**The Education System And The Teaching Profession in**

**The Korean Peninsula**

(The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea)

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**Abstract**

Both countries use Korean as their official language. In the Republic of Korea, the Korean alphabet is called Hangul, while in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it is called Chosongul. A common proverb in the Republic of Korea regarding the teaching profession demonstrates the respect they place on the profession: "A teacher's shadow is not to be trodden upon." The education system in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, like other governing systems, is a secretive one. Students pursuing higher education come from families of members of the party's upper echelons. Teaching in North Korea is considered a sacred duty by the regime. Teachers are not only imparters of knowledge but also pioneers of ideological education. Teachers hold a high status in society. Teachers who teach ideological subjects, in particular, are viewed by the state as "pioneers" and "leader creators." Specialization is provided in areas such as industry, agriculture, and military service. The purpose of education is to train individuals who will contribute to economic production. The study was conducted in the DPRK and the ROK, using both field and individual data. Obtaining visual data and data for 2024 in the DPRK was difficult (due to government restrictions). After the war, the Republic of Korea declared an educational campaign, and the illiteracy rate, which was 82% in 1935, dropped to 0% in 2024. Another indicator of the Republic of Korea's educational success is the PISA test,

**Keywords:** North Korea, South Korea, Edıcation, Teaching, CSAT

**Summary**

This study presents a comparative analysis of the education systems and the teaching profession in South Korea and North Korea, two nations that share a common historical background yet diverge ideologically and politically. The paper examines the historical development, ideological orientation, educational policies, and teacher training structures of both countries. In South Korea, education is closely associated with democratic values, economic growth, and technological innovation, while in North Korea it is shaped by socialist ideology and political loyalty to the ruling party. The teaching profession in South Korea enjoys high social status, supported by competitive selection processes and continuous professional development. Conversely, in North Korea, teachers are trained primarily as ideological educators, with limited pedagogical autonomy. The findings reveal that the historical and political division of the Korean Peninsula has profoundly influenced each country’s educational philosophy, teaching practices, and teacher identity. Ultimately, education and the teaching profession serve as mirrors reflecting the broader ideological and political frameworks of both Koreas.

**Research Design and Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study was designed as a comparative, field-based investigation focusing on the education systems and teaching professions of North Korea and South Korea. The research was conducted in educational institutions located in Kaesong, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), and Daegu, Republic of Korea (South Korea). The study consists of two main parts: the first explores the North Korean education system and the teaching profession, while the second examines the South Korean education system and the teaching profession.

**Data Collection**

Fieldwork in Kaesong presented considerable challenges due to the country’s highly centralized administrative structure and limited openness to foreign researchers. Data collection difficulties arising from the closed national system were partially mitigated through face-to-face interviews with local teachers. Additionally, supplementary data were obtained from relevant international organizations and verified reports outside the field to enhance the reliability of the findings. In contrast, the South Korean phase of the research was carried out within a secure and open academic environment, allowing direct observation of classroom practices and in-depth interviews with teachers.

**Participants and Setting**

The participants consisted of teachers and educational staff from primary and secondary schools in both Kaesong and Daegu. The selected institutions were chosen based on their representativeness of the general education structure in each country. While the sample size in Kaesong was limited due to access restrictions, the Daegu segment allowed broader participation and greater data diversity.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study lies in the restricted accessibility to educational institutions in North Korea. The closed administrative and political context constrained the scope of direct data collection and verification. Despite these challenges, the inclusion of triangulated data sources from international organizations contributed to maintaining academic validity and comparative consistency between the two research contexts.

**Education System and Teaching Profession in North Korea:**

1. **Introduction**

In North Korea, where there is no freedom of expression, the aim of the education system built under the socialist planned economy and state control under the Juche ideology is to raise socialist individuals.

The factor that has led to the literacy rate reaching 100% in the country is the strict attitude of the state authorities.

Education in North Korea operates under strict state control, reflecting the country’s political and ideological frameworks. The education system is designed not only to provide academic knowledge but also to cultivate loyalty to the state and its leaders.

**2. Historical Development of Education in North Korea**

The foundations of North Korea’s modern education system were established after liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. The government prioritized universal literacy, the creation of pedagogical institutions, and teacher training aligned with socialist ideology. Over the decades, the system has expanded to cover primary, secondary, and tertiary education, with an emphasis on ideological consistency and social control.

**3. Structure of the Education System**

12 years of education is compulsory in North Korea. The school starting age in the country is 7.

All educational expenses of the student up to higher education are covered by the state.

North Korea’s education system is divided into primary, secondary, and higher education. Primary education typically lasts four years, followed by six years of secondary schooling (divided into lower and upper levels), and higher education. Tertiary education is provided through specialized universities, including pedagogy-focused and comprehensive universities. The Ministry of Education and the Korean Workers’ Party oversee curriculum development, teacher assignments, and evaluation procedures.

In education, the North Korean government aims to:

* Develop loyal individuals with a strong collectivist spirit and a commitment to socialist ideology in primary school;
* Develop individuals with a strengthened loyalty to the regime in secondary school;
* Develop individuals with enhanced military discipline, ideological awareness, and productive skills in high school;
* Develop elite individuals who will serve the regime by training specialized cadres for the party and state in universities.

In North Korea, school subjects are grouped under specific thematic headings in accordance with the country's ideological educational approach. The educational system aims not only to instill academic knowledge but also the Juche ideology, patriotism, and loyalty to leaders.

Therefore, subjects are generally categorized under five main headings:

1. Ideological and Political Education,

2. Cultural and General Academic Courses,

3. Natural Sciences and Technology,

4. Technical and Vocational Education,

5. Physical Education and Military Training.

The answers to the question "Which countries other than your own do you know?", which we posed to students in schools in Kaesong and Pyongyang, where our study was conducted, in order to learn the knowledge level of the students, are included in this table.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COUNTRY** | **NUMBER of STUDENTS** | **Percentage %** | **OBSERVATİON** |
| China | 68 | 97 | Everyone knows it because it's described as a "brother country." Economic and diplomatic relations are strong. |
| Russia | 61 | 87 | It is frequently mentioned in classes as a historical ally; it is taught with a positive image. |
| Japan | 52 | 74 | It is often mentioned in a negative context due to the colonial period, which raises awareness. |
| USA | 30 | 43 | It's in the news as an "enemy country"; students hear its name but don't know the details. |
| South Korea | 25 | 36 | Although presented as “anti-regime” for propaganda reasons, students know ıt in the context of the Korean Peninsula. |

(European countries (Germany, France, the United Kingdom) are known at very low rates; they are generally recognized only in the context of geopolitical events or occasions such as the Olympics.  
Countries like India, Vietnam, and Cuba — often referred to as 'friendly nations' — are known to a limited extent due to North Korea’s diplomatic relations.)

An examination of the responses reveals that North Korean students' knowledge is closely tied to the countries focused on by state media. Students are presented with China and Russia as friends, the US and Japan as enemies, and South Korea as ideological opponents.

They have a one-sided understanding of these countries.

This demonstrates that in closed societies, international awareness is limited to state discourse.

**University Admission Procedures in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK):**

**1. Introduction**

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) maintains one of the world’s most centralized and ideologically driven education systems. Higher education is regarded not only as a means of developing professional knowledge but also as a mechanism to reproduce political loyalty and sustain the socialist regime. University admission in North Korea, therefore, represents a unique intersection between academic evaluation and ideological vetting. This report aims to present an analytical overview of the university entrance procedures in the DPRK, focusing on structural mechanisms, ideological criteria, and the role of state control.

**2. Structure of Pre-University Education**

Completion of this phase alone does not guarantee university entry. The state uses a multi-stage filtering process to identify candidates deemed politically reliable and academically capable.

**3. Preliminary Selection and Screening**

During the final year of upper middle school, students are evaluated by a selection committee composed of teachers, school administrators, and representatives of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). The committee assesses three main dimensions: academic performance, political loyalty, and social behavior. A decisive factor in this stage is the songbun system — the hereditary social classification that categorizes citizens based on their family’s revolutionary history and loyalty to the state. Students from families with “revolutionary” or “core” backgrounds are favored, while those from “wavering” or “hostile” classes face systemic barriers.

**4. The National University Entrance Examination**

Only students who pass the initial screening are allowed to sit for the national university entrance examination. This exam is designed to measure both academic proficiency and ideological reliability. The subjects typically include Korean Language and Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Foreign Language, and Political Ideology. The exam is centrally administered by the Ministry of Education. Beyond written tests, students often undergo oral interviews to assess their understanding of the Juche ideology and their loyalty to the Kim leadership.

**5. Placement and Admission Decisions**

Admission decisions are not based solely on examination scores. Results are combined with songbun classification, regional quotas, and state manpower needs. Even high-scoring students may be denied admission if they are deemed politically unreliable. University placements are managed by the Ministry of Education and the Education Bureau of the Workers’ Party of Korea, ensuring alignment with both economic plans and ideological priorities.

**6. Categories of Higher Education Institutions**

North Korean universities are divided into elite national institutions and regional universities, each serving a distinct function. Admission to elite universities, particularly Kim Il-sung University, is considered one of the highest honors in North Korean society. It often guarantees access to prestigious careers within the state bureaucracy or research institutions.

**7. Ideological Education and Indoctrination**

Upon entry, all university students undergo a mandatory ideological training program. The curriculum includes studies in Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism, the history of the Korean Workers’ Party, and military drills. The goal is to shape students into both skilled professionals and politically obedient citizens. Education thus functions as a state instrument for ideological reproduction rather than intellectual exploration.

**8. Discussion: Education as Ideological Control**

The DPRK’s university admission system reflects the state’s broader philosophy: education as an instrument of loyalty rather than a means of social mobility. The dual emphasis on academic testing and ideological verification ensures that only individuals who are both intellectually capable and politically trustworthy can advance. This approach reinforces the ruling elite’s control over knowledge production and the country’s technocratic class.

University entrance in North Korea represents a process where academic meritocracy is subordinated to political orthodoxy. The procedures — from candidate screening to final placement — illustrate the regime’s fusion of education and ideology. While the system produces technically competent graduates, it simultaneously restricts intellectual freedom and perpetuates social stratification through the songbun hierarchy. The North Korean model thus stands as a compelling case study of how education can be used as a strategic tool for regime preservation rather than individual empowerment.

İn North Korea, students who fail the university entrance exam are employed by the state as “**workers serving the nation,”** working as laborers, farmers, soldiers, or employees in state enterprises.

**B.Teacher Education in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea:**

**1. Introduction**

Education in the DPRK operates within a centralized, state-controlled framework. Since its establishment in 1948, the North Korean education system has served as a mechanism for disseminating socialist ideology and loyalty to the ruling Korean Workers’ Party. In this context, teacher education plays a pivotal role.

Teachers are viewed not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and ideological guardians of the socialist state. Therefore, the training and employment of teachers mirror the political priorities of the government and the needs of its planned economy.

Teachers occupy a central role as both educators and ideological guides, ensuring that the ruling party’s objectives are integrated into classroom instruction.

**2. Historical Context of Teacher Education**

The origins of formal teacher education in North Korea can be traced to the post-liberation period following the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945. During the early years of the DPRK, the government established a network of pedagogical institutions to produce educators loyal to Kim Il-sung’s revolutionary ideology. The Pyongyang University of Pedagogy, founded in the 1940s, became the flagship institution for training teachers at all levels of the education system. Similar universities were later opened in Hamhung, Chongjin, and other provincial centers to expand access to teacher-training programs. Over time, these institutions evolved into a national system of state-run universities dedicated to education and ideological promotion.

**3. Structure and Curriculum**

Teacher education programs in North Korea typically last four to five years and are offered at specialized universities or educational faculties within larger institutions. The curriculum integrates three main components:

1. Subject Knowledge, which provides training in mathematics, science, language, and social studies;

2. Pedagogical Methods, including lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment;

3. Ideological Education, which reinforces loyalty to the state and the Kim family leadership.

Students participate in both theoretical coursework and supervised teaching practices. Assessment methods emphasize academic competence and political reliability. Graduates receive state-assigned teaching posts, usually in public schools, based on the national manpower planning. The Ministry of Education regulates all aspects of these programs, from admission quotas to graduation requirements.

**4. Ideological and Political Dimensions**

Ideology permeates every aspect of teacher education in the DPRK. Courses such as Revolutionary History, Juche Philosophy, and Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism Studies are mandatory at all universities. Prospective teachers are expected to display unwavering loyalty to the ruling party and its leaders. Political education is not a supplementary component but a defining element of the curriculum.

University admission depends not only on academic achievement but also on family background and political credentials of the students. Applicants with strong revolutionary lineages often receive preferential treatment. Throughout their studies, students participate in political rallies, study sessions, and “self-criticism” meetings designed to strengthen ideological discipline.

**5. Post-Graduation Training and Teacher Placement**

After completing their degrees, graduates are assigned teaching positions according to the state’s centralized labor plan for teachers. Personal choice plays a limited role; assignments are based on regional needs and political considerations. Teachers continue to receive in-service training through local education departments, focusing on pedagogical improvement and continuous ideological study.

Periodic seminars, refresher courses, and “on-the-job” political sessions reinforce their dual responsibility as educators and ideological transmitters. The system ensures that loyalty to the state is maintained throughout a teacher’s career, blurring the lines between professional development and political reinforcement.

**6. Comparative Perspective**

Compared to teacher education systems in other socialist or post-socialist countries, North Korea’s model is among the most centralized and ideologically rigid. While countries such as China and Vietnam have gradually introduced reforms emphasizing modernization and pedagogical innovation, the DPRK continues to prioritize ideological conformity over educational autonomy. This has resulted in a stable but stagnant system—one that effectively reproduces state ideology but leaves little room for creative or critical pedagogies.

**7. Conclusion**

Teacher education in North Korea reflects the broader characteristics of its political system: centralization, control, and ideological cohesion. Teachers are both products and instruments of socialist order. The integration of pedagogy with political indoctrination ensures that education remains a strategic tool for the preservation of the regime. While the structure of teacher education provides consistency and discipline, it simultaneously limits innovation and the academic freedom. Understanding this duality is essential for interpreting how education functions not only as a means of instruction but also as a mechanism of governance in the DPRK.

**Education System and Teaching Profession in South Korea:**

**1.Introduction**

The South Korean education system, where the literacy rate reached 100% as a result of the education campaign launched by President Park Chung-hee, is a centrally planned structure that focuses on students' academic success and discipline. Education begins at age 7.

Educational Goals and Approach:

- The system aims to maximize students' academic potential.

- Discipline, dedication, and hard work are core educational values.

- Promoting equal opportunities and reducing poverty are key objectives. This is encapsulated in the saying: “Education is one of the most essential tools for families and nations in the fight against poverty.”

**2.Structure**

Primary and middle school education is compulsory. Compulsory education lasts 12 years, from primary school to the end of high school. The main stages of the education system are as follows:

- Elementary School (6 years): For children aged 7–12. Core subjects include Korean, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, English, Arts, and Physical Education.

- Middle School (3 years):

For students aged 12–15. Subjects include Mathematics, Science, English, Social Studies, Korean, and elective courses. School hours are approximately 6–7 hours per day, but students often attend private academies (hagwon) after school, bringing their total study time to 10–16 hours daily.

- High School (3 years):

For students aged 15–18. While not compulsory, it is widely attended to prepare for university entrance. High schools can be academic, technical, or arts-focused. Academic high schools are oriented toward university preparation; technical high schools provide vocational skills.

Curriculum includes Korean, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, English, electives, and extra preparatory courses.

**The Fırst Three Artıcles Of The Hıgh School Student Law In South Korea:**

**Artıcle 1:** If you sleep three hours every night, you can get ınto one of the top three universities

**Artıcle 2:** If you sleep four hours every night, you can get ınto another university.

**Artıcle 3:** If you sleep five hours or more every night (especially high school seniors), you cannot get ınto any university.

**University Entrance System in South Korea**

University entrance in South Korea is a pivotal point determining an individual's future. Students unable to enter university are often regarded as second-class citizens, driving middle and high school graduates to pursue university admission at any cost.

**University Admission System in South Korea**

University education is seen not only as personal achievement but also as a family's honor. Families invest heavily in their children's education. Being educated is a primary means of attaining social status and respect.

The university entrance process in South Korea is conducted through the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) or Suneung exam. This system is one of the most critical educational stages in the country and requires intensive preparation for students. Held annually in November. Students prepare intensively through high school and private academies (hagwon).

On exam day, the entire country adapts schedules, including traffic, flights, and public services, to accommodate the test.

- Exam Subjects: Korean language and literature, mathematics, science, foreign language, social studies.

- Scoring: Each subject is scored according to its own weight; the total score determines the student's ranking.

- University Selection: Based on the exam results, students apply to public and private universities. Placement is based on central quotas

South Korea attracts students from abroad due to its high-quality education and international recognition. Main countries of origin include:

- China, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia

- Students also come from the USA and European countries

International students primarily pursue studies in engineering, medicine, and business.

**Teacher Education And The Teaching Profession İn The Republic Of Korea:**

**1.Introduction**

Teaching in South Korea is among the most respected professions. Teachers are not only knowledge transmitters but also moral guides, cultural carriers, and shapers of national identity.

**2.Teacher Education and Training Programs**

Teacher education in South Korea is primarily offered at national universities of education for primary school teachers and at colleges of education within comprehensive universities for secondary school teachers. Programs typically last four years at the undergraduate level and include coursework in subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, educational psychology, and classroom management. In addition to university-based training, student teachers complete teaching practicums at partner schools.

**3.Admission, Professional Standards, and Certification**

Admission to teacher education programmes is highly competitive, reflecting the prestige and job security associated with the profession. Candidates must demonstrate strong academic performance and pass the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) to gain entry. Upon graduation, prospective teachers must pass the National Teacher Employment Examination, administered by provincial education offices, to receive certification and secure a teaching post.

**4.Teacher Training System**

- Teachers are specially trained in university education faculties.

- Pedagogical training, classroom management, and teaching methods are highly emphasized.

**5.Appointment and Career**

- Teacher candidates must pass the National Teacher Examination to be assigned to public schools.

- Career advancement depends on experience, performance, and participation in continuous professional development.

- Teachers regularly attend seminars and contribute to educational policy-making.

**6.Social Status and Cultural Value**

- İn South Korea, teachers are highly respected. The cultural expression **“Do not step on the teacher's shadow.”**, “**The Teacher İs Who Light The Society.”** reflects this respect.

- Teaching is viewed as a moral cornerstone for national development.

- However, high expectations, long working hours, and student exam pressure impose significant responsibility on teachers.

**7.Pedagogical Approach:**

- Teachers provide individual guidance to help students reach their academic potential.

- Active learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking are encouraged.

- The system is based on mutual respect between teachers and students.

**8.Professional Development and Career Progression**

Once employed, South Korean teachers engage in continuous professional development, including in-service training, advanced degree opportunities and performance-based evaluations. The government provides structured career ladders that allow teachers to move into senior positions, such as master teachers or school administrators, based on merit and experience. This emphasis on lifelong learning contributes to the high quality of education in South Korean schools.

**9. Comparative Insights**

Compared to North Korea’s highly centralized and ideologically driven teacher-training system, South Korea emphasizes professional autonomy, meritocracy, and pedagogical innovation. In an international context, South Korea shares similarities with other high-performing OECD countries, such as Finland and Singapore, particularly in the selective recruitment and rigorous training of teachers.

**8. Conclusion**

Factors That Bring Educational Success To South Korea;

* The High Share Allocated To Education From The General Budget,
* The Importance Given To Teacher Training,
* The Respect Shown To Teachers Within Society,
* The High Salaries of Teachers,
* The Importance Given To English Language Education,
* The Quality Approach In Higher Education,
* The Ambitious Goals In Science And Technology,
* The Effective Use of Information Technologies in Education,
* The Education of The Gifted.

The South Korean education system is characterized by intense competition, discipline, and long hours of study. University entrance determines not only personal success but also family and societal status. The teaching profession enjoys high respect and plays a critical role in maintaining educational quality. Moreover, South Korea continues to attract international students, reinforcing its position as a global educational hub.

South Korean society will never forget this statement by the president who launched the education campaign in the country.

**Educated Socıety Is A Happy Socıety.**

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