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Suffering from Private Education

When I was in the middle school, there was a famous hit song made by Seo Tae-ji, the song called “hayeooga.” It reminded the students of Korean educational problems at that time. The lyrics stated that “That’s enough, enough, enough. From now on, we don’t need anymore such those teachings...(an omission of the rest).” We students had had a common feeling that “We are not studying machines. We are just teenagers.”

Since then, the domestic educational policies have been changed a lot by the Ministry of Education and the government, but are we satisfying the current educational system? Most parents with children aren’t, because they have distrust towards government policies so that they tend to rely on private tutoring more than public school. Currently, there are several forms of private tutoring from diverse market industries.

First, there is individual tutoring, in which an instructor gives private lessons to a student. Typically, this happens at students’ home. In fact, private tutoring is regarded as a necessary course for students who are preparing for college entrance exams. While someone might welcome private tutoring to the extent that it helps them understand questions easily, the

main problem is that it is expensive, and that not everyone can afford it.

As South Korea's economy grows, its education industry has expanded radically as well. However, analyzing the relationship between income inequality and disparity in educational achievement, McMahon finds that increased opening of schooling increases income inequality (1996). Private tutoring is a relatively expensive way, so it is only available to households who are able to pay for them. Therefore, it has become a serious social issue.

Second, instruction is prepared by cram schools, called hagwons. Today, many students go hagwons. Going to a hagwon is more popular than receiving private tutoring at home because cram schools' fees are relatively less expensive than a tutor's fees and very busy children make friends at hagwons. In other words, hagwons are not only for students' preceding practice, but also for their meeting space which can make new friends.

Lately, cram schools continue to try to maximize their profits. Regretably, they do not hesitate to increase their fees from illegal practices. But, such illegal things are nothing new in Korea. It is necessary for the authorities to crack down on hagwons for making illegal system. At this situation, I think the current President Lee's government move towards sterner measures against hagwons is welcomed.

Third, there is self-study method from the Internet. The biggest merit from the Internet teaching is the cheapest among other types of private tutoring. On-line instruction is becoming a popular way to, even though off-line education still occupies the larger proportions of educational market shares.

As I mentioned before, many parents with children are dissatisfied with South Korea's rigid educational system. They think that the schools are failing to teach not only English but also other skills in the globalization. I grew up by listening Seo Tae-ji song, and my school life was also the same tough as now. For example, I woke every weekday at 6:30 a.m. and was at school by 7:30. I couldn't return home until 10:00 p.m. because after-school classes were mandatory, not for students who had fallen behind, but for anyone who wanted a chance of getting into a good university. That left me with about four hours of sleep.

But I found nothing unusual about it; most of my friends were doing the same. Furthermore, we have an old rule of four versus five. You can enter the college you want if you sleep only four hours a day, but you won't if you sleep five or more. Schools drove us to endless competition, teaching us to step on our friends for succeed. It was like a battleground. Of course, nowadays I think those kind of ways might also be a valuable reminiscence. But, at the same time, when I get ready to write resume for getting a job, I can't write anything else but all-day study at school. Probably, most Korean students

have worried about this at some point.

At this situation, many students have started to rely on cram schools or private tutoring among schoolchildren for college entrance. And, parents are groaning under the heavy weight of the costs of cram schools. Nevertheless, most parents with children are now giving their children opportunities for expensive private tutoring. According to The Korea times statistics, Korean household spending for private tutoring has been growing at a remarkable pace, from 0.9% of GDP to 1.2% in 1990, 1.8% in 1994, and 2.9% in 1998.

Most schoolchildren take a nap here and there, during 10-minute breaks between classes and on the bus. How poor they are. Of course, their parents are also living in a bad situation. Parents with 12th grade children cannot take a rest easily at home. Whenever it is exam day, mothers pray at churches and at the front-door of schools.

And for the past ten years, a new phenomenon, called “wild goose dad” who should send money abroad for their family members have appeared not only in relatively wealthy families but also middle-class families. It has split wives from husbands and children from fathers, usually for years. It is considered enough of a social problem. They feel alone and miss their families. But, they think it’s useful way to, so they are willing to go abroad.

Will their parents be satisfied with their children later? I am not totally convinced that the benefits are worth splitting up the family. I think families should live together.

I believe the quality of Korean public schools could be improved by teachers' dedicated efforts, government support and parents' trust. Over the years, the government changed educational policies concerning university entrance. In order to succeed, once the government must give enough credibility about public education system to students and their parents, including coherent educational policies. After about 10 years, I hope the current students wouldn't feel suffering from writing resume at least.

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