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Policy Lessons for Korea

Korea has one of the most educated workforces and is among the highest-performing countries in international educational assessments. Success in education has been the result of the strong capacity to foster rapid and remarkable improvements in the education system. This chapter summarises the key strengths of, and some policy challenges to, Korea's education system. This chapter highlights ways to improve the education system, firstly by improving the transition from school-to-work and the labour-market outcomes of education, focusing on quality and relevance of education. Secondly, improvement can be seen as a result of strengthening equity and social cohesion through education, in particular by addressing effective policy responses to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and supplementary education.



SUSTAINING HIGH PERFORMANCE: STRENGTHS AND POLICY CHALLENGES

Over the last fifty years, Korea's educational progress has been extraordinary. An estimated 78% of the population were illiterate at the end of the Second World War, while today Korea is near or at the top of international assessments and indicators on education. PISA data and other research suggest a number of conditions and factors that have led to Korea's success in education. This research also suggests areas where further reforms are needed.

This chapter analyses the main strengths that have contributed to Korea's strong performance. It also highlights current policy challenges in the Korean education system. The experience of other high-performing systems has shed light on ways to further strengthen the Korean education system. In turn, policy lessons for Korea will be of interest in other countries facing similar challenges.

EDUCATION IS A NATIONAL PRIORITY

As a society and as a country, Korea attaches great importance to education and this commitment has contributed to the educational achievements seen today. A long tradition of valuing education and hard work, founded on Confucianism, is a contributing factor to the success of several East Asian countries and economies, but it does not of itself explain the rapid progress of Korea in the last decades. The willingness of Korea to invest in education is reflected in a high education budget, increased expenditure per student, significant financial contributions by families, high teacher salaries, and reducing class size.

The high commitment to and prominence of education in Korea are reflected in the very high levels of public and private investment. The investment represents 7.6% of the GDP, which is significantly more than the OECD average of 6.3% and places Korea third only to Denmark and Iceland (OECD, 2013a). Public expenditure on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education has increased by 89% between 2000 and 2009, and 102% as measured per student – the 4th largest increase among 29 countries with available data. In contrast, the proportion of the total public budget spent on education is less, yet remains above the OECD average (OECD, 2013c). Families also shoulder an important share of the cost of education. Private expenditure for primary and lower secondary education in Korea accounts for 21.5% of the total investment, one of the highest proportions among OECD countries. Most of the increase in expenditure in recent years can be related to the reduction of class size in Korea (OECD, 2012b). Although class size is still comparatively high, there has been a significant reduction over the past ten years: the average primary class has shrunk by nine students and the average lower secondary class by four students (OECD, 2012b, 2013b). In 2011, the average class size in a Korean primary school was 26.3 students (21.2 in OECD) and 34 students at the lower secondary level (23.3 in OECD).

Neither national wealth nor expenditure on education guarantees better student performance. PISA data shows that the way in which resources are employed rather than the total figure is most important in high-income countries. The strongest performers among high-income economies tend to prioritise the quality of teachers over class size. In Korea, teachers are better paid than those in most other OECD countries (OECD, 2013c). For example, lower secondary teachers earn more than twice the GDP per capita (OECD, 2013c).

While continuing its efforts to increase investment in education, Korea faces challenges to prioritise policy areas that are to be the most privileged. Looking at the most effective way to use resources could help Korea achieve higher performance. The following sections provide elements of reflexion for Korea in identifying challenges, and thus the areas where Korea can most concentrate its efforts. Better matching the education system with the changing economy and society is one area where Korea can focus and ensure the convergence of policy measures to strengthen school-to-work transition through curriculum reform, vocational education and training, quality and innovative teaching. Addressing social cohesion is another area of policy challenge in Korea. Supplementary education, as discussed in Chapter 3, requires policy responses to maximise supplementary learning opportunities and to limit the downside, and also to provide equitable educational opportunities to all young people. Policy measures to address the equity in learning in school also should be considered. Some examples of recent policy responses on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and parental involvement are presented where Korea has been demonstrating strong commitment to improve the equity and quality of education.

IMPROVING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK AND THE LABOUR-MARKET OUTCOMES OF EDUCATION

Developing relevant skills and helping students transition into the workforce is one of the most important outcomes of the education system today. In the context of the changing economy, the nature and structure of employment has changed and thus has the demand for skills. PISA demonstrates that Korea has been developing and improving the basic skills and the capacity of application of the skills of 15-year-old students. Korea can build on the strong skill base and high secondary and tertiary education attainment to develop relevant skills and to ensure the labour-market outcomes of the education system.



In order to develop relevant skills, the Korean education system needs to respond to changing skill demand through the design and implementation of curricula, and education and training programmes corresponding to the needs of the economy. Support for the transition from school to work is also central for matching the right skills with the right work places and for guiding students to the most appropriate paths to optimise their skill potential and career aspiration. Above all, education and training must be of a high quality, supported by the quality of teachers and innovation in teaching matter.

This section introduces the efforts put in place in, and the remaining challenges for, Korea in the field of vocational education and curriculum reform. It also highlights teachers, information communication technology (ICT) in education and evaluation as factors to support the delivery of quality education.

ENSURING THE RELEVANCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO THE LABOUR MARKET

The Korean government considers vocational education and training (VET) as one of its priorities. Several policies have been implemented to improve the educational system and improve its correlation to labour market needs. For example, more avenues for employer involvement in policy development and implementation are under consideration. Also, Meister Schools have been created, which are VET schools where workplace training is an important part of the programme (OECD, 2009).

VET is mainly school-based, although in some programmes students may participate in workplace training with local employers, and thus VET graduates might not be equipped with the relevant skills to be readily employable. VET institutions often see themselves as having a largely academic orientation, although they are expected to provide job-ready recruits for industry. They typically develop their own curricula and qualifications within the broad guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education, which are not systematically aligned with the national technical qualifications (and underlying standards).

An OECD Review of the VET upper secondary system conducted in 2009 recommended (OECD, 2009) providing an institutional framework for enhancing industry participation in VET. Under this framework, permanent bodies should engage industry stakeholders at all levels in the development and implementation of VET policy. All relevant ministries should be represented in these bodies:

- Improve the provision, quality and relevance of initial workplace training by strengthening incentives for partnerships between VET institutions and firms, and by developing and implementing standards for quality;
- Introduce measures to ensure that VET teachers, experienced and newly hired, have relevant work experience and regularly update their skills in the vocational area, including their knowledge of technologies and working practices;
- Derive the vocational part of the curriculum used by VET institutions from, or adapt it to, the national technical standards to deliver two certificates: one from the VET institution and the other based on the national technical qualification (NTQ) examination. The NTQ examinations should be evaluated by the Ministry of Labour, and reformed if necessary, to improve quality and matching to labour market needs.

Currently, the Korean government targets VET among its priorities and has been implementing several VET related policies in collaboration with concerned ministries. Several Ministries share responsibility for VET (Education; Strategy and Finance; Trade, Industry and Energy; Employment and Labour; National Defense; and the Small and Medium Business Administration) and they have been building co-operation through memoranda of understanding. Recent reforms include the policy for advancement of high school vocational education, and measures to establish the school-apprenticeship dual education programme, and the establishment of National Competency Standards¹. These measures are expected to respond to the challenges and to contribute to the improvement of VET in Korea.

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A CURRICULUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

In the context of the changing economy and technological progress, adapting learning to the needs of the market and society has never been more important. Developing a curriculum for the 21st Century is a core concern of education reform in many countries. It requires adapting curriculum so that it fosters knowledge, character (behaviour, attitudes, values), and skills including 'soft' skills such as creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Korea has been seizing opportunities to make learning more relevant through educational reform.

Korea has pushed forward reforms to prepare for globalisation, the ICT revolution, and the growth of the knowledge base in many disciplines. The Report of the Presidential Commission on Education Reform (1996) set out a radical new direction for the education system by stating:

“A nation’s level of creativity in the fields of science and technology, and knowledge and culture is the most potent determinant of its fate. A reservoir of the nation’s assets relies on the learning capability and creativity of its people. Education plays the most vital role in developing a nation’s intellectual power”.



While recognising the educational achievements of the past, the Report stated that the inherited system “will no longer be appropriate in the era of information technology and globalisation”.

The educational reforms reflect this philosophy and seek to build a system characterised by open education and lifelong learning. The latest curricular revision (2009) provides directions to foster 21st Century skills. It includes focusing on creativity and character, reduction of the excessive academic burden, and introduction of ‘creative experiential activities’ to foster consideration for and sharing with others (KICE, 2012). Diverse teaching methods and materials as well as cutting-edge technology and ICT have been introduced (UNESCO, 2006).

Despite regular and transformative reforms, Korea can more explicitly introduce curriculum designed to match learning with the skills demanded by the labour market. Based on the foundation developed in elementary school education, Korea’s secondary education curriculum emphasises the development of basic abilities essential for learning and daily life, the formation of character and citizenship, and the ability to find a career path in accordance with their aptitudes and talents (KICE, 2012). This already involves learning creative and critical thinking and specialised subjects that will nurture skills for future jobs. Nevertheless, Korea can further explore an appropriate mix of general and occupation-specific skills in general and vocational education to better match the curriculum with relevant skill demand.

Continuous shifting from learning to testing through highly academic oriented education, to learning for holistic skills development, needs to be considered in the process of curricula reform. In Korea, the evaluation content and method of College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) influences teaching (KICE 2012). CSAT aims to measure student scholastic ability as required for college education. This test also serves as one of the tools to normalise high school education. As entering a good university is important for individuals and for schools, the way the college admission process is conducted has a great impact on teaching and learning in schools. Korea can embark on the reforms in revising university entrance examinations along with its curriculum reform.

The introduction of the Admission Officer’s system is one step forward to select university entrance candidates without limiting the criteria to test scores, and thus reducing the excessive focus of test preparation in high schools. In this regard, Japan’s experience of curriculum and university admission system reforms provides Korea with cases responding to similar challenges. In the education reform of the late 1990s, Japan promoted the curriculum that enhances so-called ‘Zest of Living’ through education. This ‘Zest of Living’ reform intended to set the conditions that would enable students to develop a well-rounded personality and promote the development of cognitive and non-cognitive competencies that are needed in Japan’s changing economy and society. This vision has coupled with the reform of the university admission system, shifting from a heavy focus on a one-shot standard test for assessing subject knowledge to the system of diverse and integrated student evaluations to assess the motivation, skills, and aptitude (OECD, 2012h; MEXT, 2012). Japan’s challenge was to find the best equilibrium between reducing the intensity and stress of learning (or promoting so-called ‘relaxed education’) and strengthening the skills of high school graduates and motivating for learning to maintain high performance without pressures of university entrance examinations.

Moreover, attention should be paid to ensure that curricula reform is effectively implemented. In Korea, teachers sometimes find themselves at the centre of conflict due to the dominant role of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) and thus parental pressures to ensure preparation for the exam, while the curriculum requires teachers to get away from teaching-to-the-test (OECD, 2004). Japan’s case underlines the point that curricular reform should be aligned to the student assessment, especially university entrance examinations, and substantial changes in instructional methodology and require leadership of schools and teachers in designing and implementing programmes of integrated study for inquiry-based and student-centred learning. Japan’s reform also faced resistance from teachers and from the general public. In the face of criticism about the decline of the quality of education, PISA results show improvement in teacher-student relations and increased performance on tasks requiring open-ended, higher-order thinking skills (OECD, 2012h).

This case of curriculum and entrance exam reform implies that Korea can continuously strive for and update the best match between skills that students can develop and are motivated to learn in schools and skills demanded by the changing and evolving economy.

ATTRACTING, SUPPORTING AND RETAINING HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS

Teachers play an important role, not only in guiding the learning and development of student skills through the implementation of curriculum, but also supporting the preparation of students for their future lives. Korea knows that quality teacher matters for the strong performance of the education system and has built a high-quality teacher workforce. Culturally and historically, the teaching profession in Korea has been well regarded and respected. Teachers are held to high standards and benefit from job stability, high pay, and good working conditions, including important levels of teacher collaboration (Kang and Hong, 2008). Teachers also benefit from a high degree of school autonomy in curricular decision-making and assessment practices in Korea. OECD studies



show that, in general, students tend to perform better in countries where schools have greater autonomy over curriculum and how students are assessed, thus the teacher's role in curriculum innovation and student assessment is critical (OECD, 2012a).

Many talented students are attracted to the profession and entrance is highly competitive. Barber and Mourshed (2007) found that the highest-performing educational systems recruit their teachers from the top third of each cohort of graduates (top 5% in Korea, 10% in Finland and 30% in Singapore and Japan). In Korea, initial teacher education graduates receive a teacher certificate that enables them to work in private schools or on a contractual basis (OECD, 2004). However, they have to take the Teacher Employment Examination to obtain a permanent teaching position in a public school. The exam consists of two steps: a written test, followed by an in-depth interview to assess aptitude, lesson plan, instructional ability including mock teaching and practical test.

Teachers are rewarded with high salaries, career stability and important social status. Korean primary and lower secondary school teachers with at least 15 years of experience receive statutory salaries that are much higher than the OECD average (USD 48 251 compared to USD 38 136 in OECD countries for primary teachers, and USD 48 146 compared to USD 39 934 in OECD countries for lower secondary teachers) (OECD, 2013b).

Korean teachers also spend less time teaching in the classroom than in many other OECD countries, and more time on activities such as class preparation and administrative work (OECD, 2013c). Many primary and secondary schools have shared offices for teachers, which promote greater exchange among staff and more involvement in school activities. In addition, an OECD Review found that teaching facilities and instructional materials are of good quality, particularly the ICT infrastructure.

Another strength of Korea is its professional development of teachers. Induction and in-service training are considered important in teacher development. Teachers traditionally begin in-service training, sometimes shouldering part of the cost or training during their personal time. There are school-based teacher development opportunities, even if these do not necessarily have external support or assistance (OECD, 2004). In response to teacher needs and in order to make teacher development more active and relevant to classroom practices, Korea has been promoting action research by teachers and mutual learning between teachers from their experiences (Box 8.1).

Korea's effort to support inter-school learning embeds the possibility of offering teacher-generated solutions to systematic weaknesses and encourages the continuous professional development of teachers. As in the cases of Ontario (Canada) and Singapore, successful reforms encourage local experimentation and innovation by teachers. Indeed, high-performing countries generally consider teaching a profession in which teachers work together to frame what they believe to be good practices, conduct field-based research to confirm or disprove the approaches they develop, and then judge their colleagues by the degree to which they use proven effective practices in their classrooms. The continuous search for more effective teaching practices and institutionalising the improved practices allow improvement in teaching over time (OECD, 2013c).

Box 8.1 Action research by teachers

Korea funds action research by teachers and counts these efforts toward their professional development requirements. Districts make grants available to schools that lead their own research projects – each school can select a research topic, conduct research, publish the results and invite teachers from other schools to peer-review their findings. The districts also fund inter-school learning, whereby teachers from a number of different schools in a district can apply to jointly conduct research spanning all their schools. Anticipation in all types of research is an important consideration in Korea's annual teacher reviews, incentive allocation, and promotions. In pursuit of this same theme of “making practice public,” schools encourage teachers to open up their classrooms to others two or three times a month, at which times other teachers can come and visit and observe their lessons.

Source: Mourshed, M, C. Chinezi Chijioke, and M. Barber (2010), *How's the World Most Improved School Systems Getting Better*, McKinsey&Company. Available at: http://www.mckinsey.com/client_service/social_sector/latest_thinking/worlds_most_improved_schools



In order that teacher innovation can be linked to school level reform, it is necessary to place special attention to leadership development, in particular for school principals. Ontario's Leadership Strategy and Singapore's comprehensive teacher policy reform can provide relevant policy experiences for Korea to focus on maintaining and increasing the quality of the educational professions by offering coherent training and continuing support.

MAKING THE MOST OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FOR LEARNING

Digital literacy and ICT skills are requirements for success in today's knowledge economy and society. ICT is also a source of innovation in education systems and potentially offers a wide range of instruments to improve educational practices (OECD 2013c). Korea is successfully integrating ICT in education and creating new approaches to teaching and learning that provides more students with easier access to education materials and with opportunities to develop and apply 21st century skills. Although the computer and Internet use at school is not significantly higher than other OECD countries², Korea performed at the top of the digital reading assessment in PISA 2009. In the 1990s, the potential of ICT in education was quickly recognised in Korea and a master plan was launched to develop ICT infrastructure with one PC per teacher and Internet access for students in classrooms. More recent developments include the SMART Education Policy and the Cyber Learning Service, which are described in Chapters 1 and 3. Yet, concerns about the effects of digital devices on students have prompted research and the distribution of guidelines to schools.

To maximise the use of ICT for learning, Korea should continue building teacher capacity in ICT and school leadership. A notable feature of the SMART Education Policy is that it delivers ICT equipment to schools and related teaching and learning resources (e.g. developing digital textbooks and teacher training). Other aspects of the SMART Education Policy include schools deciding the budget allocation for ICTs, and teachers receiving training on teaching practices using ICT. Teachers follow research and participate in trial initiatives on using digital devices for teaching and learning in the classroom.

STRENGTHENING THE USE OF EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Evaluation and assessment help government understand how well an education system is performing. Indeed, these are tools that provide information and feedback on educational performance and drive improvement of the school, school leadership and teaching practices (OECD, 2013e). In view of the considerable efforts made to improve accountability, school evaluation reports and school performance in the Korean national assessment have been publicly available since 2008 (OECD, 2012a). In this way, a greater devolution of authority to schools is likely to lead to better outcomes (OECD, 2012a). PISA data shows that systems where schools publicly announce achievement data tend to show higher levels of performance compared to schools who manage their resources more discreetly.

The evaluation and assessment framework to improve school outcomes in Korea is broadening its scope from student assessment to a thorough examination of the whole of the education system (see Chapter 1). The Korean National Assessment of Educational Achievement (NAEA) is intended to be the central link between the various systems of evaluation and assessment to relate the findings of different elements more effectively in order to achieve a greater impact. While less emphasis has been placed on accountability based on evaluation results compared to many other OECD countries, significant efforts are underway to improve the available data (i.e. objectivity, assessment criteria) in order to use it more effectively.

EQUITY IN EDUCATION FOR STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION

Korea's commitment to education is reflected in the high level of private household spending on primary and secondary education. Society's high valuation of education is reinforced by the decreasing number of children per couple and the increasing willingness to invest in the education of children for the success of both the children and the family. The substantial private funding is also driven by reliance on supplementary education, in part fuelled by the importance of university entrance examinations.

OECD's report on Strengthening Social Cohesion in Korea pointed out that the high level of private spending on education raises issues of equity in education for children from early childhood to tertiary education levels (OECD, 2013d). As mentioned in Chapter 2, between 2000 and 2009 the relationship between students' socio-economic background and their performance grew stronger, although the association between family background and student outcomes was weaker than the OECD average. However, PISA shows the high prevalence of resilient students in Korea, meaning that more disadvantaged students than the OECD average perform far better than would be predicted based on their socio-economic background. This implies that in order to enhance social cohesion through education, Korea should not solely focus on disadvantaged students, but also on those who perform poorly due to factors such as family composition and the concentration of social disadvantage in the school.

Korea has introduced policy measures to support students from rural areas, low-income families, and those struggling to make progress. For example, multiple incentives are offered to teachers who work in disadvantaged schools (e.g. additional salary,



smaller class size, less instructional time, career benefits, and choice of the next school) (Kang and Hong, 2008). As a result, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are actually more likely than those of higher socio-economic backgrounds to be taught by high quality mathematics teachers, as measured by characteristics such as: full certification, mathematics or a mathematics education degree and at least 3 years of experience (Kang and Hong, 2008).

Steps have also been taken to improve the gender balance throughout the Korean educational system, such as adopting gender-neutral language, adapting textbooks and teaching in science and mathematics to make learning more attractive to both girls and boys. However, to greatly improve equity, Korea could enhance access to learning opportunities, in particular to ECEC, and improve schooling. This section presents issues that can mitigate the challenges of social cohesion through education. It also illustrates recent efforts undertaken by Korea to provide policy measures as well as recommendations for further improvement. Firstly, potential policy responses to supplementary education are summarised based on Chapter 3 of this report. Secondly, challenges and actions taken in the area of ECEC are presented. Finally, the strength of parental involvement in education is highlighted.

MORE EFFECTIVE POLICY RESPONSES TO SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

Supplementary education, as discussed in Chapter 3, plays a significant role within the Korean education system. The percentage of students attending after-school lessons in Korea is exceptionally high compared to other OECD countries. According to the PISA 2009 assessment of 15-year-old students, in Korea, attendance of after-school lessons is more than double the OECD average in every subject (OECD, 2010).

Despite the prominence of supplementary education, research on its impact on educational performance is inconclusive (see Chapter 3). Supplementary education provides additional inputs for learning, such as additional hours of instruction, learning materials and teachers. It might also facilitate student learning through different learning arrangements (e.g. grouping of students, methods of instruction, teacher-student relationships). However, supplementary education can undermine the formal education system by, for example, disrupting the application of the curricula or classroom and school climate. Moreover, supplementary education exacerbates social inequalities as participation is closely linked to socio-economic background of students and can be detrimental to student well-being.

Over several decades, Korea has been the most active East Asian country to implement policies responding to supplementary education (See Annex 1 in Chapter 3). In parallel with strengthening the formal education system, Korea has introduced measures to mitigate the negative impact of, and to promote more equitable access to, supplementary education. Korea has created avenues for participation of parents and other key stakeholders in policy formulation. For example, the Ministry of Education conducted a survey on policies to reduce spending on private tutoring and implemented certain policy options that parents proposed, including further developing on-line education and after-school programmes.

In the context of interaction and coexistence of the formal school system and supplementary education, and given the latter's advantages and downsides, Korea could continue looking into ways to:

Reduce the prominence of supplementary education and improve its quality. For example, Korea could consider mechanisms to ensure that the new curriculum is implemented well and continue to explore ways to decrease the emphasis on rote learning and on the university entrance exam. Similarly, reducing the quality differences between universities, which might include closing those institutions that offer very poor quality, could lead to a less stratified system. Regulation of supplementary education providers could be further revised to introduce mechanisms to ensure quality control. If new legislation is effectively implemented, transparency on supplementary education providers, particularly on student fees, would increase. However, more information on the quality of supplementary education provided could enable students and families to make better-informed decisions. Additionally, measures to limit the negative impact on student well-being, such as limited opening hours, could be further considered and expanded.

Korea could provide public alternatives to private supplementary education. To promote more equitable access, Korea should continue offering after-school lessons and exploring the potential of new technologies to improve learning opportunities, particularly for low-income students and those in rural areas with limited access to private supplementary education institutions.

Korea could foster research and public engagement to implement more effective policy responses. Most research focuses on policy impact on educational achievement. Further research is needed on other dimensions, such as its effects on formal schooling, student well-being and equity. Research findings should also be widely disseminated in order to improve informed public debate around supplementary education, and Korea should continue engaging parents and other key stakeholders in the design of policy responses.



IMPROVING EQUITY AND QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

Good quality pre-primary education can give children strong foundations that facilitate later educational achievements, thereby yielding high rates of return to the investment, and even more so for disadvantaged children (OECD, 2012a; OECD, 2013d). In Korea, expenditure on pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP has been one of the lowest in the OECD and is much lower than spending on other education levels (OECD, 2012a, OECD, 2012e), but in recent years public financial support has increased for all households. Expenditures have increased to USD 6 739 per student between 2000 and 2010, close to the OECD average of USD 6 762 (OECD, 2013c; OECD, 2012a), and are expected to continue to increase over the coming years (OECD, 2013c). For example, the programme that provides tuition fees for all 5-year-olds has been extended to 3 and 4-year-olds in 2013 with the implementation of the Nuri Curriculum in 2012. As a result, parental contributions to tuition have decreased by 23% (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2013). Korea plans to prioritise extending public support for ECEC to all 3- and 4-year-olds starting in 2013, and one option is to ensure implementation of the Act to increase the capacity of public kindergartens (OECD, 2013d).

In addition to these measures to improve equity in access and to ensure quality ECEC for all children, Korea should establish common regulations and standards (e.g. staff qualifications, staff-child ratio) for all children aged 3 to 5, regardless of whether they attend kindergarten or child care. The ECEC sector is fragmented with different standards and regulations with separate facilities under two administrative bodies (*kindergarten* is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and child care is under the Ministry of Health and Welfare). Childcare centres tend to have a lower educational orientation and to cater children from low-income families, while kindergartens tend to cater children from middle and upper-income families, thus perpetuating inequality (OECD, 2012a). In addition, higher-income families also tend to enrol their children in *hagwons* (OECD, 2012a).

While some progress has been made towards establishing a common curriculum between the two sectors, there is still a gap in quality standards for the workforce. The existence of two administrative systems hampers the ability to monitor and report about the quality and costs, which are of particular importance in order to increase transparency (OECD, 2012e; OECD, 2013d). The Korean government has already taken some steps in this direction, such as the pilot projects to integrate kindergarten and childcare, to improve quality management, and to disclose information about kindergartens.

INVOLVING PARENTS IN SCHOOL AND IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Parents can help their children succeed in education and, in Korea, parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's schools.³ The Ministry of Education has unveiled a new set of initiatives to expand the parental role in and access to their child's education (CIEB, 2012). These initiatives range from school monitoring programs, in which parents gain a clear sense of the activities and curriculum in their child's school, to parental training programmes and support centres. All of these programmes are intended to encourage parents to understand their child's progress, to be aware of their school resources and to get involved by volunteering or joining a parents' group.

Parental commitment to education is also reflected in their financial investment and illustrates the role that education plays in Korean society today. Total spending on private tutoring accounts for 7.9% of the average household disposable income, which means that a family with three children might spend a quarter of their income on private tutoring (OECD, 2012a).

Korea could make greater use of the high parental interest in and support for education by further developing parents' ability to help their children, in particular those from disadvantaged families. Options to encourage schools to strengthen parental and community involvement include aligning their goals, improving their skills and resources to communicate more effectively, granting them autonomy to develop partnerships, and taking parental engagement into consideration in school appraisal (OECD, 2012g; OECD, 2013c).

CONCLUSION

Korea has one of the most educated workforces and is among the highest performing countries in international assessments. Success in education has been the result of the strong capacity to foster rapid and remarkable improvements in the education system. A notable feature of the Korean education system is the high quality of teachers, who are carefully selected, prepared, supported and rewarded. Notwithstanding past achievements, Korea continues to strive to improve its education system and better prepare its younger generations. The curriculum has been revised to develop the skills of the 21st Century and ICTs are increasingly integrated into learning.

Education should remain a priority in order to successfully confront the current challenges, sustain past achievements and foster further improvements. This chapter has highlighted ways to improve the education system, first by improving the transition from school to work and the labour-market outcomes of education, focusing on quality and relevance of education. Strengthening equity and social cohesion can be improved through education, in particular by effective policy responses to ECEC and supplementary education, albeit in East Asia, Korea is the only country to have undertaken this task through increased policy efforts.



Notes

1. Korean National Competency Standard is a concept which identifies and standardizes competencies which are required for successful job performance. It is a comprehensive concept including ability such as knowledge, skill and attitude necessary to perform a job, and assessment of the ability (Human Resource Development Service of Korea Website: http://ncs.hrdkorea.or.kr/nos/dispatcher.jsp?p_menu=86)
2. Internet use at school in Korea is 65%, below an OECD average of 71%, although almost all students in Korea – 96% - reported using the Internet at home. Computers are more used in science classes: 31% of students reported using them, whereas computer use in mathematics lessons is only by 8% of students.
3. For example, the performance advantage among students whose parents read to them in their early school years is evident regardless of the family's socio-economic background. Analysis of PISA data also shows that the genuine interest and active engagement of parents count, and many parent-child activities that are associated with better reading performance involve relatively little time and no specialised knowledge (OECD, 2012b).

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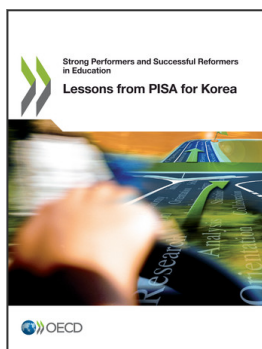
Annex 8.A1. Key facts for Korea in education at a glance 2013

Table	Indicator	Korea		OECD average		Rank among OECD countries and other G20 countries*
Financial Investment in Education						
	Annual expenditure per student (in equivalent USD, using PPPs)	2010		2010		
B1.1a	Pre-primary education	6739 USD		6762 USD		12 of 32
	Primary education	6601 USD		7974 USD		22 of 34
	Secondary education	8060 USD		9014 USD		21 of 34
	Tertiary education	9972 USD		13528 USD		12 of 33
	Total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP	2010	2000	2010	2000	
B2.1	As a percentage of GDP	7.6%	6.1%	6.3%	5.4%	3 of 33
	Total public expenditure on education	2010	2000	2010	2000	
B4.1	As a percentage of total public expenditure	16.2%	16.6%	13%	12.6%	5 of 32
	Share of private expenditure on educational institutions	2010	2000	2010	2000	
B3.2a	Pre-primary education	47.5%		17.9%		2 of 28
B3.2a	Primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education	21.5%	19.2%	8.5%	7.1%	1 of 31
B3.2b	Tertiary education	72.7%	76.7%	31.6%	22.6%	3 of 30
B3.1	All levels of education	38.4%	40.8%	16.4%	12.1%	2 of 29
Schools and teachers						
	Ratio of students to teaching staff	2011		2011		
D2.2	Pre-primary education	16 students per teacher		14 students per teacher		10 of 31
	Primary education	20 students per teacher		15 students per teacher		8 of 35
	Secondary education	17 students per teacher		14 students per teacher		6 of 36
	Total intended instruction time for students (hours)	2011		2011		
D1.1	Primary education	3795 hours		4717 hours		25 of 31
	Lower secondary education	2550 hours		3034 hours		25 of 31
	Number of hours of teaching time per year (for teachers in public institutions)	2011	2000	2011	2000	
D4.2	Pre-primary education	680 hours		994 hours		26 of 29
	Primary education	812 hours	865 hours	790 hours	780 hours	13 of 31
	Lower secondary education	621 hours	570 hours	709 hours	697 hours	21 of 30
	Upper secondary education	609 hours	530 hours	664 hours	628 hours	17 of 31
	Index of change in statutory teachers' salaries for teachers with 15 years of experience/minimum training (2000 = 100)	2011	2008	2011	2008	
D3.4	Primary school teachers	119	124	120	120	9 of 23
	Lower secondary school teachers	119	124	116	116	6 of 22
	Upper secondary school teachers	119	124	117	118	7 of 22
	Ratio of teachers' salaries to earnings for full time, full-time full-year adult workers with tertiary education	2011		2011		
D3.2	Pre-primary school teachers	1.31		0.80		1 of 22
	Primary school teachers	1.34		0.82		1 of 27
	Lower secondary school teachers	1.34		0.85		2 of 27
	Upper secondary school teachers	1.34		0.89		2 of 27

*Countries are ranked in descending order of values

**Compared to people with upper secondary education; upper secondary = 100.

«m»: data not available



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