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Trends and Tasks for the lifelong Learning Society in Korea

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1 Introduction

In the knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century, lifelong development of skills has become one of the most important tasks for securing competitiveness of a nation. Advanced countries of OECD emphasize lifelong learning and vocational skills development as the major strategies for national survival, and Korea also makes efforts for establishing a streamlined, comprehensive vocational education system for adults by providing the programs that meet diversifying demands for lifelong learning and increasing the opportunity to gain access to lifelong learning. Based on the consensus that the educated knowledge workers are vital for a nation's competitiveness, Korea has upgraded the status of the former Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOEHRD) and proposed an overall blueprint for human resources development through education. With a recognition that the knowledge-based society cannot be crystallized without educational reform, the Korean government has launched various innovative projects.

One of its efforts was that the basic framework of education policy has been extended from the past focus on school education to the realm of lifelong education. It is impossible for individuals to acquire the knowledge and information demanded today only through several years of school education in the knowledge-based society, where new knowledge and information are produced on a daily basis. Now, one cannot accomplish a successful social life and self-realization by adapting oneself to the newly occurring changes in the environment, unless he or she continues learning throughout lifetime beyond completion of formal schooling. Especially in consideration of the continued extension of human lifespan thanks to the tremendous advances made in the field of medical technology, lifelong education is being called for with added urgency.

To meet those demands of the age, the Korean government has implemented lifelong education policies, such as producing the programs designed to promote lifelong skills development of all citizens, securing the budget to promote lifelong learning, and establishing the institutional framework to buttress those programs.

The fundamental direction of Korea's lifelong education policy is based upon the Lifelong Education Law promulgated in 1999. With an assessment that a comprehensive and systematic plan for adopting the lifelong education system is

necessary following the enforcement of the Lifelong Education Law, the Comprehensive Plan to Promote Lifelong Learning was established in 2001. The Plan contains enforcement measures related to diverse forms of lifelong education to be implemented for the next five years based on the following directions: increasing the opportunity for lifelong learning and seeking regional equalization; seeking localization of lifelong learning to promote lifelong learning culture at local level; strengthening the support for lifelong learning of the educationally disadvantaged strata; transforming workspaces into learning organization and activating lifelong vocational education in the private sector; and strengthening the infra structure of lifelong learning to provide quality programs of lifelong learning¹⁾. Those directions are attuned to the dominant trends among the advanced countries reflected in the guidelines for lifelong learning policy developed and implemented by UNESCO, OECD, EU, and G8, and the comprehensive plans to promote lifelong learning proposed by the leading countries of the knowledge-based economy such as Finland, Germany, Singapore, U.K., and U.S., which view the twenty-first century as the age of knowledge-society and lifelong learning.

This article intends to review the development of lifelong education in Korea, which has been accelerated with the promulgation of the Lifelong Education Law in 1999 and the announcement of the Comprehensive Plan to Promote Lifelong Learning in 2002.

2 Towards for the Learning Age

The policy aimed at strengthening the conditions and quality of adult learning is made mainly by the Lifelong Education Policy Bureau of MOEHRD and implemented by the National Center for Lifelong Education. In the Comprehensive Plan to Promote Lifelong Learning announced in 2002, MOEHRD has proposed 27 tasks and 100 concrete measures that will be implemented for the next five years. The Plan pursues the vision of "joy of learning and sharing, and realization of the learning society" and designated the following five directions for implementation: first, increasing opportunity for lifelong learning for all and seeking balanced distribution of the opportunity; second, localizing lifelong learning through promotion of the local learning culture; third, strengthening the support policy for lifelong learning to help the educationally disadvantaged strata; fourth, transforming workplace into a learning organization and energizing lifelong vocational education in the private sector; and fifth, strengthening the base for lifelong education to provide the lifelong learning of high quality.

Also in May, 2002, a meeting was held, attended by the ministers related to education and human resources and presided over by the Prime Minister, which resulted in announcement of the Measures to Activate Adults' Vocational Education designed to support increasing dramatically adults' participation in

vocational education and training. On July 5th, the implementation plan for the Construction of the System to Develop Lifelong Vocational Skills was announced; the implementation plan is part of the Basic Plan for Human Resources Development of the Nation determined as a joint agenda of MOEHRD, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, and Ministry of Labor. Also, the Human Resources Development Council has passed the Plan to Support Development of the Skills of the Socially Marginalized Strata, produced by five ministers including MOEHRD with the goal of seeking social integration by mitigating the knowledge gap and digital divide among different social strata, regions, and generations. These series of actions have proven themselves to be a momentum for generating a concrete policy to construct the base for strengthening the learning condition and quality of adult learning.

3 Enactment of Lifelong Laws

Strengthening the conditions and quality of adult learning is based on the Lifelong Education Law. The Lifelong Education Law is aimed at contributing to improving the quality of life for the citizens and developing the society by providing the increased opportunity for lifelong learning, which can be given to anyone, anyplace, and anytime in the knowledge-based society; its visions are summarized as the construction of the open education society and the lifelong learning society. The Lifelong Education Law was an expanded and revised version of the lifelong education Law promulgated in 1982. The Lifelong Education Law was promulgated in August, 1999 and was implemented from March, 2000, with the announcement of its Enforcement Act; it was partially amended in January, 2001. The Lifelong Education Law specifies that the government and local governing bodies establish lifelong education facilities and encourage and support starting of lifelong education by various organizations and in various workspaces for the purpose of promoting and supporting lifelong learning of the citizens²⁾. Particularly, for the national-level research and training, the National Center for Lifelong Education was established under MOEHRD, and the local information centers for lifelong learning were to be managed by the National Center. At the same time, an institutional arrangement has been made to practice the 'paid learning vacation,' and the support system has been shaped to strengthen the conditions and quality of adult learning as well as various means of certifying scholastic attainment and degree acquisition.

The Educational Credit Bank System is a system through which individual citizen can accumulate his or her learning record and utilize it for acquiring degrees or certificates; it was designed to increase opportunity for acquiring scholastic degrees through diverse learning experiences. The Educational Credit Bank System is based on the Law on Credit Hour Recognition and Such; it was implemented from March, 1997 and was partially amended in March, 2001.

4 Building of Lifelong Education System

According to the Lifelong Education Law, the government and local governing bodies established the organs devoted to supporting lifelong education to strengthen the conditions and quality of adult learning. Those organs devoted to supporting lifelong education are the National Center for Lifelong Education in charge of the national-level support for lifelong education, the local information centers for lifelong education at the metropolitan and provincial level, and the lifelong learning center at city and county level.

The National Center for Lifelong Education was established within the Korean Educational Development Institute on March 29th, 2000. The Center is responsible for research on lifelong education, training of the personnel of lifelong education, and collecting and distributing the information on lifelong education. Also, the Center is delegated the role of selecting, supporting, and connecting the 16 local information centers for lifelong education and the lifelong learning center at the community level.

The functions of the local information centers for lifelong education are as follows: (1) constructing a system of mutual connection with the National Center for Lifelong Education; (2) constructing a system of mutual connection with the local associations and facilities of lifelong education; (3) operating as the regional lifelong learning hall; (4) providing information and consultation on lifelong education; (5) training the personnel of lifelong education institutions; and (6) developing and managing the lifelong education programs for local residents. The projects given the highest priority by the local information centers for lifelong education are constructing a system of mutual connection with the National Center for Lifelong Education and constructing a system of mutual connection with the local associations and facilities of lifelong education.

Under the local information centers for lifelong education, there are 255 lifelong learning centers in the cities and counties nation-wide as of December, 2003.

5 Promotion for Adults' Participation

The rate of the adults' participation in lifelong learning was 17.4 percent in 1996 and 17.2 percent in 2000, maintaining a similar level. In 2002, the percentage of those who participated in lifelong learning was higher among men than among women, among those at the age 20 through 29 than the other age groups, and among those with higher level of educational attainment than the rest³⁾.

The systemic support measures to promote adults' participation in learning include the paid and unpaid learning vacation and the educational account system specified in the Lifelong Education Law; the support measures apply to the lifelong education facilities in the form of school, lifelong education facilities that qualify

learners for formal schooling, corporate colleges, and distance universities. Also, the Educational Credit Bank System is managed based on the Law on Credit Hour Recognition and Such, and the system of acquiring academic degree through independent study is managed based on the Law on Acquisition of Academic Degree through Independent Study. In addition, other support measures are being considered, such as supporting expenditure for managing special learning programs, giving discount on the learning expense, and providing tax deduction for the lifelong learning expense.

At the same time, the government has been constructing a comprehensive information system that collects, supervises, and disseminates the information on lifelong education systematically and efficiently as an effort to provide a comprehensive and systematic service of information supervision for adult education. The information system provides citizens with a base upon which they can utilize the information on learning that is suitable to themselves efficiently in the given 'information environment.' At present, the National Center for Lifelong Education is in charge of constructing the infra structure for the information on lifelong education⁴).

Also, the government has launched the campaign to build the lifelong learning cities and villages to create the learning culture and to link learning with the local activities in an effort to strengthen the conditions and quality of adults' learning. The government has also initiated the following actions: increasing the learners' motivation for lifelong learning, promoting participation in lifelong learning, spreading social recognition of lifelong learning, and celebrating and sharing the achievement in lifelong learning through a learning festival.

6 Richness of Related Research

Research studies in the field of adult learning and lifelong education policy have been enlivened since the establishment of the National Center for Lifelong Education. Among the recent studies, the most noticeable ones are concerning the system to support lifelong education: they discuss the vision of lifelong education at both the national and local levels and the plan to manage a new system. Since Korea is at the stage of introducing the system to support lifelong education for the first time in the government sector, the government appears to stress establishing the mid- and long-term management strategies.

The second most noticeable research studies are concerning the system of training and placing the lifelong education officers. In these studies, serious exploring has been attempted to indicate the problems in the current practice of training the specialists of lifelong education, who are to lead the scenes of lifelong education in Korea, and to propose the strategies for improvement.

In the third place, research studies on adults' basic education have been continually carried out. These studies are inclined to the survey of the current

status of literacy in general, rather than proposing the literacy policy. Current status of literacy has been investigated in considerations of different background factors, and compared with the international standard.

Other research studies have dealt with the basic aspects related to adult learning and imminent tasks, including the Development of the Index of Lifelong Education (2002), Study on the Means to Adopt the System of Evaluating and Accrediting Lifelong Education Programs (2002), and the Study on the Strategies to Cope with the Opening of the Adult Education Market under the WTO Treaty (2002).

Research on lifelong education has been energized in the civilian sector, as well. Diverse research studies on adult learning have been conducted in the academia, with the Korean Association of Lifelong Education Research as the focal point. The Association has been launching energetic activities as the central association in the field of adult learning research, opening academic conferences for the recent three years with the following themes:

- Lifelong education research in Korea (2001)
Tasks of lifelong education to form the local community (2001)
- Grand shift of the educational paradigm in lifelong education, studies on lifelong education, and the lifelong learning age (2002)
- Diagnosis of and direction for the lifelong education system of Korea (2003)

7 Systematic and Continual Training Systems

The Lifelong Education Law offered the basis for transforming the previous system for certifying the special personnel of Lifelong education into the present system of certifying the lifelong education officers. Based on the Article Number 17 (on university) and Number 18 (on training institution), the certificate of lifelong education officer is given to those who have earned required credit hours related to lifelong education. Thus, there are dual tracks of training the new personnel in the university and training those already in service. The lifelong education officers assume the role of implementing lifelong education efficiently by planning, managing, analyzing, evaluating, and instructing lifelong education programs to improve educational achievement.

Systematic and continual training programs have been provided to strengthen professionalism of the lifelong education officers currently in service. The National Center for Lifelong Education and the local information centers for lifelong education hold study meetings and training sessions, conduct the survey of the general status of the personnel in lifelong education and their demand for training, and develop appropriate curriculum.

8 Empowering Adult Learners

The most noteworthy effort among all the policies for strengthening the capacities of adult learners is adoption of the Comprehensive Information System of Lifelong Education. The information system is geared to strengthening the capacities of the learners in that it has increased the learners' choice and raised the quality of learning by enabling the learners to access more diverse and broad information related to lifelong education.

The Comprehensive Information System of Lifelong Education, launched in the National Center for Lifelong Education in 2002, targets in constructing a nation of knowledge power through diffusion of the information on lifelong learning. The System has focused on providing the citizens with the information on lifelong education through a one-stop procedure by collecting and organizing the information systematically, on the one hand, and constructing the vertical and horizontal network among the National Center, local information centers for lifelong education, and various associations of lifelong education, on the other. The system is expected to enable the citizens to obtain the information they need with the minimum effort and cost and to optimize economic efficiency by preventing overlapping investment at the national level. Also, the information system contributes to increasing the adult learners' accessibility to learning by providing the learners and lifelong education officers with educational programs via the e-learning on the Internet.

Another noteworthy policy for strengthening the capacities of adult learners is the project to support the programs for the socially alienated strata, which has increased the learning opportunity of the adults of the strata. Since 2001, MOEHRD along with the National Center for Lifelong Education have been spearheading a project to develop and support the lifelong learning programs for the low-income population, persons with low educational attainment, the aged, and the physically handicapped, with the goals of increasing the opportunity of the alienated population to participate in lifelong education and helping them to initiate self-rehabilitation and to improve the quality of life⁵⁾.

9 Examples of Best Practices

9.1 Project to Build the Lifelong Learning City

The project to build the lifelong learning city has been intended to offer an opportunity for communal learning and growth in the local community. It seeks to energize local community through formation of the learning economy system, achieve social integration to revitalize the sense of local community and solidarity that have been greatly weakened, and realize the learning community. Selecting the project to build the lifelong learning city as its policy, MOEHRD has been supporting 0.2 billion won each to the regions designated for the project, including

the city of Gwangmyeong in Gyeonggi Province, Jinan county in Jeonbuk Province, and Yuseong district in Daejeon metropolis in 2001, and the city of Jeju in Jeju Island, city of Bucheon in Gyeonggi Province, and Haeundae district in Busan metropolis in 2002⁶). At the same time, the relevant local governing bodies are required to invest in promoting local lifelong learning in the form of a matching fund.

9.2 Lifelong Learning Festival

With the first nation-wide lifelong learning festival held in Cheonan in 2001 as the model, local festivals have been convened in 10 regions in 2002, including Gyeonggi Province, Busan, Daegu, and Daejeon; the second nation-wide festival is planned to be held in Daejeon in September, 2003. In those festivals, there have been such events as the cultural fair for enlivening local flavor and instilling love for the community. MOEHRD plans to increase its administrative and financial support for the lifelong learning festival to make it develop into a national festival for all citizens as well as a village festival for local community.

9.3 Providing Opportunity for Lifelong Learning Using the School Facilities

MOEHRD has designated 16 schools (7 elementary and 9 middle schools), one each for each of the metropolitan or provincial regions, as lifelong education model schools in order to strengthen the conditions for adult learning by promoting opening and utilization of the schools at all levels. Also, universities can now only report to the Ministry, instead of report and obtain permission, on its establishment of affiliated lifelong education institute, which is expected to promote local residents' utilization of the high quality human and physical resources of the universities. As of August, 2002, a total of 6,560 courses in general and vocational education are offered in 371 lifelong education institutes in 325 universities.

9.4 Increasing the Opportunity for Lifelong Learning of the Aged

Policies for education of the aged have been continually launched since the basic plan to activate education of the aged was established in 1999. To raise professionalism of the personnel in education of the aged, the government supports universities to manage the courses, which train the staffs and specialists of the educational institution for the aged, at their affiliated institutes of lifelong education. By 2001, 1,460 persons have completed the training courses. And policy research for developing the programs of education of the aged has been carried out, including the Research on Developing an Educational Program for Social Adaptation of the People Expected to Retire. Also, the plan for human resources development of the aged was established in January, 2002, focusing on the construction of the infra structure for education of the aged, increasing opportunity of the aged for social participation, and promoting dialog between generations. The government has stressed creating a base for implementing the

plan, in line with its continued emphasis upon activating education of the aged.

9.5 Managing the Golden Color Service for Lifelong Education

The Golden Color Service for Lifelong Education was inaugurated in May, 2002, with its 1,500 members nation-wide. MOEHRD launched the project for the Golden Color Service for Lifelong Education to energize lifelong learning and seek human resources development at local community level by adopting a new connective model of "Utilizing the Human Resources of the Retired + Lifelong Education + Volunteer Service," which utilizes the retired people as volunteers for lifelong education. The project is aimed at, first, constructing the base for lifelong education at local level that utilizes all the resources of the local community and second, enabling the aged to have energetic lives as specialists of lifelong education in local community after retirement from their occupations, through continuous education and supervision of the volunteers.

10 Policy Tasks of the Future

Today, it is necessary to go beyond the school-centered education and strengthen adult learning by rapidly absorbing the knowledge demanded in the global and domestic markets and providing the education that fits the changing reality, so that the human resources necessary for the economy can be supplied at the optimal point. The lifelong learning policy should start from establishing the system that frees the citizens from various limitations and obstacles, so that anyone who needs learning can learn, and such learning is not discriminated vis-a-vis school education. For effective implementation of such policies and systemic maneuver, administrative and financial support of the government should be strengthened⁷⁾. What follows presents a summary of the policy tasks for promoting lifelong learning to be pursued at the national level.

10.1 Expanding Investment to Increase Participation in Lifelong Education

The proportion of the Korean adults who participate in lifelong learning remains 17.2 percent as of 2000⁸⁾. Although direct comparison is difficult, compared with the 30 to 40 percent participation rate exhibited in the advanced countries, the Korean case is still underdeveloped. Thus, it is necessary in the future, above all, to secure the budget for establishing the system and increasing investment for raising participation of adults in lifelong learning at the national level. In the first place, the support for socially disadvantaged strata should be expanded. The government should strengthen its support by proclaiming that it is the State's responsibility as well as individual's duty for every citizen to receive school education at least at the level of middle school education. In the second place, the current support for the project to build the lifelong learning cities should be extended beyond the present term of one year.

10.2 Strengthening the Support System for Lifelong Education

In order to energize lifelong education, it is necessary to strengthen the organs entitled to implement the lifelong education policies responsibly at both national and local levels and expand the role of such organs in the local community⁹⁾. For such a purpose, first, it is necessary to strengthen step by step the National Center for Lifelong Education, currently within the Korean Educational Development Institute, in a way that the Center can fulfill its function as an organ devoted to lifelong education at the national level. The Center should be enabled to carry out the function of the National Center for Lifelong Education in practice as well as in name by securing appropriate facilities and administrative and research staffs to undertake research studies, various training activities, and collection and distribution of data. Second, it is necessary to strengthen the support for lifelong education at local level. With the introduction of the five-workdays-per-week in the Korean society, it is expected that a big bang will take place in the demand for the educational programs that connect individual's leisure hours with learning. To prepare for the new demand, new strategies should be taken into account, for instance, restructuring various lifelong education institutions, opening schools at all levels and universities to local residents and allowing them to use school programs and facilities, and supporting the activities that spontaneously arose in the local community, such as learning organizations and learning clubs.

10.3 Raising the Citizens' Understanding of Lifelong Learning

Although many experts and policy-makers have stressed the importance of lifelong education in the conferences and academic conventions both in Korea and abroad, the Korean society needs more dramatic shift in its atmosphere to actually produce the envisioned change. There should be a pan-governmental movement for lifelong learning in order to create a momentum for steering Korea into a lifelong learning society. First, a social consensus should be formed through promulgation of the 'lifelong learning day' and opening of the citizens' learning festivals; and second, new success stories of various lifelong education programs contributing to the Korean society should be continuously discovered and presented to the citizens. Through such efforts, both the citizens and the policy-makers can share the valuable meaning of lifelong learning and communicate the need for policy-making aimed at increasing the investment in lifelong learning.

Notes

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