Korea: A Study of School Library Development

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Until the 1990s, school libraries were a low priority in the South Korean educational system. But the Korean government has now developed a five-year master plan for improving school libraries. Similarly, the government has undertaken significant educational reform in order to cultivate creative human resources through open education and lifelong learning. The implementations of these educational reforms are based on information and communication technology (ICT) in education and the seventh educational curriculum. In addition to these policies, the activity of NGOs has been effective in developing school libraries. Today, South Korea has a modern, well-developed school library system.

Introduction

South Korea is a small country with a large population of 47,254,000 (Korea National Statistical Office, 2005). It has a 6-3-3-4 education system. According to the 2005 basic Korean educational statistics (Korea National Center for Education Statistics and Information, 2005), South Korea has: (a) 5,646 elementary schools (grades 1-6, approximately 6-11 years old); (b) 2,935 middle schools (grades 7-9, approximately 12-14 years old); and (c) 2,095 high schools (grades 10-12, approximately 15-18 years old). The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is the central coordinating body for school education. It sets the national schooling goals and establishes curriculum guidelines and requirements.

Recently, school libraries have taken on a rapidly increasing role in the South Korean education system. Libraries are becoming a hub of information in South Korean schools. Until 1990, such a role for school libraries in South Korea was unthinkable.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is currently implementing a five-year master plan (2003-2007) for improving South Korea's school libraries. The key points of the plan are:

1. to build, redesign, renovate, and repair school libraries;
2. to integrate school libraries into the overall school curriculum by promoting their use in the regular classroom;
3. to hire professional school librarians and trained staff to work in the school libraries; and
4. to improve cooperation between the public and private sectors aimed at enhancing the development of the school library system.
The policy of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, which was the driving force for the prosperity of school libraries in South Korea, could become a model for other parts of the world.

Changes in School Libraries and Korea’s Social Background

Until the 1990s, school libraries in South Korea had a minor role in schools. They were typically located in tiny, isolated rooms somewhere on the top floor. Most of the time they were closed. When they were open, access was usually restricted to the best students, and they were poorly equipped and contained only small book collections. At that time, the entire public education system in South Korea was poorly funded, and the importance of libraries was underrated. Instead, the importance of university entrance examinations was overemphasized. Being accepted into the most prestigious universities was the ticket to success in South Korean society.

According to Jong-Sung Kim (2000), school libraries in South Korea have undergone a number of major changes since the 1950s. Four of them have been:

1. The formation and development of the school library movement (for the first time, some schools began to build school libraries): 1950s-1960s;
2. The decline of the school library movement (stopped building school libraries): 1970s-1980s;
3. The recovery of the school library movement (started to build more libraries): early 1990s;
4. The expansion of the school library movement (today, almost every school has a school library): late 1990s-present.

After several decades of foreign domination, South Korea became a fully independent country in 1948. This was soon followed by the Korean War (1950-1953). Until the 1950s, South Korea had no school libraries, but after the war, as a newly independent country, South Korea began to emphasize education in order to build a strong economy. The government adopted an education policy based on John Dewey's democratic education ideology and progressivism. These liberal principles of education provided a favorable environment for establishing school libraries.

In the 1950s, for the first time in South Korea, school libraries began to appear. They were open to all students and housed good collections of materials. The opening of the libraries began in the southeastern part of South Korea: a half-open-shelved library opened in Jinju Girls’ High School in 1952, and in Masan Girls’ High School in 1954. This approach soon spread north into the Seoul area: Kyonggi High School opened a library in 1958, and Jaemulpo High School followed in 1959.

In the 1960s, the school library movement continued to expand. From 1962 to 1970, a national school library seminar was held annually. In South Kyongsang province, a school library manual and a curriculum for library use were developed. In 1963, the South Korean government enacted the
first library law, which required every school to have a library. But in reality, few schools were equipped with a library.

The school library movement in the 1970s declined because during this period, the public education system focused its main efforts on university entrance exams. Society demanded higher education, and students competed fiercely for entrance into the most prestigious universities in order to qualify for the best jobs. Extra classes were conducted to prepare students for the entrance exams; even regular curricula included preparation for such exams. School libraries were no more than study rooms with carrels and contained no library materials. In these rooms, students prepared for their entrance exams.

As in the 1970s, the library world saw little progress in the 1980s. The military regime that ruled South Korea regarded education only as a convenient tool to produce a vast reservoir of "economic" beings. The economy, not personal development, was its only concern. This pragmatic view of education gave rise to the strong emphasis on examinations. Those who performed well academically would be rewarded with a place in the best universities, which was the passport to earning a high salary. Meanwhile, those who did not perform well on the entrance examinations were left behind. School libraries at this time had an insignificant role to play, and librarians merely lent their services to the library.

By the 1990s, South Korea had become a democracy, and school libraries entered a new era. Free from military rule, South Korean society became more liberal and open. Education began to play a greater role in society. It was no longer seen merely as a stepping stone to climbing the social ladder, but also as a vehicle for developing a well-rounded personality. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development adopted such concepts as open education, independent self-study, and resource-based learning in the seventh version of the national education curriculum for elementary and secondary schools. Besides government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and passionate parents also contributed to this creation of a liberal educational environment. Children were encouraged to read more and think more. Knowledge would bring them wisdom, and the library became viewed as a good place to visit.

Since 2000, the South Korean school library system has undergone significant improvements, for example, larger book collections, introduction of computers and the Internet, better facilities, and improved services. The following two excerpts from newspaper articles describe the scenes in two school libraries.

third grade's social studies class at Sungpo Primary School in Ansan, Kyeonggi-do. A group of students are heading toward the library, located in the center of the school, to do their assignments. Each group is required to read a historical novel and set up some questions about the characters in the novel. The novels are selected by the students themselves after reading book reviews on the school library's Web site, which are up by their teacher. (Hankyoreh Daily, March 3, 2003)
There's a small, cozy library in my school. On average, 400 students visit the library every day. I can see a lot of happy, contented faces there. They go to the library for various purposes. Some are browsing the shelves; some are reading books or magazines; some are surfing the Internet; some are doing research; some are listening to music; some are watching videotapes; and some are having a discussion in the conference room. (Kyonghyang Daily, June 7, 2003)

The above passages not only illustrate how the libraries are being used, but depict the typical environment of today's school library. School libraries are no longer cold, dark, isolated, forgotten corners, but have become an information hub, an incubator for ideas, a cultural center, and above all, a cozy place to spend some quality time.

**Important Factors Affecting School Library Policy**

*Korea's Educational Information Infrastructure*

School libraries are considered an essential infrastructure in realizing open education, independent self-study, and resource-based learning and for adapting education to the information age. Students acquire knowledge and information by reading books or using other information resources in the libraries. The role of school libraries is not limited to providing knowledge and information. Students learn how to search and retrieve the information they need, how to evaluate the information they retrieve, how to integrate this, and how to develop knowledge.

Since 1997, Korea has been pursuing a project that adapts the education system to the information age (Korea Education and Research Information Service, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). Its primary goal is to enable people to access and use the rapidly developing ICT.

EDUNET (2005), a national teaching and learning center, is an online education network. It links the central government, local governments, and school libraries. EDUNET's Web site leads to a wide range of information about education. It is the largest comprehensive educational information service system in South Korea and a one-stop service for all, especially students and teachers. EDUNET provides the following.

1. Learning communities for students and teachers, teacher training, consultation on supervision, teaching materials, human resources for schools, and facilities such as classrooms, study rooms, and libraries.
2. Search services for curricular and extra-curricular activities, supervision, research, training, and so forth.
3. A teaching materials service, which has lesson plans, video clips demonstrating model teachers, and testing services that evaluate students' achievements.
4. Learning materials such as glossaries, educational games, articles, answers to students' FAQs, educational cartoons, cyber classrooms, and cultural tours.
5. Teacher support services where teachers can share ideas, lesson plans and other useful information with each other.
In addition to EDUNET, a DLS (Digital Library System) for the school library network is connected to EDUNET. DLS is a system that supports school libraries built in metropolitan and provincial offices of education and is an Internet-based, one-stop service system that helps school libraries carry out the function of a teaching-learning support center, digital library, and reading and cultural center. By 2003-2004, the construction of DLS had been completed for 11 offices of education (69%), and more are now underway. The main objective of DLS is to connect all school libraries and public libraries so that they can share databases and online catalogues.

**School Library Activity by NGOs**

Members of NGOs are citizens from a variety of fields including scientists, business development professionals, environmental engineers, teachers, homemakers, and so forth.

NGOs have been instrumental in the development of the Korean school library system. One notable example was the Suwon Women’s Council’s suggestion of using school libraries to promote reading to children. Suwon is a city in Kyonggi province, the largest and most populous province in South Korea, which surrounds Seoul, the national capital. In Suwon, 30 km from Seoul, the council held citizens’ public forum (Han, Ok Ja, 2001). One question on the agenda was “Is our children’s reading environment appropriate?” The council held that most school libraries were underdeveloped and urged schools, local governments, and the national government to spend more money on libraries. In 1999, this resulted in the establishment of the Kyonggi Province Council for the Good School Library. In 2000, this council became the core body of the National Union for the Revival of School Libraries. These NGOs had a major influence in persuading local governments to provide money for school libraries and to build more libraries.

In 1998, South Korea was burdened by the IMF financial crises. During this time, the Suwon Women’s Council (along with other NGOs) requested funding from the Kyonggi provincial government to increase the number of school librarians (Kim, Jong Sung, 2004). This initiative was supported by a local government fund for relieving unemployment. The Council of Korean School Libraries in Seoul also participated in this program and hired 100 school librarians. Influenced by the Seoul and Suwon NGOs and the Evergreen (Sangroksu) Culture Lover in Ansan, in March 1999, Kyonggi province persuaded the government to hire librarians for primary schools, and a similar campaign was initiated by the Gunpo Citizens’ Council for Economic Rightness in May 1999 (Han, Ok Ja, 2001). The results of these campaigns were remarkable and spread to other cities, where NGOs also joined the school library campaign. During that time, the work conditions and temporary status (many librarians only had one-year temporary contracts) of librarians was raised as an important social issue.
In Seoul, one NGO, the Council of Korean School Libraries, gave up the project and disbanded because the local government withheld funds. However, in December 1999, the above-mentioned organizations in Kyonggi province organized a new body for maintaining the campaign called the Kyonggi Province Councils for the Good School Library and received provincial government funding. The Governor of Kyonggi province fully supported the campaign, so the Council started afresh with a new project body. The Council, which received support from the local government, inspired the establishment of a large NGO, the National Union for Revival of the School Library. This ultimately triggered greater interest in school libraries not only among the general public, but also among government officials throughout South Korea. Until this time, the government had been only an observer and never a player in the history of the Korean school library system.

The establishment of nationwide organizations for the school library campaign and their activities planted the seeds for the birth of the first ever Department of School Libraries in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, which was created in 2001. Although school libraries were only one of the Ministry's responsibilities, this was the first time a government department would administer school libraries directly, and this was the most prominent effect of the NGOs' campaign for school libraries. With the expansion of the school library campaign and increasing social interest in reading, practical and concrete changes have been reinforced.

Government Policies for Developing School Libraries

Current Policies on School Libraries

In 2002, the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2002) formulated a landmark policy called the Master Plan for Promoting the School Library: Making Good School Libraries (the five-year master plan). This is the first master plan for school libraries in Korean history. With a budget of KRW 300 billion (US$30 million), it aims to improve school libraries nationwide between 2003 to 2007. It has four major targets for improvement:

1. Expanding book collections and improving library facilities;
2. Promoting the use of school libraries in the classroom;
3. Hiring experts and providing professional training for librarians; and
4. Devising an adequate framework for cooperation between the public and private sectors.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development now requires local governments to pay more attention to school libraries. It has developed a checklist of criteria for local governments to follow. The level of services and collections provided by school libraries is to be assessed as part of the performance of local educational authorities. Encouraged by this policy, the educational authority in
Kyonggi province has established a task force to plan and execute the libraries promotion program. The team, which consists of a supervisor, three librarians, and one administrator, is called the Supporting Team for School Library Promotion (Kyonggi Ministry of Education, 2003). Other provinces have set up similar teams.

**Implementation of Government Policies**

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2005a) has put the master plan into action and is doing the following.

*Expanding the book collections and improving facilities.* The five-year master plan, which began in 2003, has enhanced book collections and improved the facilities of school libraries. A total of 1,259 libraries were completed in 2003, and another 1,260 were built or renovated in 2004. The number of books increased from 5.5 per student in 2002 to 7.5 per student in 2004.

*Promoting the use of school libraries in the classroom.* The Ministry of Education and Human Resources (2005a) selected 48 schools throughout South Korea to participate in a study on how best to use school libraries in the classroom. The project included schools from all levels (elementary, middle, and high schools) in 16 cities. As part of the project, the schools promoted use of school libraries in regular classrooms (e.g., in science, math, and history classes, etc.) and tried to integrate libraries into the overall curriculum. The findings of the study were then submitted to the Ministry for review. The Ministry subsequently (a) held open seminars that representatives from all the schools were invited to attend and share their experiences; and (b) set up a Web page that showed the results of the study and provided information. As a result of the study, a wide range of methods to promote and maximize the use of school libraries was recommended. A second similar project is now underway with the participation of 48 more schools.

*Hiring experts and professional training.* Despite building, redesigning, and renovating a large number of school libraries, currently there are few teacher librarians. In Korea two kinds of librarians work in schools: (a) school librarians (certified librarians), and (b) teacher librarians (those with both teacher and librarian qualifications). The government is most interested in hiring the latter as they are more suitably qualified. However, most schools have only temporary school librarians. The government wishes to increase the number of teacher librarians, but this is difficult because of the enormous amount of funding required.

Many more school librarians than teacher librarians work in schools in Korea. In Kyonggi province, for example, over 800 school librarians are currently employed, and nationally 1,024 are employed. On the other hand, the number of newly recruited teacher librarians is much lower. In 2002, 33 were hired; in 2003, 45 were hired; and in 2004, 34 were hired. In the first half of 2005, another 17 were hired (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005a). These numbers are low, but since 2001, the
number of permanent full-time teacher librarians has increased by nearly 100% from 129 to 258, which is a significant improvement. Now there are 258 permanent, full-time, teacher-librarians.

In addition, the government is continuing to hire more part-time temporary librarians and is providing them with workshops to upgrade their skills. Workshops to provide a better understanding of how to use libraries are also being held for principals, vice-principals, and teachers. In these workshops, teachers learn how to use the libraries to improve their classroom teaching and how to integrate library use into the school curriculum.

*Devising an adequate framework for cooperation between the public and private sectors.* It is important to develop community awareness of school libraries. With increased awareness, members of the community might undertake fundraising or volunteer their time to work in school libraries. In 2004, to promote awareness of school libraries in the community, seven organizations were granted KRW 100,000,000 (US$100,000); in 2003, five organizations were granted KRW 50,000,000 (US$50,000) (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005b). These organizations were delegated the responsibility of promoting school libraries to parents, students, and other members of the community. Parents and students were informed of the role of libraries in the educational system and how they could improve reading skills, personal development, and lifelong education. Today, because of elevated community awareness, an increasing number of parents are volunteering their time to work in school libraries.

*Implications and Challenges of Government Policies*

The five-year master plan has brought significant changes in school libraries. It has not only influenced the educational setting, but has also had significant effects on the social and political landscape in Korea. However, the rapid changes in school libraries also pose challenges to the current infrastructure in terms of human resources, the concept of the school library, and coordination between various bodies (Han, Yoon Ok, 2004).

*Implications of the Master Plan*

*Support for a new educational paradigm.* The school library as a facilitator of knowledge has an important role to play and can make significant contributions to a knowledge-based society. It is a convenient tool for such educational initiatives as student-focused education, individualized teaching and learning, and lifelong education.

*Response to social demands.* A liberal education system and the cultivation of a knowledgeable society are sure signs of a modern society. Building up libraries and nurturing reading habits fulfills the educational, cultural, and social needs of a democratic society with a responsible government.

*Strengthening cooperation between the government and communities.* The educational authority took the lead in the school library project, and NGOs, librarians, parents, and other interested parties also play an active
role in consultation, planning, and implementation of various projects, campaigns, and activities.

Challenges Facing the Master Plan
Status and hiring of teacher librarians. Teacher librarians are now recruited on a part-time basis. It goes without saying that it is difficult for part-time staff to plan and organize any activities or long-term programs. It is also difficult for them to develop a close working relationship with school administrators and other teachers, which is critical to the proper implementation of any program. Therefore, the number of full-time teacher librarians in permanent positions should be increased.

Lack of interest from principals and teachers. Although educators have increasingly recognized the role of the library in a school, it takes time for them to gain an understanding of what it can do and how. Many teachers are resistant to change. Some are not interested in learning how to use the libraries and do not understand their importance. Many still have not heard of information literacy programs, online databases, or evaluation of Web resources. Some treat libraries as nothing more than physical workshops with books, magazines, and computers. There is still a long way to go before school libraries can function fully in the schools.

Proper coordination between the Ministry, local governments, and schools. Coordination between the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, local governments, and schools is inadequate. A well-planned, coordinated effort is needed. The Ministry should take a leading role in planning national programs, and local authorities should oversee and provide sufficient resources for their implementation. There should be more sharing of experiences and resources among schools.

Connection Between the School Library and the Educational Curriculum
Coordination between curricula and school libraries is insufficient. Efforts are being made currently to integrate these two aspects. The seventh national curriculum is currently being implemented in Korea. This curriculum brings diversity to teaching and learning strategies. In contrast to the past uniform paradigm, the current curricular content ability in the Korean education system is based on individual levels. In order to implement effective instruction activities that enhance students' creativity and critical thinking, school libraries must be connected to the curriculum.

Conclusion
Looking back on the past 10 years, a dramatic improvement in the school library environment in South Korea can be observed. Until the mid-1990s, few people were concerned with school libraries or appreciated their potential usefulness in the Korean educational system. However, parents in South Korea wished their children to read more, and to encourage them to read, they began demanding improvements in the school library system. This parental interest motivated NGOs to begin lobbying governments to
establish policies to improve the school library system. Soon the school library movement expanded to a nationwide phenomenon that included cooperation between local, provincial, and national governments, local communities, and the private sector. The entire society of South Korea is becoming increasingly aware of, and interested in, school libraries. In addition, the educational information infrastructure in Korea has also affected development of school libraries. The government has undertaken significant educational reform in order to cultivate creative human resources through open education and lifelong learning. Implementation of these educational reforms is based on ICT in education, and the seventh national curriculum and has fostered a positive attitude toward school libraries. The national government is now implementing a five-year master plan to enhance the overall strength of the school library system. The policy, which includes the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development’s five-year master plan, is currently generating the driving force behind the prosperity of school libraries in South Korea. As a result, school libraries in South Korea are now a modern, well-developed system. However, there are still challenges, including insufficient coordination between curricula and school libraries and a shortage of teacher librarians.

Notes
1 Participants in the National Union for the Revival of the School Library are as follows: the Korean Federation of Teachers Association, the National Parents’ Association for Ideal Education, the Korean Association of Community Education, the Korean Teachers’ and Educational Workers’ Union, the Citizens’ Movement for Educational Reform, the Association of Librarians for the Promotion of the School Library, and Kyonggi Province Council for the Good School Library.
2 The second Policy Coordination Division passed the school library issue to the Information Technology Support Division under the International Cooperation and Information Technology Bureau following reorganization of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in August 2003.

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79

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