

Education

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Exploring Korean teaching and learning

SOUTH Korea, or the Republic of Korea (ROK), has emerged as the world number one for educating students. I was curious about what made that nation progress so fast up the ladder of education and economics compared to Malaysia.

As a participant of the Asean-Korea Exchange Fellowship Programme 2016/2017, I spent three weeks conducting research in schools, the Seoul National University, and meeting some Korean think tanks.

My primary research was to explore primary school education in the ROK, focusing on the teaching of morality and healthy body programmes for primary school pupils.

After in-depth document analysis on the educational history of the ROK, I have a clearer picture of why ROK can emerge as the world number one for education.

Firstly, the country sets a solid foundation by investing heavily in early preschool education (up to five years old).

It goes back to basics: this is the formative age for character formation and healthy bodies.

Historically, education started in the ROK with character development more than 500 years ago. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism were the pillars behind the basis for character formation.

By 1949, preschool education for every Korean child was compulsory, and parents who could not afford it were provided with subsidies to ensure that no child was left behind.

The focus of early education was on basic hygiene, character development and leading a progressive life. By the time these children came to primary school, basic skills have been learnt, and they seem mature for their age; knowing the right food to eat and behaving appropriately in school and public spheres.

With character having been developed and formed according to norms of society, teachers in elementary school can fully focus on the teaching and learning process.

The second important factor that speeds up world class education in the ROK is training of teachers and the excellent support system for teachers at all levels (elementary school, middle high school and high school).

For a start, teacher candidates are selected from students who obtained excellent results in high school and have a well-rounded record in school.

They are provided with comprehensive, up to date training; merging hundreds of years of local wisdom with the latest Western and Eastern educational philosophy that has been proven effective not just in one but many developed nations.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology ensures that teachers receive high wages, have small number of students in their classes for deep teaching and learning to take place. This provides the opportunity for the ROK teachers to research the latest method of teaching and learning so that they can maximise the opportunities from the time spent with students in the classroom.

Because their classes have small number of students (usually between 16 to 18), teachers have the opportunity to experiment with innovative teaching methods, applying technology along the way.

Teachers are usually in school from early morning until 4.30pm every day. School starts around 9am and ends at 2.30pm, but teachers continue with administrative work and prepare for the next day's lessons.

We in the Malaysian education system have much to learn from the ROK. I am thankful to the Asean University Network for this invaluable opportunity to explore more on the Korean education system.

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Read more at

<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2017/02/19/exploring-korean-teaching-and-learning/#MUlzmfQh8qZo86rl.99>