

Early History of Correspondence Education in the Republic of Korea

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I. Introduction

Two decades have just passed since the establishment of the Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence as a formal institute of correspondence education, for the first time, in the history of Korean education.

This paper is intended to provide a brief historical picture of the Correspondence College only for the first decade(1972-82) and other endeavours related to correspondence education during this period.

There are a number of terms referring to practices which differ in some way from the traditional school systems, such as open education, distance education, informal education free school and others. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably and synonymously, they differ from each other in terms of implication and emphasis. What they have in common is the goal to be achieved: that is, broadening and extending educational opportunities for people at all levels in a way that cannot be attained by traditional school systems. The term 'open education' is broad in its meaning and perplexing even to the philosophers of education. Therefore, the narrower term 'correspondence education' is preferred in this article.

II. A Historical Origin of Correspondence Education in the Republic of Korea

If correspondence education is defined as the organized effort to send instruction on certain topics by way of the written or

printed word, its origin in Korean history is untraceable. In Western history, it may go back to such classic examples as Plato's epistles to Dionysius. In the modern sense of correspondence education as the organized provision of distance-teaching through textbook materials sent by mail, including subsequent technological developments of modern mass media such as radio and television, however, it appears to have begun in the Republic of Korea around the year 1930 when radio facilities were introduced for the first time in this country.

Correspondence courses on non-school subjects such as horticulture and radio and television repair, or courses preparing high school or college graduates to pass national examinations for public office and public certificates for accountants and law officers have flourished since World War II. Correspondence courses in foreign languages are especially noteworthy. The high demand for people to learn foreign languages, especially English, gave an *impetus to starting systematic radio programmes* supplemented by text materials. Except for foreign language programmes, textbooks written for self-study were the only means of correspondence teaching.

Before the epoch-making establishment of the Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence in 1972, it could be said that correspondence education had been of an informal nature in the sense that no formal credits or degrees were given and no systematic feedback was provided to check and motivate students' progress. It was just one-way communication from the institution to students without any interaction between instructor and students, and it was managed by private agencies for commercial purposes.

The growing demand for trained manpower by rapid industrialization in the latter part of the 1960s and the subsequent accumulation of wealth through economic development were crucial factors for Korean educators and administrators to seek ways to increase educational opportunities. The immediate motivating factor for the Korean government to establish the Junior Correspondence College in 1972 as a formal institution of higher education, however, was to absorb those high school graduates who continued to fail the national pre-college entrance examination administered by the Ministry of Education. For high school graduates to be qualified to take a college entrance examination of their choice, they had to pass the pre-college entrance examina-

tion. This examination was introduced in 1969 to control the quality of higher educational institutions. More than half of the high school graduates of each year, amounting nearly to 100,000 students, failed the examination. The tremendous accumulation of those who failed but continued to take the examination every year came to pose a social problem. The examination was given only once a year and new high school graduates who failed the examination were expected to go into the vocational world. This expectation turned out to be unrealistic. Due to the high value given to college degrees regardless of their quality, applicants continued to take the examination three or four times - or even more.

The main motive for establishing the Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence (KOJUCAC) was to cater for such college aspirants who had failed several times but still continued to prepare for college examination, besides broadening the opportunity for higher education in general. It took three years from the initial planning to the actual establishment of the correspondence college. During that period, some of the educators and administrators were quite skeptical of the nontraditional nature of its instructional patterns and the generally low esteem shown in the past by the public for correspondence teaching.

As an emerging pattern of higher educational institutions in the Republic of Korea, nevertheless, the correspondence college has been successful in that the competitive rates in entrance to the KOJUCAC are about five to one every year and its graduates, since 1974, are highly regarded by the public, as evidenced by an informal survey.

Educators and administrators who witnessed the success of the KOJUCAC came to advocate the extension of correspondence education to other educational levels. In 1974, a correspondence high school system was introduced by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the traditional high schools, in order to expand educational opportunities for those junior high school graduates who, despite their intellectual abilities, souls not afford to go on to senior high school. The minimal cost of tuition and the possibility of having a job to make a living while studying for a degree provided incentives for attending correspondence high schools.

III. The Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence

The Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence was established as a two-year junior college attached to Seoul National University in accordance with Article 114 of the Education Law and Presidential Decree 6106, and fully accredited by the Ministry of Education as a national institution of higher education. The fundamental aim of the college is to enhance the educational level of the Korean people by providing new opportunities for higher education to youth and adults who could not, mainly for financial reasons, go on to regular colleges and universities. As for 1979, for example, the college consisted of five major departments with an average annual intake of 16,000. The student quotas for the various departments were as follows: Home Economics—2,750; Agriculture—2,500; Elementary Education—2,750; Business Management—4,000; and Public Administration—4,000.

As for the length of education, a minimum of two years' study is formally required for graduation but a maximum of five years was allowed to complete the two-year programme. Its graduates could go on to traditional four-year colleges if they passed the national qualifying examination.

Instruction was given through four major means: (1) student's self-study with text materials, (2) submission of assigned reports to the KOJUCAC faculty for correction and evaluation, (3) listening to radio lectures and (4) brief periods of required attendance.

Textbooks for each subject field were specially prepared by selected faculty members of Seoul National University to facilitate self-study. The radio lectures, consisting of three 15-minute programmes respectively for the first—and second—year courses, were broadcast through the national network of the Korean Broadcasting Station (KBS) every day. Students are required to attend twice a year lectures given by the local co-operating colleges and universities. Each period of required attendance was somewhat less than two weeks, one in summer and the other during the winter vacation.

The college was trying to maintain academic standards as high as those of the other reputable traditional institutions of higher education. The academic evaluation of students' achievements was based on three criteria: (1) the primary examination nation-

ally prepared by the college ; (2) the secondary examination locally prepared by the instructors of each co-operating institution ; and (3) the evaluation of the students' reports submitted to the college. On the average, C⁺ or better grades were required for graduation. The graduation rate of the college entrants ranged from 20 to 25 percent of the number normally expected to complete the course within the period of two years. An additional five-to-ten percent of them eventually graduated, while 70 percent of them left the college without a degree.

As for organization, there were three administrative sections under the office of the Dean. The Academic and Student Affairs Section took responsibility for directing academic affairs, compiling instructional materialism, supervising academic evaluation, and conducting student guidance and counselling. The Radio Education Section was in charge of programming and producing radio instructional materials and conducting radio broadcasting. The Student Records and Business Section was responsible for keeping student records, registration, general affairs and business accounting.

IV. Korean Correspondence High School

The success of the Korean Junior College of the Air and Correspondence gave a direct impetus to the establishment of the Korean Correspondence High School (KCHS) in April 1974. Eleven regular senior high schools were selected from the two major cities — Seoul and Pusan, and were held responsible for operating their own correspondence high schools. In the following year, this was extended to include 14 cities in the Republic of Korea with 36 member high schools. As for 1979 there were a total of 40 correspondence high schools scattered in 17 cities and one town.

It could be said that the management of the whole body of correspondence high schools was comparable to the effort of a good chamber music group with four members : the Ministry of Education, provincial boards of education, co-operating member high schools, and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI). The Ministry of Education took care of legal, financial, and administrative aspects, curriculum and textbook management, and overall supervision. Each board of education was in charge of selecting applicants and allocating entrants, supervising

instruction, and controlling the management of correspondence high schools located in the province. Each correspondence high school attached to a regular senior high school was held responsible for conducting an instructional programme of classroom attendants, evaluating academic achievement, keeping student records, correcting student reports and managing student guidance and counselling. KEDI played a technical advisory role : textbook compilation, development of radio instructional programmes ; control of end-of-semester examinations ; and research on correspondence education.

Instruction consisted of radio instruction, classroom attendance, guiding students' homework and self-study with textbooks. Correspondence high school students had to attend classroom instruction every other Sunday. This appeared to be quite a burden for those youth who have a job and for those who have to work even on Sunday. It was found that one of the major factors contributing to the high percentage of student withdrawals was the requirement of frequent classroom attendance during the late 1970's, almost 90 percent of the admitted students dropped out before graduation. This was a very serious problem for the administrators.

As for the methods of academic evaluation, semester grades were determined on the basis of mid-term and final examinations, including students' reports required twice each semester. Regardless of the quality of semester grades earned, students had to pass the final qualifying examination for graduation given during the second semester of the third year in order to get the senior high school diploma. Just as in regular high schools, they were expected to graduate in three years but were allowed to extend their residence period to seven years, according to their personal circumstances.

Regarding the admissions policy, anyone could apply for admission who had a junior school diploma or equivalent qualification. There was no age limit. On the basis of personal histories including high school rank and other evidence, students were admitted without any formal written examination requirement. Since the number of applicants was less than the admission quotas, there was no competition for admission.

V. Problems and Perspectives of Korean Correspondence Education during the Period

It is remarkable that the correspondence educational system, especially in KOJUCAC, had been very successful in spite of the conservative attitudes held by Korean people about formal education. One of the major reasons for its unusual success was the wise decision at the initial stage to attach the system legally to the university with the highest reputation, in the country ; Seoul National University. Due to its reputation, high school graduates were eager to enter the attached correspondence college and considered it equivalent to the Seoul National University.

However successful it might be, there were some problems to be solved in its near future. Problems faced by both correspondence college and high schools included the acquiring of TV channels and attempting to extend radio instructional hours to more convenient listening hours. During the period the hours were the earliest one in the morning (5:00 a. m.) and the latest in the evening (11:00 p. m.). Even though most Korean homes had television sets, instructional programmes for correspondence schools had not been broadcast on television due to the cost of the required software. Another problem was related to the effectiveness of textbooks for self-study. It could be said that most correspondence textbooks had been written simply as an accompaniment to lectures rather than for self-study. This was due to the lack of professional expertise in writing for correspondence learning. Continuous textbook revisions were thus urgently necessary.

Although the initial establishment of the correspondence college was well accepted by the Korean society, its graduates were not highly evaluated as compared with those from traditional institutions. Therefore, educators concerned with correspondence education had to cope constantly with the problems of maintaining high academic standards and controlling the achievement level of graduates.

One of the unique problems related to the correspondence college involved admission procedures and criteria. During the period students were admitted on the basis of academic records of senior high school. Since the competition for entrance had been so high, quite a large portion of applicants intended to falsify

their academic records in some way. More than ten percent of students admitted had to be expelled from the college because of their forged academic records. Therefore correspondence college administrators, for once, intended to take into consideration the introduction of college aptitude tests for student selection instead of academic records.

There had been a growing social demand for the extension of the present junior college programme toward the four-year university—and even toward graduate level, including M. A. and doctoral programmes. An additional increase in student quotas in major departments was also urged.

It may be said that future prospects for correspondence education in the Republic of Korea had been good during the period. It was also envisioned that correspondence education should have soon been no longer one of the non-traditional or informal educational practices but would be fully integrated into one of the formal educational systems.

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