see what has changed in this domain in the past 30 years.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of our survey was to obtain a fine-grained picture of the changes that occurred in the field of South Korean education in the past 30 years. In order to gather the necessary and sufficient data, which should provide answers to our research questions, we have devised a questionnaire meant to reveal which particular aspects of Korean education have been affected by the socio-political, cultural, and historical events in the peninsula, as well as by the phenomenon of globalization. The choice for this research instrument has been dictated by three reasons: it could be administered online<sup>5</sup>, to informants from other countries, it does not involve a significant budget, and, more importantly, “[t]he knowledge needed is controlled by the questions, therefore it affords a good deal of precision and clarity” (McDonough, McDonough, 1997:171).

In devising the questionnaire, we have employed “scaled questions”, which are actually statements in connection with which the subjects are invited to express their agreement or disagreement. According to McDonough, McDonough (1997:176), “[t]hese are often used to elicit opinions rather than facts and are sometimes called

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<sup>5</sup> This was the best choice in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

‘opinionaires’”. For our questionnaire, we have employed scaled questions with 5 alternatives: strongly agree (S.A.), agree (A.), undecided (U.), disagree (D.), strongly disagree (S.D.).

We have adopted Kahn and Cannel’s (1957) idea of ‘funnel sequencing’ of the questions: we started with broad questions and gradually narrowed down to specific ones related to the topic. The questionnaire design went through a number of stages. First, a draft was produced by the first author, which was discussed and analysed with a colleague<sup>6</sup> of hers from the Faculty of Sociology of *Transilvania* University of Brasov. This draft was e-mailed to the Korean project partner, professor Jin-hee Kim, who changed some of the items, making them more relevant for the Korean society. Eventually, this improved version of the questionnaire was pre-tested on 12 subjects, acquaintances of Professor Kim’s and further improved, considering the shortcomings identified after we had run the pre-test. The final version of the questionnaire was created by dr. Kim via Google Form and launched on the Korean equivalent of Google, i.e. Naver, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2021. We aimed for 300 filled-in questionnaires, but already in a week’s time, we collected 322. Each of the respondents was rewarded for the time taken to fill in the questionnaire with a coupon for a Starbucks coffee, which they received as a surprise once they submitted the filled-in questionnaire.

The hypothesis our research started out from is that education, like many other domains of Korean life, such as the family institution, traditions, career, openness to foreigners or economic development, has undergone changes caused by the historical events that occurred in the country. Derived from this hypothesis, the following research questions have been formulated, guiding both our questionnaire design, as well as the data analysis:

- 1) Which particular aspects of education have changed?
- 2) How did the Korean people perceive these changes (for the better/for the worse)?
- 3) Is there a correlation between gender, age, and the education background of the respondents

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<sup>6</sup> We take this opportunity to express our gratitude and indebtedness to Luiza Meseşan Schmitz, our colleague from the Faculty of Sociology (*Transilvania* University of Braşov), who helped us in producing the first draft of the questionnaire, as well as to the data analyst, Kyungwon Byun, from Andong National University. Also, many thanks to Ana-Maria Cazan for her encouragement and enlightenment on some statistical issues.

and their views on the changes in the domain of South Korean education?

The **respondents** in the survey differed along the following socio-demographic factors:

a) **Gender:** there were 92 male participants (28.6%) and 230 female participants (71.4%) in the study, which shows a deeper implication of Korean women as far as education is concerned;

b) **Age:** we have identified 5 age groups of our informants: 20s (n=52, representing 16.1%), 30s (n=67, representing 20.8%), 40s (n=62, representing 19.3%), 50s (n=89, representing 27.6%), and people over 60 years of age (n=52, representing 16.1%);

c) **Level of education:** along this factor, 3 sub-groups of respondents have been identified: *high school graduates* (n=54, i.e. 16.8%), *college graduates* (n=166, i.e. 51.6%), and *university graduates* (having an MA or a PhD) (n=102, i.e. 31.7%).

The data obtained from the questionnaires concerning the changes in the field of education in South Korea in the past 30 years were analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0, by means of which we conducted frequency and cross analyses for the investigated domain, i.e. education. Within this domain, finer-grained statistics were obtained by means of the t-test, which was performed along the four dimensions (variables) that differentiated our informants, mentioned above. The analysis of the data is presented in the following section of the paper.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

We shall now proceed to analysing the data obtained from the online questionnaire survey. First the frequency analysis will be dealt with (section 4.1); in the second part (4.2) we will try to find a correlation between the 3 variables and the responses provided by our subjects.

**4.1. Frequency analysis and descriptive statistics.** As mentioned above, we have adopted the funnel sequencing of the questions. Thus, the first question was aimed at identifying how our respondents perceived these changes in their country. Most of the respondents consider that in the past 30 years, the socio-cultural life in South Korea has changed for the better (n=270, i.e. 83.9%), whereas a minority of subjects was either undecided (n=23, i.e. 7.1%) in this respect or thought that the changes were for the worse (n=29, i.e. 9%) (see table A-1).

Table A-1: Korean’s perception of the overall changes in their society.

I don’t know	For the worse	For the better	Total
23 persons (7.1%)	29 persons (9.0%)	270 persons (83.9%)	322 persons (100%)

The second question/statement was specifically focused on education and our intention was to find out whether the respondents felt that changes had indeed occurred in this particular domain. The answers varied between ‘strongly disagree’ = 1 to ‘strongly agree’ = 5. The statistical analysis showed an average of 3.66, which is an indication that Koreans are aware of changes taking place in education, as revealed by table A-2.

Table A-2: Koreans’ awareness of changes in education.

Issue	S.D.	D.	U.	A	S.A	Total	Average
There have been significant changes in education	8 (2.5%) <sup>7</sup>	25 (7.8%)	81 (25.2%)	162 (50.3%)	46 (14.3%)	322 (100%)	3.66

The following question invited the respondents to express how they perceive the changes to have affected the domain of education, i.e. whether they consider that the changes have been positive or negative. More than half of the subjects (n=204 (63.4%)) opined that the changes have been rather positive (for the better) than negative (for the worse). A small number (n=70 (21.7%)) thought that what happens nowadays in education has a negative impact on the students, in particular and on the society, in general, while an even smaller number of participants in the survey (48=14.9%) expressed no opinion whatsoever.

Starting with the fourth item in the questionnaire, we narrowed down the investigation

<sup>7</sup> The figures in the table should be interpreted as follows: the first figure stands for the number of respondents, the figure in brackets standing for the percentage of the respondents in the total, i.e. 8 respondents out of 322, representing 2.5% of the total.

to specific details regarding the changes in the domain under investigation. There were 10 scaled questions, each focusing on a particular education-related issue, such as social and gender equality among students, students’ right to express their own opinions, the *hakwons* (cram schools or private academies), preference or non-preference for vocational schools, students’ option to assess their professors’ activity in class, methods of learning, or preference for male over female professors in tertiary education. For each individual question the average has been calculated, which illustrates whether the change is considered significant or not. If the values exceed the means, this would be an indication of a change.

The statistical analysis revealed that in the past 30 years, the domain of education has suffered changes in a number of respects, but they do not parallel in any way the radical economic and technological development of the country. As Hong (2014:31) stated, “[no]where is the gap more apparent than in the Korean school system”. First, it seems that in current South Korea, unlike in the beginning of the institutional education in the country, children coming from diverse social backgrounds (i.e. divorced, monoparental, low-income or multicultural families) are treated rather equally by their educators, without being discriminated against (statement/issue 1 in the questionnaire), 165 respondents (representing 51.3%) of the total of 322 showing agreement in this respect. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly children of the *yangban*<sup>8</sup> class enjoyed formal education, whereas the children of the low-borns or those of the *paekcheong*, a “low-status hereditary group in Korea” (Seth, 2010:67), were not welcomed to share the same classroom with the offspring of the social elite or were discriminated against. Even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, children of various socio-economic backgrounds were treated differently. Euni Hong, an American-born Korean, who moved to Korea in the late 1990s, when she was 9 years old, recalls the rich parents’ habit of paying off teachers either to ‘soften’ them not to corporally punish the pupils because of their disobedience or low marks, or to make teachers overlook a few wrong answers in the schoolchildren’s exam papers (Hong, 2014).

In order to avoid a discriminatory treatment of the pupils by their teachers, many Korean schools imposed certain rules to make the social status

<sup>8</sup> *Yangban* refers to the hereditary aristocracy in Korea, which was made up of landowners and government officials (Seth, 2010).

disparities less visible. Thus, in a large number of schools, schoolchildren are required to wear uniforms and to refrain from having expensive shoes or from carrying overpriced watches. At the same time, children are not to be dropped off at school by private car.

On the other hand, given the fact that for a long period of time, Korea did not welcome foreigners and discriminated children born in international marriages, it doesn’t come really as a surprise that nowadays such children, who are often of mixed-race and who stand out easily in class may be marginalized. This is also one of the reasons why many international couples, in which one of the parents is Korean, prefer to live abroad, mainly in a country with a longer tradition in multiculturalism, such as the UK, Australia, Canada or America, in this way preventing their children from being bullied on racial issues. Table A-3 below contains the data related to how the respondents perceive the treatment of children coming from various sociocultural backgrounds by their teachers.

Table A-3: Equal treatment of children with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

Issue 1	S. D.	D.	U.	A.	S. A.	Total	Average
Schools treat children with diverse sociocultural backgrounds equally.	7 (2.2%)	52 (16.1%)	98 (30.4%)	130 (40.4%)	35 (10.9%)	322 (100%)	3.42

As the Korean society is still strongly patriarchal, male society, we wanted to see whether under the influence of the Western culture, Korean girls have the same rights to education and whether they are treated equally to their male peers (statement/issue 2 in the questionnaire). When schools started teaching both boys and girls in the 1920s, as a result of the *Kabo Reforms*<sup>9</sup>, the schoolboys outnumbered the schoolgirls. This was

<sup>9</sup> In 1894-95, the pro-Japanese Korean officials initiated a program of social reforms, known as the *Kabo* (or *Kap-o*) Reforms (after the year *Kabo* -1894), which aimed at the modernization of various domains of the Korean society, including the educational system. “They noted that girls attended school in Western countries and that Japan had drawn up plans in the 1870s to make basic education compulsory and universal for girls as well as for boys” (Seth, 2010: 65).

the outcome of a long-standing Korean tradition, which encouraged boys, but not girls to study. But even when girls started being taught in an institutional setting, their schooling period was shorter than that of boys; moreover, the subjects taught varied according to gender. According to Oh, Kim (2013), in 1922 the Korean educational system comprised 6 years of primary school course for boys and girls, but secondary education covered 5 years for boys and only 4 for girls. Moreover, there was also inequality in the way in which within a mixed class, boys and girls were treated, the boys having more advantages over their female peers, even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the fragment below, excerpted from Cho’s (2018) novel, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*, a novel that has caused heated debates about the social discrepancies in South Korea:

Number 1 on the roaster was a boy, everything began with the boys, and that felt like the right, natural thing. Boys lined up first; boys led every procession no matter where they were headed, boys gave their presentations first, and boys had their homework checked first while the girls quietly waited their turn, bored, sometimes relieved that they weren’t going first, but never thinking this was a strange practice. Just as we never question why men’s national registry numbers begin with ‘1’ and women’s begin with ‘2’. (Cho, 2018:36).

Also, girls were punished if they did not comply with the dress code imposed by their school, while boys were not. And if boys bullied girls in school, it was the latter who took the punishment. At the same time, in the late 1990s, schoolchildren’s gender was still an indicator of destiny, as Hong pointed out:

South Korean students had to study another foreign language in addition to English. Excellent idea. But at many high schools, they would only let boys take German and girls take French. No boys allowed in French class and no girls allowed in German class. No exceptions. (Hong, 2014:16).

Nowadays, time span for each educational cycle is equal for boys and girls (6 years of primary school, followed by three years of middle school and 3 years of high school), the topics covered by the curriculum do not differ depending on the student’s gender (both girls and boys may study technology and domestic science), and apparently teachers treat boys and girls equally. The responses in the questionnaire survey indicate a positive change in terms of equality between

genders in class (see table A-4 below), in that about 60% of the respondents opined that boys and girls are treated in the same way.

Table A-4: Equal treatment of pupils, irrespective of their gender.

Issue 2	S. D.	D.	U.	A.	S.A.	Total	Average
Co-ed schools treat boys and girls equally	6 (1.9%)	25 (7.8%)	96 (29.8%)	147 (45.7%)	48 (14.9%)	322 (100%)	3.64

Another important issue concerning the domain of education is the students’ freedom to express their own opinions in connection with the subjects they are studying (statement/issue 4), even if they are in contradiction with those held by their professors. Korea being a patriarchal society, strongly influenced by Confucianism, which preaches total obedience of the less powerful to the more powerful people, pupils and students were not encouraged to contribute with personal ideas on certain topics debated in the classroom and neither were they allowed to suggest or to complain about anything, since the teacher/professor was considered the guru, having the answers to all issues. This attitude stems from the previous centuries, when the teacher/instructor was more educated than the majority of his schoolboys’ parents, and as such, his word could not be contradicted or questioned. This attitude has not completely disappeared nowadays, many students preferring to be lectured, rather than to contribute with their own opinions to the class or to any extracurricular activity as they know that these do not have any intrinsic value. Jiyoung, the heroine Cho’s novel (2018), on finding out that a classmate of hers wanted to suggest to their home teacher that they should change the order in which boys and girls ate lunch, uttered: “Suggest to the teacher? Are we even allowed to say something like this to the teacher?” (Cho, 2018:35).

Nowadays, as Korean students and professors came in touch with Western ways of teaching/learning due to the process of internationalization of education, we assumed that little by little the situation has changed, the Korean students interacting in a more constructive way with their professors. More than half of the questionnaire respondents indicated agreement with this change (184 subjects - A & SA -, representing 57.1% of

the total). The results of the statistical analysis indicate that additional effort needs to be made in order to grant pupils more freedom in expressing bluntly their queries related to the subjects taught in class or to various problems they are confronted with in school, rather than to speak to their teachers after class, in private (Diem *et al.*, n.d.).

Table A-5: Students’ right to openly express their opinions.

Issue 3	S. D.	D.	U.	A.	S.A.	Total	Average
In schools and educational institutions, students are respected for expressing their opinions.	5 (1.6%)	35 (10.9%)	98 (30.4%)	144 (44.7%)	40 (12.4%)	322 (100%)	3.56

As stated by OECD (2014) (quoted in Kim 2017:9),

[a] notable feature of Korea is the widespread participation in supplementary education to gain a head start for competitive examinations, which can facilitate admission to top universities and improve life prospects.

Parents have a major contribution in this endeavour, sending their children at an early age to *hakwons* (some kind of Western after-school programs), where they are prepared for all types of exams and where they spend long hours (sometimes until after 10 pm). According to Hong (2015), parents may pay for this extra tuition somewhere between \$1,000 and \$ 4,000 per month. In the late 1980s, the Korean law prohibited cram schools (*hakwon*) because they put the children coming from wealthy family at an advantage. Even so, Koreans found ways of eluding this law. In the late 1990, cram schools were re-legalized, so that at the end of the decade “70 percent of elementary school students and 50 percent of middle and high school students were receiving some form of private tuition” (Tudor, 2012:187, epub). In this respect, we wanted to find out whether nowadays, Koreans still want to help their children gain an advantage by sending them to *hakwons* (statement/issue 4). Much to our surprise, the average of the responses was lower than 3 (2.70), a large number of subjects (n=126, 39.1%) mentioning that they were undecided with

respect to the *hakwons* being a good solution for improving students’ knowledge and, thus, increasing their chances of entering prestigious universities, whereas another group of respondents indicated disagreement with this form of education (95 subjects=29.5% disagreed and 38 informants=11.8% of the total strongly disagreed with *hakwons*). Possible explanations for the decrease in importance of this private tuition form could be the high prices charged per child per month, the fact that it increases inequality between students coming from families with different financial means, but more plausible could be the high level of corruption – many such institutions having opened the subjects for the exams before the due date and released the questions to the students (Hong, 2015). Despite all these shortcomings, many Korean parents still consider *hakwons* to be the springboard for their children’s academic success.

We were wondering what happens to those young Koreans who, despite their parents’ desire and efforts to prepare them by means of supplementary private tutoring, do not make it to the university: will they give up on continuing their education or would they rather opt for attending a training course in a vocational college which would offer them the opportunity to become skilled workers in various domains (statement/ issue 5)? Almost 200 out of 322 respondents found this alternative a good solution for the adolescents, 90 (28.0%) were undecided, while almost 40 subjects would not find it appealing at all. The change of priorities from earning a university degree to graduating from a vocational college might have been influenced by South Korea’s increasing unemployment rate. According to *Statistics Korea* (<https://www.statista.com/tatistics/263701/unemployment-rate-in-south-korea/>), in 2016 the unemployment rate in the country was 3.68%, while in October 2021 it reached 4.6%. Thus, rather than being a university graduate without any chance of getting the desired job, many young Koreans choose to enter two- or three-year vocational schools, where they can get a qualification in domains such as social welfare, nursing, physical therapy, or primary education (Park, 2015), and will get a job right after finishing the training. Tudor (2014: 89) stated that “[e]ducation mania and high aspirations were great for Korea in the beginning – but now they are double-edged swords.”

On the other hand, the students who are accepted at universities and who also graduate from them, very often choose a double major, which despite placing additional burden on the



young Koreans, ensures them better employment opportunities and higher earnings (statement 8). Thus, the average calculated for this issue is the highest from among all responses related to education – 3.96, indicating that Koreans consider the double major a plus for their future careers. Almost 200 respondents in the survey opined that having a double major is very important nowadays, while more than 50 subjects considered it to be extremely useful (see Chart A-1 below). It is true that in current Korea, many young people are over-educated and expect to find jobs corresponding to their level of education. But the job market does not always meet their expectations. In order to solve the “double-edged” crisis of over-education, South Korea should not reduce the young people’s opportunities to enrol in university studies, but should try to “improve the connections between tertiary education and the labour market” (OECD 2009, quoted in Kim 2017:11).

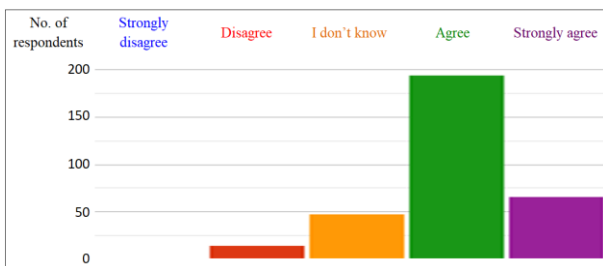


Chart A-1: Koreans’ opinion related to a double major.

It is a well-known fact that Koreans value education and that they hold scholars in high esteem. Students and their parents worship South Korean teachers and professors, the roots of this attitude being hundreds of years old. The explanation for the respect paid to scholars comes from the times when the teachers/tutors were more knowledgeable than their pupils’ parents and for this reason, “parents entrusted their children to teachers” (Hong, 2015:36), so questioning or assessing a teacher’s knowledge on the subject taught or on his teaching methods would have been considered rude. Nowadays, as many of the students’ parents may be just as educated as the teachers, this situation led to some friction between parents and teachers concerning students (Hong, 2015) and also to a decrease in the respect for teachers. This is the reason why in our study we wanted to find out if in the current South Korean higher education institutions students are encouraged or discouraged to evaluate their professors’ performance in class (statement 6 in the questionnaire). Half of the respondents (n=162,

50.3%) showed agreement with the idea that professors should be evaluated by their students, another 51 subjects (representing 15.8% of the total) strongly agree with the idea, while 81 showed uncertainty concerning the issue. On the other hand, less than 10% of the participants in the study expressed their disagreement (whether strong – 1,6%, or mild - 7.1%) concerning the teachers being evaluated by their students, this latter group probably thinking that the professors are the gurus and that it would be offensive on behalf of the students to assess their knowledge or teaching methods, as they believed teachers could do no wrong.

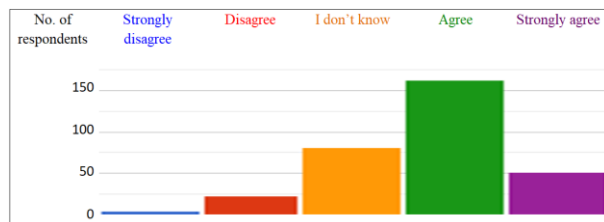


Chart A-2: Koreans’ opinion related to the professors’ assessment by their students.

Given the country’s long tradition of Confucian culture, the Korean society is strongly male-oriented, as “a person’s identity is determined by the male side of the family” (Hong, 2015:71). This is reflected, among other things, in the parents’ preference of male children over female ones or in institutions managers’ favouring male over female workers. Most of the positions in universities were initially occupied by male professors because Korean men are perceived to be more professionally trained than their female peers, as they have more time to dedicate to their profession than women have. In a relatively recent article published in *Korea Time* (Kim, 2018) it is mentioned that although one of the three best universities in South Korea, namely Seoul National University has had an economics department since 1946, it was only in 2018 that a woman professor was hired. The reason invoked by one of the higher education institution’s representative was the fact that the economics department had mostly male students. This shows that while Korean men and women are equal in achieving education, there is a gender gap with respect to female employment in higher education, a gender gap that is perpetuated from early childhood. In this respect we wanted to find out whether, despite the much smaller number of female staff members in universities (approx. 18.3%, according to Kim, 2018), students show a

preference for male over female teacher/professors (statement 7).

Table A-6: Students' right to openly express their opinions.

Issue 7	S. D.	D.	U.	A.	S.A.	Total	Average
University students prefer male professors over female professors	65 (20.2%)	119 (37.0%)	100 (31.1%)	31 (9.6%)	7 (2.2%)	322 (100%)	2.37

As the results in table A-6 show, a wind of change is blowing in tertiary education as far as women are concerned. The fact that more than half of the respondents (65+119) disagreed with the idea that students prefer male professors is indicative of a certain degree of trust in women's capacity to do a good job. A possible reason could be that, just like their male peers, many women professors have attended foreign universities (mainly in the USA), have earned a PhD abroad, are as good as (if not better than) their male colleagues, and may have a better understanding of their students' minds and souls.

One other aspect concerning education that we were interested in was the respondents' opinions related to the huge amount of information that Korean students assimilate by memorization (statement/issue 10), as in the Western cultures this method of education is discouraged, students' creativity being very much appreciated. As Hong puts it,

[a]nnoying or not, being trained in rote memorization, along with discipline, obedience, worship of authority, and good old-fashioned terror of failing is one of the cornerstones of Korea's accelerated success (2015:47).

Learning by heart has its roots in the time when children had to become familiar with the Chinese language and writing system. But this happened a long time ago.

The responses provided by the subjects (summarized in table A-7) indicate that Koreans are still in favour of rote learning; only 52 (i.e. 16.2%) respondents seem to be against this method of learning, 101 subjects (31.4%) were undecided in this respect, while almost half of the respondents consider rote memorization to be the best way of learning.

Table A-7: Korean students' preference for rote learning.

Issue 10	S. D.	D.	U.	A.	S.A.	Total	Average
Students are educated through infusion and rote memorization.	9 (2.8%)	43 (13.4%)	101 (31.4%)	126 (39.1%)	43 (13.4%)	322 (100%)	3.47

A possible explanation for this attitude could be the decade long tradition of memorization in the Korean educational system, which is at the basis of preparing pupils for getting high scores in their exams that will determine their GPA (grade point average) and their success in entering famous Korean universities. This method of learning has led to the emergence of *hakwons* meant for memory honing. While in South Korea students are encouraged by both families and professors to learn the core subjects, continuously, through memorization, as they will be all tested in the same subjects at the end of high school period, Western education lays more focus on students' creativity, on their individual interests concerning school subjects, at the same time encouraging them to partake various extracurricular activities, with the aim of finding their true passions, which, eventually, will make students enjoy school life better. As De Mente states:

The method of education in Korea is changing slowly. New methods of teaching have been introduced, and there is a growing realization that real-life experiences and the interest of the students should take precedence over old ideas and old ways. But education is still mostly a one-way experience, with professors and instructors lecturing and students learning by rote memorization. (De Mente 2017:860).

The last issue we were interested in when administering the questionnaire was to find out the Koreans' opinion concerning the time spent by schoolchildren and university students on studying (issue 9). While most of the Western children and young people do have some leisure time after school hours, the majority of Korean schoolchildren will go to *hakwons* (private academies), where they will continue studying until late at night (sometimes even after 11 pm)

(Tudor, 2012). Apart from the long hours spent at school and in *hakwons*, when they come home, Korean children have to do their homework both for the school subjects and for those taught in the private academies, which leaves them with less than 6 hours of sleep. Not even during the summer or winter vacations do Korean children have time to relax as they are sent by their parent to study in *hakwons*. And this is all because of the fact that in schools children are tested and ranked, so there is a strong competition among them. University students, on the other hand, having double-majors, will have to study for both programs they are enrolled in, so if they get 3 or 4 hours of sleep per night they would consider themselves fortunate.

The results of the survey confirmed our prediction that in such a competitive society as the Korean one, learning hard and long is the norm. Thus, 151 respondents (representing 46.9% of the total group) agreed and 68 (21.1%) strongly agreed with the statement that students spend a lot of time studying. At the opposite end of the scale, only 5 respondents strongly disagreed with the idea that Korean students spend too much time on learning, while 28 of them (8.6%) disagreed with it. A considerable number of respondents (70=21.7%) did not provide any opinion in this respect.

Although continuous study proves to be counterproductive, as children are deprived of sleep and feel under pressure all the time, apart from a limitation of the time they could study in *hakwons*, nothing has been done to ease their lives. As Tudor (2012:329-330) shows:

The saddest part is that everyone knows this is a bad thing, but when other parents force their kids to study when they should be sleeping, it is hard for people not to feel pressure to do the same—especially since failure to keep up may result in their child being rejected from the top universities that will make his or her career and lead to success in life.

A by-product of Korea's educational competition and fear of failure is the sudden rise of suicides since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kim, 2017). According the *Statistics Korea* (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1267450/south-korea-main-causes-of-death-by-age/>), the suicide rate among teenagers is about 41%, while among persons aged between 20 and 29, the rate is almost 55%.

Despite the high rate of suicide among the Korean teenagers and young persons who fail (in part) in their academic endeavours, despite the negative comments and the dissatisfaction

expressed on various media by Korean or Korean-born students studying abroad, the educational system in South Korea is too deeply rooted to change soon and radically.

#### 4.2. Difference verification by gender, age, and educational background of the respondents.

The second part of the analysis aims to provide answers to the 3rd research questions, namely whether there is a correlation between our respondents' perceptions concerning various changes in the field of education and their socio-demographic characteristics, i.e. gender, age, and level of education. We shall start with the first characteristic of our respondents, namely gender.

(1) **Difference verification by gender.** We performed a cross-analysis in order to find out which of the two genders perceived the socio-cultural changes that occurred in South Korea in the past three decades to have been for the better or for the worse. The significance probability (P) value is .275, which indicates a statistically insignificant difference between gender and each possible answer ('I don't know', 'For the worse', and 'For the better') in question 1 (i.e. how they perceived the changes in education to have occurred). But when we look at the crossover frequency between the two groups determined by sex and the items, we notice that in the **male** group the highest frequency was for the item "for the better" (80.4%), followed by "for the worse" (13.0%), and "I don't know" (6.5%). In the **female** group, the percentage for "for the better" is slightly higher than in the male group, i.e. 85.2%), followed by "for the worse" and "I don't know" with an equal percentage (7.4%).

In question 2 we narrowed down our focus, asking the respondents whether they have perceived any changes in the field of education. The independent sample t-test for this domain according to gender showed no statistical significant difference, the female group having a slightly higher average than the male group, as shown in **table B-1** below. We interpret this difference in the mean values as proof of a deeper implication of women in children's education, and thus, a higher familiarity with the changes in this domain.

## ON THE CHANGES IN THE KOREAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE PAST 30 YEARS

Table B-1: Male vs. female perceptions of changes in education, in general.

Domain	M±SD Mean±standard deviation		t
	male (N=92)	female (N=230)	
There have been significant changes in education	3.53±1.084	<b>3.71±.818</b>	-1.441

Next we checked the differences in terms of **gender** for the specific areas in the field of education where changes seemed to have occurred. The specific results are presented in table **B-2**.

Table B-2: Correlation between each issue/statement in the field of education and gender.

Statements	M±SD Mean±standard deviation		t
	Male (N=92)	Female (N=230)	
1. Schools treat children with diverse sociocultural backgrounds (e.g. low income, divorced families, multiculturalism, etc.) equally.	<b>3.42±1.008</b>	3.41±.939	.092
2. Co-ed schools treat boys and girls equally	<b>3.66±.917</b>	3.63±.886	.295
3. In schools and educational institutions, students are respected for expressing their opinions.	3.54±.954	<b>3.56±.878</b>	-.157
4. For the education of elementary, middle and high school students, academy education ( <i>hakwon</i> ) is a good solution.	<b>2.74±1.108</b>	2.68±.939	.431
5. Specialized high schools (vocational colleges) are helpful for adolescents' diverse career choices.	<b>3.62±.936</b>	3.54±.859	.700
6. In college, students evaluate professors' activities through lecture evaluation.	3.64±.846	<b>3.75±.880</b>	-.992
7. University students prefer male professors to female professors.	<b>2.46±1.104</b>	2.33±.927	.968
8. Although it is difficult to choose a double major in college, it is a good	<b>3.99±.719</b>	3.95±.743	.407

opportunity for students.			
9. Students spend a lot of time studying.	<b>3.84±.929</b>	3.75±.933	.775
10. Students are educated through infusion and rote-memorization.	<b>3.74±.888</b>	3.36±.991	3.184**

\*\*P<.01

The independent sample t-test for each statement related to the domain of education showed the following results: in Statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 the male group had a slightly higher average than the female group, and in Statements 3 and 6, the female group had a slightly higher average than the male group. However, there was no statistically significant difference. In Statement 10 (related to the students' rote-memorization), the male group's mean value (M=3.74) was higher than the female group's (M=3.36), and statistically there was a significant difference. The explanation for this difference could be that fact that from the very beginning of Korean education it was boys who had the chance to study and the method that was ingrained in them was rote memorization, which has been perpetuated to a great extent among the current schoolchildren and students. And as the current teachers and professors have been trained to acquire knowledge by rote memorization, they ask the same thing from their students.

**(2) Difference verification by age.** We shall next check whether there is any correlation between the **age** of the Korean respondents and their perceptions concerning the changes in the domain of education in the past thirty years. The respondents in all age groups agreed that there have been changes, as indicated in table **B-3** below).

Table B-3: Correlation between the age of the respondents and their perceptions related to the changes in education.

Distribution	I don't know	Negative change	Positive change	Total
20years (and less)	5 (9.6%)	9 (17.3%)	38 (73.1%)	52 (100%)
30 years	16 (23.9%)	17 (25.4%)	34 (50.7%)	67 (100%)
40 years	9 (14.5%)	18 (29.0%)	35 (56.5%)	62 (100%)

50 years	11 (12.4%)	15 (16.9%)	63 (70.8%)	89 (100%)
60 years (and over)	7 (13.5%)	11 (21.2%)	34 (65.4%)	52 (100%)
SUM	48 (14.9%)	70 (21.7%)	204 (63.4%)	322 (100%)
$\chi^2=12.175, df=8, p=.144$				

The result of the cross-analysis to find out the correlation between **age** and the respondents' perceptions of the changes in the domain of Korean **education** shows that the significance probability (P) value was .144, indicating that the association between each scale value by age and education was not statistically significant. In the group under 20s, 'positive change' showed the highest frequency with 38 respondents (73.1%), followed by 'negative change' (9 respondents=17.3%) and 'I don't know' (5 respondents = 9.6% of the total). In the 30s group, 34 respondents (representing 50.7%) considered the changes in the field of education to have been 'positive', 17 (25.4%) consider that these changes have been 'negative', while 16 (23.9%) provided no opinion in this respect. In the 40s group, 'positive change' showed the highest frequency with 35 (56.5%) people, followed by 'negative change' (18 persons=29.0% of the total of respondents) and 'don't know' answers provided by 9 respondents (14.5%). In the 50s group, 63 (70.8%) respondents opined that the changes in the domain of education have been 'positive', 15 (16.9%) perceived these changes to have been 'negative', while 11 (12.4%) people had no opinion in this respect. In the last age-group (60 years and over), 'positive change' showed the highest frequency with 34 (65.4%) people, followed by 'negative change' 11 (21.2%) and 'I don't know' 7 (13.5%).

The data in table B-3 obtained by applying a one-way ANOVA test, show that there is a statistically significant difference among the groups. To understand this difference, a post-evaluation using the Scheffe (for equal variance)/ Dunnett T3 (for bi-variance) test has been performed, its results showing, indeed, a meaningful difference among age groups in their responses concerning education. Looking at the data in table B-4, we notice that the 30s group (M=3.48) and the 40s group (M=3.44) showed significant differences in comparison to the 50s group (M=3.90) (see table B-4 at the end of the paper).

The difference between the younger and older respondents can be accounted for in terms of a generational change: those who grew up in the early 1960s and were too poor (or had friends who were too poor) to afford secondary or tertiary education, made sure to help their children through high school and college. Thus, the parents' dream of being enrolled in high school or college education was fulfilled by their children.

We then tried to identify whether there are differences for specific areas of **education** that underwent changes, depending on the **age** of the respondents. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in table B-5, at the end of the paper.

The one-way ANOVA test indicated significant differences for Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, and 10. In order to understand the differences between groups in detail, we checked these results by means of the Scheffe (in case of equal variance)/ Dunnett T3 (in case of bivariate) post-test. Meaningful differences between the groups appear for Statement 1, Statement 2, Statement 3 and Statement 4. Looking at the differences among groups we notice that as far as Statement 1 is concerned, there was a significant difference between the group in their 30s (M=3.09) and the group in their 50s (M=3.70), while with regards to Statement 2, there was a significant difference between the 20s group (M=3.31) and the 30s group (M=3.48) on the one hand, and the group in their 50s (M=3.93), on the other. As far as Statement 3 is concerned, there was a significant difference between the respondents in their 30s (M=3.22) and in those in their 50s (M=3.81). With regard to Statement 4, there was a significant difference between the group aged 50 years (M=2.40) and the group in their 20s (M=3.15). In many of the statements where statistically significant differences were noted, these were between respondents in group (d) (i.e. people in their 50s) and respondents in groups (a) and (b) (i.e. people in their 20s and 30s), which comes to reinforce the idea of a generational change.

(3) The next step in our research was to look into the correlation between the respondents' **level of education** and their opinion about the changes in the field of education in Korea. For this purpose, as mentioned in section 2, we have divided our respondents in three classes, according to their highest degree of education: high school graduates: n=54 (16.8), college graduates: n=166 (51.6%), and holders of MA and PhD degrees: n=102 (31.7%), the respondents with a college certificate representing more than half of the total. Table B-6 below contains the frequency data.

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Table B-6. Correlation between the respondents' education background and their perception of changes in Korean education.

Distribution	I don't know	For the worse	For the better	Total
(a) High school or lower	12 (22.2%)	8 (14.8%)	34 (63.0%)	54 (100%)
(b) University	24 (14.5%)	36 (21.7%)	106 (63.9%)	166 (100%)
(c) Graduate School Master's or PhD	12 (11.8%)	26 (25.5%)	64 (62.7%)	102 (100%)
Sum/total	48 (14.9%)	70 (21.7%)	204 (63.4%)	322 (100%)
$\chi^2=4.502, df=4, p=.342$				

The significance level (P) value obtained by the cross-analysis was found to be .342, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between the respondent's level of education and each type of suggested answer (i.e. "I don't know", "For the better", "For the worse"). Looking at the frequency of crossover between groups and items (i.e. type of response), we found that the percentage of answers from all three groups indicating positive changes in the field of education was almost the same: 63.0% in group (a), 63.9% in group (b), and 62.7% among the MA and PhD holders. Further on, we checked whether there is any correlation between the education background of the respondents and their opinions with respect to various aspects of education in South Korea. The results are shown in table B-7, presented at the end of the paper.

The results of the one-way ANOVA test for each statement related to the domain of education indicate that there were some differences in 7 out of the 10 statements (Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 10) according to the respondents' highest level of education. Therefore, in order to understand the differences between groups in detail, we also considered the results of Scheffe (in case of equal variance)/Dunnnett T3 (in case of bivariate) post-test, which indicate meaningful differences between the 3 groups for statements 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10. Examining the differences between groups, with respect to Statement 2 (*co-ed schools treat boys and*

*girls equally*), the mean value of the group of high school graduates (M=3.39) and the mean value of the university graduates (M=3.52) differed considerably from that of the holders of MAs or PhDs (M=3.97). A somewhat similar difference was found in connection with statement 3 (*in schools, students are respected for expressing their opinions*). Another significant difference was found in connection with Statement 6 (*in college, students evaluate professors' activities through lecture evaluation*). Thus, the respondents in group (b) had a mean value of (M=3.50), those in group (a) showed a value of (M=3.52), while MA and PhD holders had a mean value of (M=4.21). In Statement 8, there was a significant difference between the respondents with high school background (M=3.54), the university graduates (M=3.95), and the group with a master's degree or PhD (M=4.21). Finally, in Statement 10 related to the Koreans' rote memorization, there was a significant difference between the group of MA or PhD holders (M=3.26) and the group of university graduates.

These differences between respondents in group (c) (representing respondents with an MA or a PhD) and those in groups (a) and (b) could be accounted for by various facts. First, most of the persons who have a PhD are university professors, which means that they are familiar with the changes that occurred in the field of education, especially because many of them have experienced them themselves. On the other hand, the respondents in group (c) are also those who, due to globalization, might have had the chance to further their education not only in their own country, but also abroad. Once they obtained their MA or PhD, they returned to South Korea to contribute to the country's educational and, implicitly, economic and technical development.

Also worth a mention is the fact that, as South Korea is one of the leading producers of high-tech products, many MA and PhD programs are sponsored by famous companies such as Samsung, LG or KIA, which want to make sure that their future employees will be top-specialist who will guarantee the global success of the respective companies. So, there is a strong connection between the work-market and the post-graduate programs.

Table B-4: Respondents' perceptions of changes in education, in general, according to age.

Domain	M±SD Mean±standard deviation					F	After verification
	20yrs (a) (N=52)	30yrs (b) (N=67)	40yrs (c) (N=62)	50yrs (d) (N=89)	60 (e) (N=52)		
There have been significant changes in education	3.75±.813	3.48±.841	3.44±1.065	3.90±.812	3.67±.923	3.426*	b,c<d

Table B-5: Correlation between the age of the respondents and their opinion related to the changes in each area of Korean education.

Statement	Mean±standard deviation					F	After verification
	20 yrs (a) (N=52)	30 yrs (b) (N=67)	40 yrs (c) (N=62)	50 yrs (d) (N=89)	60 yrs (e) (N=52)		
1. Schools treat children with diverse sociocultural backgrounds (e.g. low income, divorced families, multiculturalism, etc.) equally.	3.37±1.010	3.09±.848	3.34±.974	3.70±.958	3.50±.897	4.263**	b<d
2. Co-ed schools treat boys and girls equally	3.31±1.094	3.48±.804	3.56±.898	3.93±.809	3.77±.757	5.402**	a,b<d
3. In schools and educational institutions, students are respected for expressing their opinions.	3.44±.873	3.22±.867	3.53±.900	3.81±.903	3.69±.829	4.780**	b<d
4. For the education of elementary, middle and high school students, academy education ( <i>hakwon</i> ) is a good solution.	3.15±1.127	2.81±.875	2.73±.961	2.40±.926	2.58±.957	5.413**	d<a
5. Specialized high schools (vocational colleges) are helpful for adolescents' diverse career choices.	3.73±.866	3.66±.708	3.37±.945	3.63±.858	3.40±1.015	1.970	
6. In college, students evaluate professors' activities through lecture evaluation.	3.83±.785	3.49±.927	3.69±.841	3.89±.818	3.63±.950	2.342	
7. University students prefer male professors to female professors.	2.31±1.020	2.18±1.014	2.63±.927	2.25±.945	2.56±.958	2.645*	difference×
8. Although it is difficult to choose a double major in college, it is a good opportunity for students.	3.79±.848	3.90±.581	4.02±.713	4.10±.754	3.92±.763	1.796	
9. Students spend a lot of time studying.	3.58±1.036	3.67±.877	4.00±.789	3.94±.789	3.54±1.163	3.364*	difference×
10. Students are educated through infusion and rote-memorization.	3.96±.839	3.67±.842	3.48±.987	3.11±1.005	3.31±.961	7.993	

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$ , \*\*\*  $P < .001$

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Table B-7. Correlation between the respondents' level of education and each statement about changes in South Korean Education.

Statements	Mean ±Standard Deviation			F	(Post-test)
	(a) High school or lower (N=54)	(b) University (N=166)	(c) MA or PhD (N=102)		
1. Schools treat children with diverse sociocultural backgrounds (e.g. low income, divorced families, multiculturalism, etc.) equally.	3.28±.856	3.34±.931	3.62±1.025	3.437*	× Difference
2. Co-ed schools treat boys and girls equally	3.39±.856	3.52±.906	3.97±.802	11.350***	a,b<c
3. In schools and educational institutions, students are respected for expressing their opinions.	3.26±.894	3.43±.856	3.91±.869	13.426***	a,b<c
4. For the education of elementary, middle and high school students, academy education ( <i>hakwon</i> ) is a good solution.	2.98±1.189	2.69±.939	2.56±.929	3.278*	a<c
5. Specialized high schools (vocational colleges) are helpful for adolescents' diverse career choices.	3.48±1.059	3.53±.791	3.67±.916	1.052	
6. In college, students evaluate professors' activities through lecture evaluation.	3.52±.885	3.50±.879	4.18±.651	23.704***	a,b<c
7. University students prefer male professors to female professors.	2.48±.841	2.32±1.021	2.38±.985	.575	
8. Although it is difficult to choose a double major in college, it is a good opportunity for students.	3.54±.818	3.95±.621	4.21±.762	16.015***	a<b<c
9. Students spend a lot of time studying.	3.46±1.077	3.75±.891	3.97±.873	5.474**	a<c
10. Students are educated through infusion and rote-memorization.	3.48±1.005	3.59±1.003	3.26±.889	3.574*	c<b
*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001					



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The overall picture offered by the paper is that education is one of the cornerstones of South Korea's rise from the ashes. Horace Underwood, an American professor at Yonsei University in South Korea and the great-grandson of the Presbyterian missionary by the same name, who had founded the afore-mentioned higher education institution, is quoted by Breen (2004:183) saying that "[w]ithout the educated manpower to plan the development, the wisdom to put it into effect, and the educated skill to do the work, the economic development would never have taken place." This shows the close connection between education and economic development, which seems to have run in parallel, especially in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bringing about an "economic miracle within a single generation" (Diem *et al.* n.d.) in the peninsular country.

Our analysis has also tried to offer answers to the research questions. Thus, as far as **research question 1** is concerned, we have seen that changes have affected a number of aspects pertaining to education to a larger or a smaller extent. From a foreigner's perspective, one of the issues the Koreans still have to work on is to diminish rote memorization and to encourage imagination, creativity, and discussions in class. The old method of acquiring knowledge will prevent young Koreans from dealing constructively with problems they face in everyday life. In this respect, it seems that Confucianism is still strong in South Korea. In the same vein, male professors are still very much preferred to female professors, a preference that comes from the Confucian belief that literacy and knowledge is a prerogative of masculinity. Another aspect the Koreans have to pay more attention to is encouraging pupils and students to express their own opinions in class and not to be satisfied with being lectured by the teacher. To our mind, the dialogue between teachers and pupils/students will develop that latter's creativity, their confidence, will also help them communicate rather than compete with each other, and will eventually break the rigid barrier between the two parties, without diminishing the respect students have for their teachers. More alarming than all these is the fact that because the Korean pupils' and students' life is determined by scores, they study extremely long hours, may feel unhappy, frequently show symptoms of depression, or have suicidal thoughts. From a foreigner's perspective, the first author thinks that the Korean Ministry of Education

should try to improve the education system, to make it gentler to the school children in the sense of lessening the burden of scores placed on their shoulders.

Nevertheless, some progress has been noticed in the tendency of diminishing the class and gender gap in the field of education, by adopting an impartial treatment of children in terms of social background or gender. Hopefully, in the next generation we shall witness an equal preference for male and female professors in universities.

A somewhat surprising finding was that more respondents (n=134) disagreed with the *hakwons* (cram schools) than those who agreed (n=63) with this kind of private education. Possible reasons behind this opinion could be the high prices parents have to pay, as well as the corruption found among some of the teachers working in them.

With respect to the **research question 2**, the results of the questionnaire survey indicate that for a large number of Koreans (204 respondents out of a total of 322) the changes that have taken place in education were for the better. This could be an indication of a slow detachment from the old practices and of embracing some Western ones. By no means should Koreans give up the traditional values while committing themselves to modernization and globalization.

In terms of the correlation between the changes in education and variables such as the respondents' gender, age, and educational background (**research question 3**), the findings indicate that in terms of gender, the results show that female respondents in general perceive the changes in education to have been for the better, which could be accounted for on the basis of their stronger involvement in their children's education. The only significant difference between genders concerned the last statement in the questionnaire (related to the still very much employed rote memorization), where the male respondents had a considerable higher mean value than the female respondents, i.e. 3.78 vs. 3.36. Two possible explanations could account for this: one is the long period of time in which Koreans employed the Chinese script that contains complex characters of up to 23 strokes. This develops children's ability at pattern recognition, but it also imposes the need for rote learning. The second reason has to do to the fact that Confucianism encouraged only boys' education. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the few foreigners that were allowed to enter the Joseon Kingdom were surprised to see groups of boys sitting around their teacher and reciting by heart Confucius' teachings.

In what concerns the age variable, we have noticed some differences between the respondents in their 50s and the respondents in the younger age groups (20s and 30s). These differences are indicative of a generational gap.

As far as the last variable is concerned, i.e. the respondents' level of education, no relevant statistical difference was identified. All three groups of respondents (high school graduates, BA holders and MA/PhD holders) perceived the general changes in education to have been positive. But when it came to the changes in specific areas of education, the statistic results indicated a slightly higher mean value of the group represented by the respondents with an MA or a PhD degree as compared to the other groups in six out of the ten areas investigated. This might be an indicator of the fact that people with a higher degree of education, who also dedicated more time to this activity, were more aware of how the field of education had changed.

Returning to our motto, Korean education can make pupils' and students' lives very difficult, sometimes almost unbearable. Nevertheless, they consider it the only avenue for social position and power in the Korean society. And no matter how advanced the Korean society might be nowadays, the education system is still very much dominated by Confucianism.

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