



Korean National Strategy for Library Development and Reading Promotion for Children and Young Adults

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1. Abstract:

Korea became independent from Japan after World War II in 1945. However, due to an intense war between the North and South in 1950, its per capita GNP stood at mere 60 dollars, making Korea one of the poorest countries in the world. Today, it has become the 13th largest economic powerhouse and transformed itself from a country which received international aid to a donor country which helps other poor countries. The reason Korea with a 50 million population and scarce natural resources achieved democratization and industrialization together with economic success lies in Korean people's strong drive for education.

The importance of childhood reading has been more recognized among Korean parents and they have paid a lot of attention to children's reading. Such awareness of reading prompted people to build new libraries, which also led to Miracle Libraries building program run by MBC one of the major broadcasting companies in Korea. Also, the program played a key role in building a lot of small libraries nationwide, which had been mostly funded by the private sector.

Such movements and atmosphere contributed to generating interests from state and local governments in Korea. In 2003, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism released a 'Comprehensive Development Plan for the Library System', centering on the National Library of Korea and public libraries. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology put forward a 'Comprehensive Revitalization Plan for School Library'. Also, local governments put in efforts for improved services for children, such as building new

libraries or expanding existing children's services in public libraries. All these efforts were designed to satisfy the information and library needs of local residents.

The WLIC 2006 in Seoul added momentum for the government to pay more attention to the library system and served as an important opportunity to further develop the Korean library system and enhance its status. Successful holding of the WLIC 2006 in Seoul contributed to the revision of the National Library Act, enactment of the Reading Promotion Act and creation of the Library Information Policy Committee under the supervision of the President. All the efforts made by the private and public sectors contributed to the remarkable development of the library system including an increased number of libraries and improved library environment and programs.

Today I would like to present Korea's library and reading promotion policies and different library-based reading promotion efforts. Also, I will give you an insight how the library development influences reading habits among children and young adults.

2. Korea's Library and Reading Promotion Policy

2.1 Enactment and Revision of Laws Related to Promoting Reading

- Revision of the Library Act

Roles that the library plays in promoting reading cannot be overstated. The Korean library Act originated in 1963 and took on the current shape in 2006 after being revised 11 times. The act essentially focused on establishing the Library and Information Policy Committee under the supervision of the President. The act will mandate the Comprehensive Development Plan for the Library, designating regional representative libraries, defining roles of libraries in closing the digital divide and assisting the implementation of the Comprehensive Development Plan for the Library.

- Enactment of the Reading Culture Promotion Act

According to the Korean reading movement history, people in the leadership or social elite groups joined forces to conduct reading promotion campaigns at a time when the nation was faced with difficulties. For example, in the 1920s when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, educated young people living in cities moved to rural areas to preserve the national identity by running literacy and reading promotion education. In the 1960s and 1970s when Korea's GNP per capita reached a mere \$60, small libraries in villages were built by the private sector and a national reading promotion campaign for students was organized by the Ministry of Education. Later, the Reading Wave Movement which had been conducted by the Government in 1995 led to the establishment of the Reading Culture Promotion Act in 2006. The new act included mandating the establishment of the Reading Culture Promotion Basic Plan, creating the Reading Promotion Committee, requiring central and local governments to provide the equal reading education and defining roles that communities, schools and even companies play in promoting reading.

- Enactment of the School Library Promotion Act

The School Library Promotion Act describes rules and regulations of the establishment, operation and assistance of school libraries. It (also) essentially includes legal and

(institutional) support such as funding for the school library, establishment of the library's promotional basic plan, placement of school librarian and building a library network.

2. 2 Reading Support and Promotion Policy

- Establishment and Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan for Library Development

The Comprehensive Plan for the Library Development was released by the government in 2003 inspired by the national reading movement which was launched in the 1990s. The main objectives are to raise public access to the library, expand collections, provide customized library services for users and promote reading. In 2006 the Library Act was amended in order to implement the plan in an effective way. Also the Second Comprehensive Plan for the Library Development which covers various kinds of libraries was devised in 2009. The First and Second Comprehensive Plan for Library Development has served as a major driving force to improve the Korean Library System.

- Comprehensive Revitalization Plan for School Libraries

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology makes efforts to encourage schools to meet the demands of students and support self-initiated learning focusing on reading by upgrading the 7th national educational curriculum. The Ministry put forward actions to vitalize school libraries including expanding school libraries and collections, running various library programs and placing library personnel, which were described in the 2003 Comprehensive Revitalization Plan for School Libraries. As a result, each library has improved library environments and more schools have new school libraries.

- Reading Promotion Policies

Under the Reading Promotion Act, the reading promotion policies have been devised. The main ideas include:

- Reading environment: Creating a desirable reading environment at homes, kindergartens, schools and communities
- Encouraging reading habits: Developing and distributing lifetime reading programs
- Conducting reading movements: Launching reading movements by utilizing various media channels
- Reading programs for the underprivileged: running programs for the disabled, senior citizens, prison inmates and multicultural families.

2.3 Improvement of Library Infrastructure

One of the remarkable improvements of the Korean library system was caused by the revision of the Library Act, Comprehensive Development Plan for the Library System which had been established in 2003 and 2009 and the Comprehensive Revitalization Plan for School Libraries.

The number of libraries

Year	Public libraries	Year	School libraries	Year	Small libraries
2001	436	2002	8,101	2005	130
2010	748	2010	10,937	2008	3,324

The number of collections at public and school libraries

		Year 2002	Year 2006	Year 2009
Public libraries	Number of collections	30.97 million	49.34 million	62.56 million
	Number of books per person	0.64	1.01	1.26
School Libraries	Number of collections	48.73 million	72,02 million	114.89 million
	Number of books per student	5.5	9.5	15.4

The number of librarians at public and school libraries

		Year 2002	Year 2006	Year 2009
Public libraries	Number of librarians	1,918	2,560	3,052
	Number of library users whom a librarian serves	25,051	19,173	16,308
School Libraries	Number of school librarians	164	424	682
	Percentage of schools with librarians	2%	4.2%	6.2%

Improvements within the library system has contributed to increased library visits and reading rates. The ‘2010 National Reading Statistics’ released by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism showed that the adult reading rate increased by 2.6% to 29.2% and the student reading rate soared by 12.6% to 65% in 2010 compared with the previous year. In particular, library visits by elementary and secondary students recorded the highest level since 2002 as the number of libraries as well as the number of collections has gradually increased. In addition, public libraries and the NLCY provide many reading programs and schools promote the importance of reading.

3. Library reading promotion efforts and results

3.1 National Library of Korea (National Library for Children and Young Adults)

As a representative library in Korea, the National Library of Korea (NLK) assists public libraries nationwide to provide better library services and reading promotion programs. In 2006, the NLK established the National Library for Children and Young Adults in an attempt to serve children and young adults with better services. One of the NLCY’s main goals is to develop new reading promotion programs for children and young adults and distribute the programs to public and school libraries. The followings are major reading programs run by the NLCY.

- Reading Books with the Library

The program is designed to promote reading among underprivileged children in partnership with 90 public libraries across the nation. Librarians or instructors visit local children’s

welfare centers or childcare centers once a week where they run reading programs and post-reading activities for children in need. The NLCY annually provides each participating library with \$3,500 worth of funding. Much of the budget is spent on purchasing books and hiring instructors. The program is to help underprivileged children to develop reading habits and foster their dreams at libraries. Also it is to break the vicious circle of poverty by giving them more reading education opportunities and improving their literacy and reading skills. As participating children are from low income families, they lag behind in class and struggle in their language development. Also, they tend to show some characteristic problems being more reserved or violent. In the first stage of the program, children did not show much interest in librarians or reading itself. However, as time went by, they changed gradually. They started to build confidence in reading and enjoy school life. As they became more optimistic, their social skills improved.

Testimonials from participating children

“When I first heard the reading therapy, I thought it was stupid because I was not sick. When I asked “why do I need to take reading therapy?” the librarian told me, “It is good for broadening your horizon. It stimulates your mind”. We read together and did some fun activities. I did not like the class activities when we first started. The reading instructor was very patient with me so my interest in reading has slowly grown. What interests me most during the program is to experience how the disabled live their lives. I have sympathy for them and realize challenges and difficulties they are faced with. Now I find myself very interested in reading and feel like I have more self-esteem. Before I was afraid to read aloud in class but now I enjoy reading aloud and school”.

“Before I took part in the reading program, I did not like reading nor did I visit a library. Now I am a totally different person. I love reading and I become more social and confident.”

“At first I was very nervous when I took the reading class. Soon my reading skills improved a lot and I found many interesting books. Also, I could continue reading even at school and home.”

“I was not fond of reading. I thought it was boring. But the program made me enjoy reading. I especially like writing book reviews with my reading teacher. She kindly explained words I didn't know. Now my vocabulary is getting bigger.”

The program leads to many positive changes in underprivileged children as well as serves as an opportunity for librarians to think of their jobs from a different perspective. They thought of users who visit the library as their clients but they now see people who have difficulties accessing the library as another major client group. As librarians witnessed how the reading class transformed children, they realized the importance of reading again and how rewarding their job is. Even though libraries cannot secure funding from the NLCY, they are willing to set aside a budget for the program to continue the program.

- Library Adventure by Bookworms aged 13 to 18

Middle and high school students who used to enjoy reading while they were young find it hard to spend time on reading as they encounter plenty of subjects to study and heavy homework. The program designed to promote reading among middle and high school students is first developed by the NLCY and distributed to school libraries across the country.

Teenage bookworm readers play a leading role in the development of the recommended book list and the NLCY produced the reading book list poster called 'Map of the Library Adventure by Bookworms aged 13 to 18, using cartoons personally drawn by young adults. The involvement of young people aroused their peer's interest in books and appeared more appealing. Considering that teenagers are more influenced by their peer groups than parents, teachers or librarians, the program was created and run by the student participation. Bookworm Readers consisting of 800 students who are avid readers are selected to recommend books for their friends according to nine themes that young adults are interested in such as 'My future', 'Sex and love', 'Friends' 'My Planet: Earth' 'Meaning of Family', 'Secrets of Life' and 'Everything We Do Is Art'. The online community is run to enhance interaction among participants where they post book reviews or share different post reading programs. Annually 40 middle and high schools are selected to run the program and each school is given \$2,000 of financial support by the NLCY. Half of the budget is spent on purchasing books and the rest is spent on running a wide variety of reading programs. The program has contributed to the creation of voluntary reading environment in the daily lives of young people and promoting the importance of school libraries. A growing number of school librarians and teachers provide customized reading counseling to students by taking advantage of the recommended book list. Also, the program allows participating libraries to enhance their image so that more and more students visit the libraries.

- Development and Distribution of Reading Content for Multicultural Families

Korea has transformed itself from a homogeneous society to a multicultural society as a huge number of foreign migrant workers find jobs in Korea and international marriage becomes the norm. Often we see that children born to foreign mother struggle in their speech and language development and they lag behind in class and tend to be more reserved or violent. Against this backdrop, it is necessary for the library to provide services tailored for multicultural children so that they can improve their literacy and reading skills. In partnership with the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, the NLCY created storytelling content books and DVDs and distributed them to public libraries and cultural centers across the nation so that they can better serve multicultural users. Korean picture books for storytelling were translated into English and then re-translated into five major ethnic languages in Korea including Vietnamese, Thai, Mongolian and Chinese. Finally they were turned into the storytelling animation DVDs to make children more involved. So far, we developed 150 kinds of storytelling content and plan to develop 130 more. The content is freely available at the Library website.

- National Public Library Reading Class

The NLCY developed the 'Reading Class Operation Manual' and distributed the manual to public libraries across the nation so that they can run the program in an effective way. The Library holds the Reading Class Workshop targeting children's librarians twice a year free of charge, which contributes to developing professionalism of librarians. Since 2010, the promotional posters have been created and distributed to public libraries and the Chief Executive of the National Library of Korea Awards and the Director of the National Library for Children and Young Adults Awards were granted to students who completed the reading class with excellence results. Also, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Awards were given to 30 excellent leaders such as librarians, teachers and related specialists who displayed strong leadership. The number of libraries which take part in the National Public Library Reading Class has increased every year.

3.2 Public Libraries

Like many countries, the Public Library System in Korea plays a leading role in promoting reading for local residents. As children and young adults account for more than 50% of the total library users, public libraries run various reading promotion programs targeting this group such as BookStart, Storytelling, Acting out Books, Book Clubs, Reading Class during summer and winter vacations and so on. Recently, public libraries developed school subject related reading programs such as Reading and Essay, Philosophy Class, English Reading Club, Learning Chinese, Basic Japanese, Math Story, Science Class and so on and. These programs are designed to improve children's academic performance and to encourage them to read.

3.3 School Libraries

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology came up with the 'School Library Revitalization Project Plan' in 2008 to create a reading environment and 'Plans to Promote School Reading Education and Library' in 2009 so that schools put more emphasis on reading education. Since then, schools support the operation of book clubs for teachers, students and even parents, provide reading counseling for students with low reading skills, run reading therapy programs and assist the holding of reading education forums or school library forums. Such efforts and education policies to appreciate reading and self-initiated learning have brought many changes to the classroom. Each school undertakes the reading program based on students' reading comprehension skills and runs the '10 Minutes Morning Reading' program so students are given 10 minutes to read every morning before they start class. It raises the awareness of reading among students and teachers and they have more interest in school libraries, leading to strengthened roles that the libraries play. Reading education motivates students to study more actively and become more positive. Under the 'Comprehensive Plans to Improve Reading Education and School Libraries' released by the Ministry in September 2009, students are encouraged to read for pleasure, express their views freely and develop their critical thinking, creativity, reasoning and logic. It has been effective in creating a school where reading is valued.

3.4 Results of Reading Promotion

The 2010 National Reading Statistics indicates that reading promotions and library development efforts made by the government and private sector since 2000 finally paid off. According to the statistics, library visits by adults increased 2.6% compared to the previous year while library visits by elementary and secondary students soared 12.6% to 65.1% year on year. Children and young adults' reading rate recorded the highest level after the statistics was first conducted in 1993. Major factors behind the increase are an improved environment of children's library including renovated children's section in public libraries and building more children's libraries and small libraries. Also, morning reading program is another contributing factor. With more than half of all middle and high schools implementing the morning reading program, students who take part in the program read 20.3 books each semester while those who do not take part read only 11.8 books. It clearly confirms that the morning reading program has been effective to develop children's reading habits and motivate them to read more. When family, school and library join forces and do their parts to provide a better reading environment, we can promote children's reading.

4. Conclusion

In a knowledge based society where not only individual but also national competitiveness is sharpened by information and knowledge, libraries take heavy responsibility for raising national competitiveness. Libraries should provide desirable reading environment for users who visit libraries and those who have difficulties accessing libraries so everyone will have equal access and foster their dreams and envision their futures at libraries. When a book titled 'Miraculous Learning at Library' was published in 2005, it came as a surprise to Korean society where families spend a huge amount of money on private education. The author was talking about her experience how successfully she educated her children without any help of private education but by taking advantage of libraries. She went to Paris to study Art History with her 6 year old daughter who could not speak one word of French. Her daughter was able to fully understand French 18 months later by attending a Storytelling program everyday run by a public librarian in Paris. After she came back to Korea, she brought her second daughter who had struggled speaking Korean to a public library and read books to her daughter. Later without much difficulties, her daughter learned Korean. After experiencing successful language studies at library, even for her daughters' math study, she asks her daughters read math related children's books rather than giving them a math workbook, which is good for children to understand math theories. The author claims that reading itself can be the best teacher and learn every school subject by reading subject-related books. Also, she praised the library as one of the best education institutions equipped with resources and tools. If students make better use of the library, they do not need any expensive private education. The government's efforts to expand libraries and improve library services over the last ten years and our college entrance exam and school curriculum which put emphasis on reading and self-initiated learning have ultimately encouraged children and young adults to read more. It is fair to say that Korean student's high academic performance including ranking second in the Program for International Student Assessment among OECD countries in 2010 has not been achieved overnight.

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