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Scientific articles

Análisis de la educación en Corea del Sur: confucianismo, desarrollo económico y familia

***Analysis of education in South Korea: Confucianism, economic development
and family***

***Análise da educação na Coreia do Sul: Confucionismo, desenvolvimento
econômico e família***

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Resumen

La investigación tuvo como objetivo explorar las características de la educación en Corea del Sur, centrándose en tres elementos esenciales: confucianismo, desarrollo económico y familia, aspectos que son fundamentales en la sociedad coreana. Este estudio cualitativo se desarrolló con un enfoque narrativo biográfico y de estudio de caso. Se utilizaron como herramientas de recopilación de datos la observación, el diario de campo y las entrevistas realizadas a cuatro docentes de escuelas primarias en Corea del Sur. Para enriquecer el análisis, se llevó a cabo una revisión bibliográfica sobre confucianismo, familia y educación. Además, se incluyeron las vivencias de un docente mexicano residente en Corea, quien trabajó como instructor multicultural en varias escuelas primarias de Seúl a través del Mizy Center, centro administrado por la Comisión Nacional Coreana para la Fundación Daesan y



respaldado por el gobierno metropolitano de Seúl, el cual se dedica a fomentar el intercambio cultural internacional entre jóvenes coreanos mediante conferencias y diversas actividades con extranjeros.

Los hallazgos del estudio revelan que la educación en Corea del Sur se sustenta en gran medida en la ética confuciana, que enfatiza la piedad filial; es decir, el amor y respeto de los hijos hacia los padres, lo cual se manifiesta en una serie de obligaciones familiares (Choi, 2010). También se identificó que el contexto económico, cultural y familiar influye significativamente en los logros educativos de los estudiantes coreanos.

Palabras clave: Educación, confucianismo, familia.

Abstract

The research aimed to explore the characteristics of education in South Korea, focusing on three essential elements: Confucianism, economic development, and family, which are fundamental in Korean society. This qualitative study was developed using a narrative and case study approach. Observation, field diary, and interviews with four primary school teachers in South Korea were used as data collection tools. A bibliographic review of Confucianism, family, and education was carried out to enrich the analysis. In addition, the experiences of a Mexican teacher living in Korea were included. He worked as a multicultural instructor in several primary schools in Seoul through the Mizy Center, a center managed by the Korean National Commission for the Daesan Foundation and supported by the Seoul metropolitan government, which is dedicated to promoting international cultural exchange among Korean youth through conferences and various activities with foreigners. The study's findings reveal that education in South Korea is largely based on Confucian ethics, which emphasize filial piety, that is, the love and respect of children towards their parents, manifested in a series of family obligations (Choi, 2010). It was also identified that the economic, cultural and family context significantly influences the educational achievements of Korean students.

Keywords: Education, Confucianism, family

Resumo

A pesquisa teve como objetivo explorar as características da educação na Coreia do Sul, com foco em três elementos essenciais: o confucionismo, o desenvolvimento econômico e a família, aspectos fundamentais na sociedade coreana. Este estudo qualitativo foi desenvolvido com abordagem narrativa e estudo de caso. Observação, diários de campo e entrevistas com quatro professores do ensino primário na Coreia do Sul foram utilizados como instrumentos de recolha de dados. Para enriquecer a análise, foi realizada uma revisão bibliográfica sobre confucionismo, família e educação. Além disso, foram incluídas as experiências de uma professora mexicana radicada na Coreia, que trabalhou como instrutora multicultural em diversas escolas primárias de Seul através do Mizy Center, centro administrado pela Comissão Nacional Coreana para a Fundação Daesan e apoiado pelo governo metropolitano de Seul, que se dedica a promover o intercâmbio cultural internacional entre jovens coreanos através de conferências e diversas atividades com estrangeiros.

As conclusões do estudo revelam que a educação na Coreia do Sul é em grande parte baseada na ética confucionista, que enfatiza a piedade filial, ou seja, o amor e o respeito dos filhos para com os pais, que se manifesta numa série de obrigações familiares (Choi, 2010). . Identificou-se também que o contexto económico, cultural e familiar influencia significativamente o desempenho escolar dos estudantes coreanos.

Palavras-chave: Educação, confucionismo, família.

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Introduction

To understand Korean society more is needed to live in it; it is crucial to delve into its essence and mentality. To delve into this culture – as with any other – it is preferable to master its language and study its history from within to understand its evolution. Throughout this experience, not only as a multicultural instructor but also as a foreigner living in Korea, it is observed that "the Korean does not like to be last. He may not always be first, but he does not want to be last" (Rhie, 2002, p. 64). This is also reflected in education. The competition among students to not be last in class drives them to try harder.

South Korea, the Asian country, has amazed the world with its so-called “economic miracle” which was the result of a change of mentality and the efforts of the Korean people. In 1918, South Korea was under the domination of Japan, regaining its independence after



World War II in August 1945. However, the joy soon faded due to the war between the two Koreas in 1950. This year was truly disastrous for the country: five million people died, and the territory was devastated. South Korea and North Korea began the war on June 25, 1950, and ended with the promulgation of the Korean Armistice Agreement, a non-aggression treaty, on July 27, 1953. By then, South Korea was the least developed country in the world (Choi, 2018).

However, the country insisted on its recovery, and for this, the priority was education, which became the fundamental secret of its economic development. Therefore, the history of South Korea presented progress and high economic growth due to the passion for education; this was the engine to continue investing in it and the source that produced the professional human force for industrial development and, at the same time, the push that directed economic development. Although all of South Korea was destroyed, it found a fundamental force that contributed to its reconstruction: education (Choi, 2018).

The study is approached from four specific perspectives on how education is experienced in Korea. First, as a student of the Korean language; second, as a PhD student in Sociology at a Korean university; third, as a multicultural instructor in primary school; and fourth, by analyzing the results of interviews with four teachers. By combining personal experiences as a foreigner in South Korea with theoretical and historical foundations, we can approach this ancient culture that, since its independence in 1945, has managed to establish itself as a developed nation with high educational standards worldwide.

South Korea is a unique case in the international context. It is well known that until recently, it was among the most backward economies. Still, thanks to its persistence (among other factors) and investment in education, it has become one of the most stable economies in the world (Rhie, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to ask how South Korea has reached the top in education. What are the characteristics of its teachers? What are its students like? What is the educational model in Korea? Finally, the central question of the research is: what are the characteristics of education in South Korea, and what factors have contributed to its success in international educational evaluations?

Although finding definitive answers to these questions requires in-depth multidisciplinary analysis, the experiences lived in this country will allow us to approach the human aspect of education in South Korea. Given this, the following general objective of the research is proposed, which aims to examine the characteristics of education in South Korea, emphasizing Confucianism, economic development, and family. The following specific

objectives are also recorded: 1) Describe the experiences lived as a multicultural instructor in primary schools; 2) Analyze the contributions of the teachers interviewed in primary schools, highlighting values and achievements; and 3) Compare the cultural and educational aspects between South Korea and Mexico, highlighting differences and similarities.

Theoretical foundation

The analysis of education in South Korea is based on the following four theoretical currents (Choi, 2018): 1) Functionalism theory, 2) Conflict theory, 3) Theory of economic development and education, and 4) Theory of collective tradition and education.

Functionalism theory argues that education contributes to the maintenance and continuity of society by providing opportunities for social mobility through developing personal skills, which helps reduce social inequality. Therefore, increasing access to education and individual effort leads to economic development. Conflict theory argues that although access to education may improve, inequality persists according to socioeconomic status. To address this inequality, modifying the social structure to promote equality is necessary.

The theory of economic development and education suggests that education facilitates the learning of knowledge, enables the implementation of new technologies, and forms a professional workforce, which is crucial for economic growth. The Korean collective tradition theory indicates that if everyone fulfills their roles and cooperates, aligns thoughts and actions, and will toward a common goal, education can also boost economic development (Choi, 2018).

Examples illustrating these theories in South Korea are as follows:

1. Functionalism: Korean parents support their children's education, seeing it as the only way to achieve social mobility.
2. Conflict: Factors such as socioeconomic status affect university access, with differences in admission rates across regions. Korea implemented a regional selection system for students from different areas.
3. Economic Development and Education: The Korean state adopted educational policies to foster economic development, such as reducing illiteracy, expanding primary education, creating more educational institutions, and generating a professional workforce.

4. Collective tradition and education: The New Community Movement in South Korea promoted cooperation and a change of mentality, uniting the population with the common goal of economic development (Choi, 2018).

From this line of analysis, a more significant number of well-trained workers allows for more excellent production. In other words, increasing human capital accelerates economic growth. Therefore, education is essential for economic development, as it increases the workforce and the knowledge needed to implement new technologies, improving productivity and fostering economic development (Choi, 2018).

From this perspective, South Korea's success is not only due to the significant investment in education but also to the strict educational discipline that includes learning English, long study hours, patriotism, punctuality, and mentality formation. Private education is rigorous. In early childhood education, English is practiced through videos, cartoons, books, and music. Thus, the educational environment becomes mandatory and competitive, as most students attend academic institutes to advance beyond what they have learned in school (Choi, 2018).

Based on what has been reviewed and observed in the context of South Korea, the educational pressure on students is extreme. But this has its reward, since, with a higher academic level, the percentage of employment and the average salary increase significantly. In other words, a high educational level makes it easier to obtain jobs and improves salaries, a common phenomenon in developed countries. Therefore, education investment is profitable (Choi, 2018).

The Korean case of conflict theory shows that, in South Korea, education is crucial. Those without a college degree (also applies to the Mexican context) are marginalized and economic wealth is essential to receive a good education. From pre-university education, the importance of entering the best universities is evident and Korean parents invest all their capital in their children's education from kindergarten onwards. Therefore, prestigious universities tend to accept students of high social status, who received a better previous education. Therefore, obtaining a degree from a prestigious university is advantageous for social advancement and recognition (Choi, 2018).

The Korean education system includes six years of primary school, three years of middle school, three years of high school, and four years of university. Primary and secondary education are free and covered by the state, while higher education is divided into two semesters per year, starting in March and September respectively. At the same time,

education classifies people into different levels. The questions are designed to be difficult enough to classify students in the university entrance exam, which is held once a year. This phenomenon also applies to companies with high selection requirements, using education to classify candidates (Choi, 2018).

In large industrial conglomerates (Chaebol), high-level employees come from the country's top universities, and their social relationships influence salary variation, motivating people to compete for better jobs and professional skills. Therefore, personal study time in South Korea exceeds the world average, with students taking additional hours at private institutions to further their studies. At the same time, educational institutions also require volunteer work for university admission. Students carry out these activities in nursing homes, prisons, juvenile rehabilitation centers, and among vulnerable populations. In addition, the state offers scholarships to low-income students, guaranteeing education for the entire population (Choi, 2018).

Education is, therefore, a priority for both the country and families. Parents severely instruct their children, even during days off, encouraging continuous learning. This extreme educational competition motivates students to achieve top grades and a prominent social position, driven by the labor market that rewards high scores. Consequently, students in South Korea experience a “bottleneck education,” characterized by rigid methodologies that do not consider students’ abilities, understanding, or interests. This education, geared toward meeting the needs of the labor market without encouraging critical thinking, can create a disconnect between students and teachers (Choi, 2018).

The Korean sociocultural context discourages the development of argumentative and critical skills, accustoming young people to receiving knowledge without subjectively evaluating it. This leads to a lack of self-reflection on learning, focusing only on professional success without considering personal well-being. At the same time, students who do not enter higher education must repeat exams up to three times, which motivates them to study hard, as higher education is critical to securing a position in the labor market. Therefore, the social hierarchy in South Korea demands obedience and discipline in the educational system, forcing parents to strive to offer the best education and quality of life to their children. However, this competitiveness can generate a selfish mentality in children, who focus on competing without considering the well-being of others (Choi, 2018).

South Korea encourages bilingualism by sending young people abroad to hone their skills. Parents also teach sharing knowledge from childhood. Furthermore, books in South

Korea are accessible, and libraries equipped with modern technology are open 24 hours a day for students. Museums offer interactive educational programs, and high-speed Wi-Fi makes it easy to access academic learning anywhere and anytime. Therefore, academic institutions provide high-quality international experiences, such as trips to developed countries and academic and cultural institutions. The state offers scholarships for underprivileged students, improving educational quality (Choi, 2018).

In this sense, the "Korean miracle" is also due to the cooperation between the people, government, and businesses, with a patriotic mindset that aligned thought, will, and action toward the development of the nation. Although inequalities persist, education has been vital in creating a professional workforce, the basis of economic growth. Education, regardless of the sociocultural context, drives the advancement of a nation. Therefore, the theory of functionalism may be insufficient because it ignores factors such as economic power, family status, and gender and focuses only on personal effort and ability (Choi, 2018).

On these arguments, Yang (2010) points out that the obsession with education is a widely researched phenomenon in South Korea, where individual education has acquired considerable relevance in the family environment. However, most studies focus on the effects of education on students without considering family dynamics. Many families allocate more resources than they can manage exclusively to education, leading to 'education fever' and negatively affecting the family economy.

This situation arises from the obsession with preparation beyond what public schools offer. Parents seek private education, tutors, and support classes to ensure the best grades for their children. Yang (2010) poses three key questions to understand how this affects Korean society: a) Why do Korean families invest so many resources in their children's education? b) Is this due to the Confucian tradition of the Joseon dynasty? and c) Is it a result of the neoliberal model that has rapidly transformed Korean society?

These questions are for Koreans to answer, but from the beginning of my Korean studies, I could see this country's importance to education, the speed with which students are expected to learn, and the importance of devoting extra time outside of class time. To improve my performance in Korean classes, I had to hire a private tutor and advance my studies during vacations. Competing with Chinese, Mongolian, and Japanese students, for whom Korean is more familiar, is a great challenge for Latin American students.

Reflecting on the above and applying it to the Mexican context, it is pertinent to ask: What do Mexican families spend most of their resources on? How is family spending

distributed in Mexico, and why? What differences and similarities do we find in both cultures regarding spending allocation and the importance given to education? This analysis shows how Korean family dynamics focus on one primary objective: children must be the best at any cost.

Yang (2010) notes that "education fever" implies a dedication to study despite adversity. It also refers to the effort to develop human talent despite the bad experiences of Japanese colonization and the postwar period. Furthermore, Yang offers a negative interpretation by presenting Korean society as obsessed with obtaining degrees from prestigious universities in Korea and abroad. This has led to increased private education, and spending on education has moved from third to second place after food.

Yang (2010) explains that examinations have been crucial in Korea's educational development. During the Joseon Dynasty, the civil service entrance exam was a rite of passage to a higher status of life and privileges, accessible only to the privileged classes. Benefits included official recognition, government employment, and maintenance of family social status. Civil service and university examinations remain extremely important today, with an industry dedicated to preparing students for these challenges.

The college entrance exam is the most significant event in the lives of Korean teenagers and affects their families as well. High schools are heavily involved in ensuring that their students get into the best universities, which gives prestige to the institution and its teachers. During Japanese colonization (1910-1945), Korea adopted the Japanese education system, and although the Japanese wanted to maintain a docile population, education began to correlate with the labor hierarchy. After the Korean War, merit became the means to upward mobility.

In the 1980s, only high school students attended private academies. In the 1990s, this trend spread to kindergarten, primary, and secondary school students. Globalization and neoliberalism have made the Korean education system very strict, although changes have recently been introduced to encourage creativity and excellence.

Korea's rapid economic development has led to increased internationalization, making overseas study a requirement to compete globally. Parents invest in language courses and send their children abroad to learn English and other relevant languages. One phenomenon is the "goose father," where the mother and child move to an English-speaking country while the father sends money from Korea. The "eagle father" is a more recent, well-off version of this phenomenon.

Yang (2010) warns that the obsession with getting into the best universities and the vast family investment in education have overheated the system, deteriorating young people's competitiveness. This "overheating" suggests that, although the "educational fever" has benefited Korea's development, a model change is necessary to adapt to the new times.

Importance of Confucianism in Korean Education

Confucianism came to Korea from China around the 17th century and has significantly impacted Korean society, making it one of the most adherent to these principles. According to this ideology, society is an extension of the family. But what benefits does Confucianism bring? Without going into historical or philosophical details, the first benefit of this ideology is observed in the country's economic development.

Korea achieved both economic development and the establishment of democracy after its independence. Although the causes of its economic growth are diverse, the analysis focuses on distinctive characteristics of the Korean people: their unwavering diligence, obedience to authority, self-sacrifice, devotion to the group, high savings rates, and zeal for education. All of these characteristics are aligned with the teachings of Confucianism.

Arnaiz (2004) mentions that Confucius promoted the "rectification of men", that is, fulfilling responsibilities and duties through justice and benevolence. Justice refers to "what should be" and benevolence, as a material essence, to the duty of "loving others". A key aspect of Confucianism is filial piety, which implies the worship and respect of parents and the family bond.

One factor that drove industrialization in Korea was the adoption of Western technology, which required a highly educated population. The high levels of education and excellent scores of Koreans on international tests are due to this zeal for education, which is considered the number one priority in life.

This desire for education not only contributed to economic development but also to the process of democratization. Korea evolved under a military regime that did not allow freedom of expression, but unlike other emerging nations, it always had a low illiteracy rate. An educated population paved the way for democratic governments.

Korea continues to build its democracy. The first civilian president was elected in 1988, and since then, society has continued its democratization process. In terms of speed, Korea was relatively quick to leave behind dictatorial rule. From 1945, when it was liberated

from Japanese colonization to 1988, when the first civilian president was elected, it took 43 years for Korea to become a democratic country.

Korea is still building, learning, and experimenting as a relatively new independent nation. The mixture of Confucianism and dictatorial rule has left its mark today. The younger generation demands more space for expression and is increasingly influenced by the West. The speed of daily life and the Internet have created a society that seeks immediate results.

Technological connections in Korea are high-speed, connecting virtually anywhere in the country, from a small coffee shop in a village to any library or office. Although Korea's future depends on its inhabitants, the influence of Confucianism is evident in its development as a nation.

In light of what we have seen in Korea, it is worth questioning where we want to take our students from our educational spaces. The current complex scenario in Mexico requires overcoming habits, customs, and myths from previous generations; however, teachers have the ability to influence our students in various ways.

State of the art

Regardless of one's experiences as a foreigner in Korea, theoretical material on education is abundant, published in Korean, English, and Spanish. For example, Garcia and Arachavaleta's (2011) study claims that the educational success of South Korean students is due to a series of structures, pressures, values, and goals present in Korean school culture and society rather than to the intrinsic virtues of Korean schools.

They conclude that the reasons for educational success in Korea correspond to three essential factors: 1) the high esteem for education in Korean society, derived from the legacy of Confucian ethics, which is crucial to students' enthusiasm for education; 2) the Korean family structure, whose Confucian practices and attributes of "filial piety" have proven to be effective in academic success and in the low percentage of school failure; and 3) the communion of principles and objectives between Korean parents and teachers, together with the high esteem and respect for teachers in Korean society. These factors create a classroom climate of order and hard work, generating high academic success.

Andere (2007) points out that many analysts and observers of educational phenomena in Korea suggest that the high ratings in international measurements are due to the high number of private schools and the high percentage of private enrollment in relation to public enrollment, one of the world's highest. Korea ranks eighth in secondary level and fourth in

high school regarding the percentage of students enrolled in private schools among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

Torres (2012) states that education has significantly influenced the comprehensive development of South Korea, as evidenced in two ways: a) the creation of an educational system focused on teaching mathematics and basic sciences and the consolidation of a plural culture that allows young people to understand globalization as a cultural, economic and social process and; b) the implementation of an educational project aligned with the various stages of economic, scientific and technological growth in South Korea. Initially, education was directed toward economic development, and then, with the consolidation of the industrial process, it focused on excellence and, currently, on the generation of knowledge and proprietary technologies.

Yang (2010) offers a more human view of the educational situation in Korea based on the analysis of four mothers over forty years old who left their jobs to promote their children's school activities. These mothers invest all their available resources to ensure their children's academic success, highlighting: a) the mother's ability to access information about the best schools, dates, procedures, and tutors; b) the father's indifference or absence in making educational decisions, acting mainly as a provider; and c) the financial support of grandparents.

Santelices (sf) states that Korean teachers must constantly be evaluated based on their performance, which results in competent teachers for their positions. This fact is significant since general standards are maintained regarding the knowledge and skills of each teacher due to the unitary and equitable demands for all of them.

Research conducted by Lara et al. (2023) indicates that South Korea's growth was determined by gross capital formation and tertiary education, as stated by the endogenous growth theory. It is concluded that the response to economic growth is positive and sustained in countries with greater capital accumulation and quality of labor, where state participation is vital.

Materials and methods

The research uses a qualitative approach, which is chosen when seeking to understand the subjective perspective of individuals or groups of people on the events surrounding them. By delving into their experiences and opinions, we can learn how they perceive their reality (Guerrero, 2016). The author used a biographical narrative design of an author who



completed his doctorate in South Korea and currently resides in that country. The participating Korean primary school teachers also used the case study design.

The instruments used to collect the information were observation, field diary entries, and interviews, which were applied to four primary school teachers during their participation as multicultural instructors in the project sponsored by the Seoul metropolitan government. Participation occurred in seven educational centers, with fourth-grade groups from primary schools. The information was analyzed through direct coding.

Analysis of the results

As we already know, it is not only families who invest in education, but the Korean government also allocates 7.6% of its GDP to this sector. Are there risks in this significant investment in the educational area? For Korea, this has had some consequences. On the one hand, this country not only invests in the education of its society, but every year, it invites students from all over the world to study for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. In other words, it not only takes care of having an adequate educational infrastructure for its population, but it also opens up the world to educate foreigners and share multicultural experiences.

The above can be explained as follows: Imagine that I have just decorated my house for my family, and I spend my time inviting people over to eat and use my kitchen, television, bathroom, and everything else I have in my house. I am one of those students invited by the Korean government to walk around their house whenever I want. However, this invitation entails serious responsibilities that I have had difficulty learning. Likewise, Koreans have had to try to understand foreign students, which has recently made multiculturalism a much-studied academic topic.

The 12 Mexican students who came to Korea together in 2010 were eager to study, learn, and have fun. I remember our first conversations after the first month, and everything was summed up as: "I'm tired, I don't have time, I have a lot of homework, I don't sleep as much anymore, I need to hurry up, etc." I can't speak for the other 11 students, but I had a different study inertia that I had to adjust immediately to continue here. There were Mexican students (and from other countries) who, for various reasons, returned in less than a year.

Another consequence of the emphasis on education is seen in the development of a class. As I mentioned initially, I came to Korea straight to language school. This was my first encounter with the Korean education system. My Korean teacher's class is perfect. There are

no mistakes. The teacher follows a program from which she does not deviate. Her entire class is practically timed. There is little room for doubts, questions, or comments. Some might complain about so much order and discipline in a class, but this is generally how classes work at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

As part of this discipline, there is a very particular business in Korea called “study rooms,” which are rented by the hour so that kids can read and study in a comfortable place. These places are open until two in the morning, and students can use them at all times, especially during exam periods. In addition, many university libraries are open 24 hours a day, and people spend their time studying books and using various interactive tools to improve their English, math, science, etc.

Koreans have invested not only money but much valuable time – perhaps exaggerated for many – in education. They have made their system work despite its flaws, obtaining many results of which they are proud. However, the high suicide rate in this country is a fact known throughout the world, which has led Koreans to rethink their educational model to reduce the pressure on adolescents and young people to enter the best universities.

Living in Korea and maintaining most of my relationships there has put me under this pressure, which leads to severe emotional conflicts. The pace of life in this society is demanding, and sometimes, it is difficult to find spaces to relax, not because they do not exist but because there is no time to do so. The demands are ever more significant, and the only way out is to continue preparing for better opportunities.

Given this reality, the suicide rate in South Korea cannot be hidden, mainly due to pressure from the study, just as the rates of violence in Mexico cannot be hidden, with murders and high crime rates mainly due to corruption, poverty, and a poor educational system, among other factors.

Koreans have realized the need to understand other cultures and to encourage more foreigners to learn about Korean society, language, history, and folklore. As a result of the increase in foreigners in the country, they began implementing multicultural programs in primary and secondary schools. One of these projects, which I participated in for two years, involves hiring foreign students who live and study in Seoul to share the culture of their home countries with Korean students.

The program promotes respect for the world's cultural heritages as defined by UNESCO. The class lasts two hours, every Friday, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. In the first hour, a Korean instructor explains to the students what UNESCO is, what its function is, and

mentions the world cultural heritage monuments in Korea, emphasizing the importance of their preservation. In the second part, the foreign instructor introduces the students to their country, teaches the students his or her language, and explains a historical monument from their country, its history, and its importance. Then, in the third part, the students play games or do crafts related to the government. The students are always encouraged to communicate with the foreign instructor in English.

Typically, 10-12 undergraduate or graduate students participate in the program. Their nationalities vary depending on the variety of students. Universities make applications to recruit foreigners, and those with the skills to teach primary or secondary school students are chosen. During my two years of experience in this program, I have met instructors from countries as diverse as Myanmar, Azerbaijan, Oman, Vietnam, China, Finland, Congo, Turkey, Indonesia, the United States, Paraguay, Ecuador, Brazil, Russia, etc.

The lessons are the same for all countries. A rigorous and detailed plan is followed and rehearsed a month before the classes start. All the content is evaluated and approved by the program managers. The foreign instructor works with the Korean instructor, explaining the concepts of multiculturalism and the country's history in question. The first part, where the idea of multiculturalism and the cultural heritage of humanity is presented, is done in Korean; the second part, where the foreign instructor intervenes, is done in English with simultaneous translation into Korean. The last part is the games and the manual work, in which the two instructors mingle with the students to help them with the work and talk with them.

As with everywhere in the world, neighborhoods in Seoul belong to different socioeconomic levels. During my participation in this program, I visited schools of various levels, but the common feature is the quality of the facilities. Each classroom has one or two desks with a computer, Internet, screen to project videos, and blackboard. The classrooms are equipped with heating and air conditioning. The teachers follow strict study programs and adhere entirely to what is established. The relationships with the teachers are cordial, and the children's behavior is attentive and restless, like any child. I always found them willing to learn, curious to ask me things as a foreigner, and they are hilarious and respectful. We usually communicated in English, but if I tried to speak to them in Korean, they also responded to me in Korean.

The group teachers have little contact with the foreign instructors during class. Time does not permit it. They only provide classroom facilities and sit in the back to observe the

class and keep control of the group if necessary. There is no time to talk with the teacher except for the ten-minute break between classes, but the instructors prepare the material for the manual activity during this time. Generally, the teachers only greet and respond to the Korean instructor's requests, mainly such as access to a PC, magnets to stick on the board, or any other needed material. The classrooms and the teacher have all the necessary technological materials, bookcases, books, and school supplies.

The classrooms are equipped with vacuum cleaners and cleaning supplies. The goal of maintaining a multicultural program like this is due to Korea's recent commercial and cultural opening. The large number of foreigners living in the country has led Koreans to think of an international Korea in which their children can face a globalized world and be educated in human rights and respect for other cultures.

Talking to teachers, they are convinced that education is the basis of life and serves to form and maintain culture and traditions. This is the role they assume in education. Through it, they want to cultivate democratic awareness (remember that many teachers perhaps lived their childhood in a dictatorship) and talent and maintain social cohesion. Teachers are clear that education allows students, through individual effort, to have a happy future. One teacher comments on the enjoyment he gets from his work: "When organizing in common agreement with educators and parents; when I see the bright faces of the students and that together with them, we work and help students who are going through difficulties; working together with the school staff so that they develop, help them and see positive results" (Field diary).

Another teacher says that "education is a guide to a right life" and that being a teacher requires "a sense of duty, a vocation, understanding students, and a sincere and kind heart." He also says, "Compared to parents in other countries, Korean parents are very interested in their children's education; they cooperate with the school and have a say." Finally, a teacher says his main achievement in education was "achieving my dream of writing a book about my life as a teacher" (Field Diary).

Getting to speak with the teachers took work. Many of them were still inexperienced in dealing with foreigners, and even if I talked to them in Korean, they felt uncomfortable if they answered me and I did not understand perfectly. However, others were very open and spoke to me about many topics despite the limited time available. The opportunity to visit so many different schools in Seoul and deal with Korean teachers and students allowed me to become more involved with the feeling of this society, its respect for foreign things, its

curiosity about the unknown, and its interest in educating its students in a globalized environment.

Discussion of the results

This research highlights the critical value that Korean society has given to education to ensure that high school and university students guarantee a social status and an optimal family economy. These aspects, on a large scale, cause the South Korean economy to achieve higher levels of development. Choi (2018) did something similar with the degree thesis entitled *The Relationship between Education and South Korean Economic Development*, establishing the hypothesis that development in education promoted a high level of human capital, which resulted in the growth of the economy in South Korea.

In his research, Choi (2018) records a general objective to understand the relationship between the evolution of education and the high growth of the economy in South Korea and the influence of education on the economy. For his part, Carrasco (2017) set out to investigate how South Korean educational perspectives and guidelines have evolved and have transformed education in South Korea. This research focuses on analyzing the level of illiteracy from 1945 to 2015 and economic financing from 1965 to 2012, finding that illiteracy was decreasing over the years and that there was no significant difference in financing from 1980 to 2012. The year 2011 was when the country invested more resources in education.

In this sense, as has been mentioned, the present study highlights that the cultural, social, and economic context dramatically influences the academic achievement of young Korean students. From the cultural aspect, Confucian ethics is perceived as a virtue that reaffirms filial piety; this refers to the love and respect that children show day by day towards their parents, which is reflected in a series of family obligations (Choi, 2010), issues of honor, which sometimes cause stress and anxiety in Korean adolescents and young people, reaching extreme levels where they commit suicide, sometimes for not entering the chosen university or for not meeting the expectations of their parents.

Andere (2007) states in his research that there is intense competition among Korean students. This competition stems from the state requirement that all students wishing to enter university must pass a standardized entrance exam. Since students and parents value university admission and are a source of personal, family, and community pride, young people and their parents invest everything necessary to obtain high results in these exams.

Given this situation, this study has insisted on assessing the possibility of reducing such demands on Korean youth, all in favor of mediating the demand and promoting the prevalence of situations of well-being and comprehensive development in the youth of South Korea.

Conclusions

When it comes to economic success and its relationship to human rights and the culture of being, we find significant differences in South Korea. This is a society that has experienced periods of colonization and military domination. The desire to rebuild the country quickly, avoid famine, and maintain unity to prevent future invasions has led to neglect of other vital aspects of personal development. Intense competition has led to a constant struggle to work harder, get more, and be the best at everything. Money becomes the primary motivation to achieve success. In light of this, Korean society, government, and civil organizations are beginning to promote being over having. It isn't easy to convince people to work less to enjoy other things.

For example, since last year, South Korea's Ministry of Education has been considering reducing study hours and exams to give middle and high school students more free time. Although young people support this measure, many parents who are very involved in their children's education consider it a step backward. "How can they ask us to reduce our children's study hours?" they ask, especially when many young people attend private academies after school to study English, math, music, sports, or other activities. Teenagers are so busy with these activities that they hardly have time to be with their families or develop different talents. In short, they need more freedom.

The Korean education system has a lot to improve. Koreans have realized that they need more creativity and spontaneity in the classroom, characteristics that Mexicans, who are very spontaneous, have in abundance. Korea does not improvise; it plans and organizes meticulously. As they say, balance is best. Could a Secretary of Education in Mexico propose reducing study hours? That is what is happening in Korea. They have recognized that young people need fewer exams and more free time to develop their creativity, and they are working on it. Of course, there is resistance, as not everyone likes the idea of their children studying less. From the Korean perspective, that could mean slowing down the path to success, however defined.

The same is true of the high suicide rate, which has become a national priority. Korean society is beginning to reflect on its accelerated pace and its consequences. Although Korea is noted for its excellent, often exaggerated, effort and the consequences that come with it, it raises an essential question for Mexicans: why do we strive? What motivates us, and what would be the national consequences of focusing our efforts on something that has just been educated now?

In Mexico, the saying, “Not too much to burn the saint, not too much to light it up,” suggests a balanced approach to life. If Korea needs to reduce the pressure to achieve balance, what do we Mexicans need to adjust? If we recognize that we need balance, where should the scales tip? We already know where Korea is leaning. What about us as a society, as an institution, as a family, and as individuals? If Korean children are under much pressure to study, are Mexican children, who do not study as much as Koreans, satisfied with their results? What are the sources of satisfaction for Mexican children? These are undoubtedly exciting questions that go beyond the scope of this research and deserve deep discussion due to the many factors affecting our Mexican society.

Future lines of research

The study focused on three crucial terms: family, economic development, and Confucianism. It was just one approach to education in South Korea, leaving open some lines of research such as the following: 1) Research with students who take the exam to enter university and the consequences of not entering, which sometimes leads to suicide. 2) Comparative research between Mexico and South Korea in basic, upper secondary, and higher education, emphasizing family and religion. 3) Studies on well-being, coexistence, inclusion, and a culture of peace in schools in both countries, given that these are current and necessary topics to recognize whether educational practices fulfill their function by taking care of the personal development and health of students.

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