

# The Effectiveness of a Program to Train North Korean Teachers to Adjust to South Korean Society: *Policy Implications for Supporting North Korean Escapees\**

KANG Gu Sup and CHAE Soo-Eun

## Abstract

*This paper examined the effectiveness of a program to train North Korean teachers to adjust to South Korean society. It used a biographical approach and aimed to examine the characteristics of the adaptation of North Korean teachers who escaped from their country to South Korea. The training program endeavored to assist their adaptation by perpetuating their specialized professional work experience from North Korea. Interviews with 28 North Korean teachers were analyzed, and the effects on and experiences of the participants in the adaptation program of the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) involving the North Korean Teachers Academy were presented thematically. In line with major points that arose during the interviews, recommendations were made about policies to support North Korean teachers and the other North Korean escapees adapt effectively to their new society through training based on their past occupational experiences in North Korea.*

**Keywords:** Korean unification, North Korea, North Korean teacher, North Korean escapees, cultural adaptation, adult education

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\* This paper is based on in-depth interview data collected from North Korean teachers who participated in 2011–2012 training programs of the North Korean Teachers Academy (NKTA) carried out by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI).

KANG Gu Sup is Research Fellow at the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI).  
E-mail: gusupkang@gmail.com.

CHAE Soo-Eun is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, Gangneung-Wonju National University, South Korea. E-mail: sooeunchoe@gmail.com.

## **Introduction**

North and South Korea both recognize that North-South unification is a long-desired task that must be resolved at some point.

Beyond the issues of integrating political, economic, and social systems, a key task is establishing a state of peaceful coexistence between the residents of North and South Korea in a unified Korea. In order for the members of a unified society to be able to peacefully live together, efforts to promote peaceful coexistence between North Korean (hereafter, NK) escapees and South Koreans must precede national unification.

In fact, NK escapees inevitably struggle to adapt to their new society in South Korea due to differences between North and South Korea. South Korean (hereafter, SK) society over the last several decades has become very different economically and culturally from the North. Most NK escapees exhibit insomnia, depression, and other psychiatric symptoms and are known to have serious psychological issues (Han 2013). Considering the multiple dimensions of their experiences and abilities before their escape, as well as the current hardships they face, is important to help NK escapees adapt to SK society. Regarding adult learning, some have suggested that adaptation programs for NK escapees should be based on their previous academic and work record in North Korea (No and Chun 2009). In this view, NK escapees adapting to and living in a very different SK system offer an important preview of what the North and South living together may look like. Successful adaptation in the South by NK escapees can lead to identifying possible ways residents from the North and South can coexist and promote a positive understanding of a unified Korea.

Accordingly, this paper examines the effectiveness of a program to train NK teachers to adjust to SK society. A biographical approach is employed with the aim of examining the characteristics of the adaptation of NK teachers who escaped their country to South Korea. The training program attempted to assist their adaptation by building on their prior professional work experience in North Korea.

In addition, this paper looked at policy implications to help the adaptation of not only NK teachers but also the over 26,000 other NK escapees

who are living in South Korea.<sup>1</sup> The current study also provided policy implications for the NK people, who would need to adapt to a unified government to be established in the future for Korea. More specifically, this paper focused on how the NK teachers are applying their prior professional work experience in North Korea to the process of adapting to South Korea; it also presented some policy implications for their successful adaptation by making use of their occupational experiences in North Korea.

While this study provides academic and practical contributions to the development of future NK teacher programs, some of the main limitations of the present study can be discussed as follows: first, the most obvious limitation of the study is the representation of the study sample, which was based on in-depth interview data collected from a limited number of 28 NK teachers out of many other NK teachers who were enrolled in the Korean Educational Development Institute's (hereafter, KEDI) NK Teachers Academy (hereafter, NKTA) program. Second, the NKTA program was designed and mapped out based entirely on the understanding of SK educators and experts specializing in the SK system. Therefore, more comprehensive studies with a much larger sample size and methodological triangulation would be required to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings of the study.

### **Selection and Training Procedures for Teachers in North Korea**

Ever since North Korea was founded, the country has attached great importance to policies surrounding its school teachers—who are responsible for the education of future generations of the fatherland. Specifically, school teachers are defined as “professional revolutionaries who work to raise future generations as heirs of the revolution and as communists,” and the government stresses that, “in front of the party and the revolution, they bear responsibility for the future of the fatherland” (Kim 1990, 509).

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1. Ministry of Unification. “Statistics.” Accessed January 10, 2014. [http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.do?menuCd=DOM\\_000000105006006000](http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.do?menuCd=DOM_000000105006006000).

From this definition of the profession, one can note the process for acquiring knowledge. In North Korea, educational institutions for teachers can be divided into two categories: kindergarten and primary school (equivalent to South Korea's elementary school) teachers go through a program at a three-year college of education, and middle and high school teachers complete a course at a four-year college of education. Each city or province generally has two of each type of college of education. Typically, in North Korea, students are selected in a two-step process that involves a national graduation examination and a civil servant examination (Han 1998, 190), and to gain admission to either type of college of education one must have not only excellent grades but also the proper *seongbun* (class and family background) and meet other criteria.

In addition to processes of admission, the main courses at North Korea's educational institutions for teachers vary from program to program, but they can be divided into three broad categories (Han 1998, 243). The first is made up of courses that emphasize ideological education, such as the revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung, *Juche* (self-reliance) philosophy, and the writings of Kim Il Sung. The second category consists of basic education courses (e.g. education, psychology, educational methodology, and student teaching) while the third category involves subject matter courses.

Since North Korea's educational institutions for teachers perform the important function of training "professional revolutionaries" whose mission is educating future generations, they proceed with every aspect of the process—student selection, education curricula, teacher placement, and reeducation—in a systematic fashion. Since the primary task of school teachers is raising future generations as heirs of the communist revolution, colleges of education emphasize communist ideological education along with cultivating teachers' knowledge and skills for teaching classes in their specialty subjects.

In fact, the review of the selection and training procedures for teachers in North Korea shows that NK teachers-to-be are educated and trained to be teachers in quite a different way compared to those in South Korea, such as in basic concepts and values, goals, methods, and the nature of education.

## The Adaptation Status of North Korean Escapees in South Korea

### *Adaptation Programs for North Korean Escapees*

For adult escapees from North Korea, education for social adaptation starts with an initial 12-week program run by the Ministry of Unification at its education facility for early-stage adaptation, Hanawon. Participants live at the center for the duration of the program. Social adaptation education covers psychological and emotional stability, understanding SK society, career guidance, and basic vocational training. The standard course at Hanawon takes 420 hours, while escapees may also voluntarily participate in a 438-hour supplementary program offered on evenings and weekends. Supplementary courses are on subjects that NK escapees can immediately apply to their lives in South Korea, such as getting a driver's license and parenting. Table 1 details the subjects, fields, and hours of study of the social adaptation program for NK escapees.

After NK escapees complete Hanawon's education program for early-stage adaptation, they move to their resettlement locations and participate in a second-stage program for social adaptation in their respective regions. Regional adaptation centers (also known as Hana Centers) are responsible for a three-week education program for regional adaptation, which provides job search support, academic guidance, and other important practical knowledge and information for adapting to their new region.

More specifically, the adaptation programs at Hanawon and the respective region of their residence focus on a general understanding of SK society, such as democracy and capitalism on one side, and a program for vocational education on the other side. The resocialisation program had an undeniably crucial meaning for NK escapees as newcomers to South Korea. Participation in the program provided an opportunity to comprehend SK law as well as the basic sensibility of SK people in their careers and daily lives. However, these programs tended not to provide information and knowledge necessary for understanding SK culture, which means that vocational education was emphasized over other considerations.

**Table 1.** Social Adaptation Program for North Korean Escapees at the Early-Stage Social Adaptation Education Center (Hanawon)

Subject Area	Contents (hours)
Promoting emotional stability and health (49 hours, 11.7%)	Emotional stability program (30)
	Health promotion program (19)
Understanding our society (124 hours, 29.5%)	Democratic civil education program (10)
	Adapting to capitalism program (6)
	Understanding society program (40)
	Language adaptation program (32)
Career guidance and basic vocational training (196 hours, 46.7%)	Participatory learning (36)
	A basic career guidance test and understanding the hiring process (12)
	Vocational information & information on getting a job (40)
	Career guidance program (14)
Initial resettlement support (51 hours, 12.1%)	Basic employment adaptation program (130)
	Understanding the resettlement support system (10)
	Program on living at Hanawon (15)
Total	Administrative support program (26)
	420 hours

Source: Ministry of Unification (2012)<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, all the courses provided are basically mandatory rather than voluntary for NK escapees. Thus, the participants lost motivation for working through the program. Besides the problem of motivation, the program is basically designed for general NK escapees, meaning that the content of the program does not fulfill specific needs of the individual escapees and does not consider their personal background, characteristics, and vocational experiences back in North Korea.

These shortcomings in the existing adaptation programs for NK escapees in Hanawon and Hana Centers demonstrate the need for a new kind of resocialisation program governed by a holistic approach that takes into account the personal life histories of NK escapees and their special

2. Ministry of Unification, *Adjustment programs for North Korean Refugees* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2012), unpublished.

needs on an individual level in order to support their social, cultural, and career adaptation.

### *The Career Status of North Korean Escapees*

Vocational education for NK escapees is led by the Ministry of Unification and the Ministry of Labor and Employment, and comes in the form of policies supporting adaptation to and resettlement in SK society for NK escapees. The program is divided into basic vocational adaptation training and specialized vocational training. Basic training aims to prepare NK escapees with basic job skills necessary in SK society. The basics of the information age and of life in the workplace, specialized jargon and terminology imported into Korean from other languages, and field trips designed for practical learning are covered for one month during the second half of participants' stay at Hanawon. Specialized vocational training happens at specialized vocational training institutes, and NK escapees receive support for completing up to three training programs during their five-year period for resettlement support.

After taking vocational training, about 46% of all participants acquired the relevant certificate or license. However, in general there appears to be little relationship between acquiring certification and acquiring a job. NK escapees often worked in primary industries (agricultural and fishing, 16.2%) or secondary industries (manufacturing, 30%) in the North, but in SK society they mostly work in tertiary industries (wholesale and retail 30.6% and private or public services 36.9%), so a low correlation exists between the category of work they did in North Korea and that in which they are employed in South Korea (Cho, Kim, and Sun 2012, 27), leading many enter the workplace in generally low-level jobs (Park and Kang 2008, 63). To sum up, many of the NK escapees were not well prepared with vocational competencies to sufficiently play important roles in their careers as required in SK workplaces. Accordingly, considering the large gap between North and SK social, cultural, and labor market system, vocational resocialisation for NK escapees in SK society is not an easy task to manage in a short period of time.

## An Adaptation Program for Specialists among North Korean Escapees: The North Korean Teachers Academy

### General Training Programs for North Korean Teachers

KEDI's Education Support Center for NK Migrants held at NKTA four times between 2009 and 2013, during which time more than 60 people completed the course. The program was divided into 60 hours of general training and 30 hours of intensive training (see Table 2). NK teachers and other related experts in the field presented their points of view in the process of developing the NKTA program.

While some differences were apparent in subjects over the four times the program was run, by and large the contents of the general training program offered a basic understanding of SK education and covered curricula and teaching methods for core subjects (Korean, mathematics, and English). Participants also gave presentations on topics, such as their individual experiences in the adaptation process in South Korea.

**Table 2.** NKTA General Training by Subject and Number of Hours

Subject	Understanding SK education	Curricula and teaching methods for core subjects			Participant presentations	Totals
		Korean	Mathematics	English		
Number of Hours	14	14	14	14	4	60
%	23	23	23	23	8	100

Source: Han (2013)

The main contents of general training focused on the field of education, specifically on teaching methods and curricula, school culture, and parent-teacher relationships, in order for participants to understand differences in education between the North and South. Also, for the core subjects of Korean, English, and mathematics, the training was conducted in order to help participants concretely understand SK curricula and teaching methods by using approaches like class observation (Lee 2012, 149).



**Table 3.** NKTA General Training Program

Area	Subject	Lecture content details
Understanding SK education	Comparing education in North and South Korea and searching for a direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting the philosophy and objectives of education in North and South Korea and the contents and direction of SK education policy</li> </ul>
	Instruction methods and school culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruction methods (lecture methods, discussion methods, and cooperative learning)</li> <li>• Curricula (changes and characteristics of the 7th National Curriculum)</li> <li>• School culture (curriculum formation, management committees, parent associations, running after school programs, specialty classrooms,)</li> </ul>
	Making teaching and lesson plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Instruction</li> <li>• Instruction models (lectures, discussions, projects, and investigative learning)</li> <li>• Actual teaching</li> <li>• Evaluations</li> </ul>
	The necessity of and tasks for unification education in schools	The contents of unification education in schools, the present state of unification awareness, issues surrounding unification education
	Issues surrounding and measures for helping NK escapee students adapt to school	The present condition of NK escapee students and steps and measures for their adaptation to school
	Ways to increase basic elementary school academic skills	Understanding the causes and overcoming deficiencies and instructing methods in accordance with students' individual traits

Curricula and teaching methods for core subjects	Korean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing North and SK dialects and Korean grammar</li> <li>• Korean-language curricula</li> <li>• The makeup of Korean textbooks</li> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Writing</li> </ul>
	Mathematics	A comparison of North and SK mathematics curricula and teaching methods for various fields of mathematics (geometry and measurements)
	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An introduction to English education</li> <li>• Elementary English curricula</li> <li>• Vocabulary teaching method</li> <li>• Teaching spoken language</li> </ul>
Participant presentations	Personal resettlement experiences	
	Comparing North and SK teaching methods	

Source: Lee (2012)

### *In-depth Training program for North Korean Teachers*

Unlike general training, intensive training involved actual class participation by the NK teachers through, for example, class discussion. The training content was selected based on their previous work experiences in North Korea and was tailored toward giving practical help needed for participating in the workplace in South Korea. Along with other subjects, they learned counseling techniques and communication skills, which were not included in general training. More specifically, in order to give the participants who had become accustomed to lecture-style classes an understanding of inquiry-centered teaching methods in which the students themselves search for answers, the program employed “Understanding Methods for Teaching Elementary Mathematics” and a section on helping themselves and escapee students understand and recover from psychological wounds,

entitled “The Psychology of Students and Counseling Techniques.” In order to increase understanding of communication skills in the South, an “Effective Communication Skills” section was incorporated as well (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** NKTA Intensive Training Program

Korean and writing	Understanding Korean-language curricula
	Increasing writing ability through a reading activity program
	Connecting class discussion with reading and writing
	Elementary writing
Mathematics	Understanding methods for teaching elementary mathematics
Social studies	Understanding elementary and middle school social studies
Counseling	Student psychology and guidance techniques
	Parent-teacher consultation techniques and practice
Miscellaneous	Making and using PowerPoint presentations for class
	NK teachers' presentations on resettlement experiences
	A school teacher's leadership
	Effective communication skills

Source: Han (2013)

Basically, the NKTA program is differentiated from some of the general adaptation programs, like the Hanawon and Hana centers developed for all the NK escapees, since it considered the career experiences of the participants in North Korea and their special needs to work as experts in the field of education in South Korea. In other words, the NK teachers had opportunities to participate in a highly practical program that used and applied their past professional experiences as teachers in North Korea.

To sum up, the NKTA program is characterized by a curriculum that provides the NK teachers with a variety of knowledge and information available to adjust to SK society and schools. During the program they had

a chance to develop a good grasp of SK society and schools operating in a different educational system from those in North Korea. Moreover, they had the opportunities to promote their vocational abilities and aptitude necessary to work in South Korea in connection with their prior career experiences. This program might then be expected to show them influential ways to contribute to SK education.

## Methods

### *Participants*

A total of 28 NK teachers participated in interviews for this research. They each had a minimum of one year of teaching experience in North Korea: five worked in NK elementary schools, 21 in middle and high schools,

**Table 5.** Composition of the Interviewees by NKTA Session Attended and Subjects taught in North Korea

Subject \ Attended Session	1st offering	2nd offering	Total
Elementary	2	3	5
Revolutionary	0	1	1
Music	0	2	2
Korean	2	2	4
Chemistry	2	1	3
Mathematics	4	1	5
History	1	0	1
Biology	1	0	1
Physics	1	0	1
Economics	0	1	1
Art	0	2	2
Physical Education	0	1	1
Chinese Characters	0	1	1
Total	13	15	28

Source: Han (2013)

while two worked at vocational schools, which are the North's equivalent of South Korea's technical colleges. The subjects taught range from Korean, mathematics, physics, and chemistry to art and music. Interviewees had finished the NKTA administered by the Education Support Center for NK Migrants in KEDI; 13 participants completed the program in the first session (January 9–March 20, 2010) while 15 finished it in the second session (October 29, 2011–February 11, 2012).

### *Procedures*

This project used qualitative research methods with in-depth interviews of the NK teachers about their experiences before and after escaping. The 28 NK teachers were interviewed in groups of two or three for two hours at the research lab of Education Support Center for NK Migrants. Each interview group consisted of participants from the same NKTA session. Aside from basic information about the participants and in order to analyze changes from before and after having completed the NKTA activities, interview questions covered seven broad areas: 1) teaching and education experiences in North Korea; 2) satisfaction with life in South Korea; 3) difficulties; 4) the NKTA training curriculum; 5) teachers' changes from before and after NKTA training activities; 6) teachers' activities aside from the training; and 7) psychological changes and job-related adaptation to SK society. Additionally, participants were asked about the class on home visits (for teaching NK escapee students), their giving lectures on unification, and differences in the roles of NK and SK teachers. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed by assistants.

Besides the interviews with the teachers, in order to organize the NK teachers' experiences before and after escaping North Korea through a biographical approach, Grounded Theory methodology was utilized (Glaser and Strauss 1977). This analytic technique consists of three steps—primary coding, axial coding, and selective coding—allowing for capturing emerging themes from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Primary coding or open coding is “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (Strauss

and Corbin 1998, 101). The primary coding is followed by axial coding, the process of relating the primary codes to subcategories (Strauss and Corbin 1998), and selective coding, “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 143). Through these processes, the coders built critical thematic stories that flow throughout the entire dataset.

## Results

### *Downgrades in Their Occupational Status and Culture Shock in South Korea*

The careers of NK teachers were recognized as having a relatively high status in North Korea, but they were frustrated because their teaching experience in the North was not given due recognition in South Korea. Since the NK teachers could not pursue their teaching profession in South Korea, they experienced a slump in their occupational status. The following remark from a May interview shows how the interviewee suffered from perceived gaps between the South and NK languages:

I can't even dream about working in my profession, and I thought there wasn't anything I could do except work in a restaurant, so I went to work at restaurant and there a customer asked for a yoji. It was the first time I'd heard the word yoji. I asked the owner what it was, and she told me it was a toothpick (May 3, 2011 K1).

The NK teachers were often troubled even during work in low-quality fields due to a misunderstanding of SK language and a lack of apprehension regarding SK society. In a field that by nature relies on knowledge, because the value of the teachers' knowledge acquired in North Korea is unrecognized, the value placed on their work experience in the NK teaching profession is inevitably much lower while in South Korea. Additionally, as examined earlier, because educational institutions for teachers in North Korea focus not only on courses about cultivating knowledge and skills but

also on communist ideology, and because the education that future teachers get in North Korea happens in a considerably different environment, the recognition of NK teachers' professionalism is difficult in South Korea.

As a result of this lack of appreciation, many of the NK teachers underwent emotional issues related to SK culture. A sense of cultural and emotional differences between North and South Korea commonly led to issues in interpersonal relationships and their social lives. While in North Korea they enjoyed a high level of education and a relatively stable development background, after they came to South Korea they underwent difficulties due to differences in language, etiquette, and ways of speaking. The difficulty of being able to find someone who understood the differences and could help with them was a source of isolation in South Korea for the teachers. Language differences especially emerged as a decisive stumbling block for NK teachers adapting to SK society. Even though South Korea uses the same alphabet and writing system, disparities in words and the nuance of phrases reveal the two nations are linguistically very different. Such language differences between the two countries seemed to result in the NK teachers' anxieties and difficulties in attempting to adjust to SK society, which was evident in the following excerpts from a May interview:

I had been hurt because of cultural differences, so I wanted to ask how SK people would handle this situation. But there's no one I could call and discuss the matter with. It was very hard to deal with this all alone by myself (May 13, 2011, S1).

Also, the language and cultural differences were tremendous. It was a shock—things are going along smoothly and then you get this shock and you just want to quit (May 12, 2011, C2).

Generally, the NK escapees suffered because they had not taken the best career choice in South Korea, which means that they were just enrolled in a certain job training course and employed with little consideration of their life history and past work experiences in North Korea. Further, the dissimilarities between the social and cultural system and emotional predicaments (e.g. loneliness and a sense of isolation) of North and South Korea also

caused them to go through tough times in adapting to SK society. In this regard, the struggles encountered in adjusting to SK society are likely to be more complicated for most of the NK people, including teachers and other escapees, if unification between two countries occurs and is implemented instantaneously.

Consequently, a social adaptation program for the NK escapees should be incorporated with a curriculum not only providing ideas related to occupational competencies but also stabilizing their psychological and emotional state in consideration of the social and cultural differences between North and South Korea.

### **Recognizing the Need to Acquire Teaching Expertise and Exploration of Teacher Roles**

After arriving in South Korea, it appears the NK teachers were in survival mode. For most of them, the training was a time to pause and look back on their past life. The break rekindled their desire to remember and regain their roles as teachers, which led them to think about actual, concrete ways to achieve retraining in their related fields, acquisition of certification, and other related concerns. By participating in the training course, one of the participants testified on realizing his need to study in a new university and thereafter entered graduate school. Thus, the training for NK teachers not only motivated them to enhance their learning, it also gave them an impetus to perform concrete changes in their activities, like entering graduate schools. Thus, participating in the academy encouraged them to undertake the challenge of new learning in graduate school as in this excerpt from an April interview:

I was like that, too. I also came and went through the same process with XXX. I couldn't think about studying again, I just worked and thought about earning money. From participating in NKTA, because (being able to use) computers is essential, I went to a computer academy and am earning certifications, and I'm also studying social welfare. I'm also



studying counseling. At NKTA, the thought that “I can do it” was planted in me (April 28, 2011, L2).

Even though there’s (the issue of) my age, I have to study a bit more, of course. The NKTA training was very short. I thought how great it would be to transfer to a place like a college of education and study there. The training was four times a month, which was not nearly enough, I think. So I submitted my application to a graduate school of NK studies (May 20, 2011, K2).

In addition to further studying, the participants, through the training course and especially through school visits and other practical experiences, had time to recall their teaching experiences in North Korea. They once again came to strongly desire the role of teaching students. Due to the differences in knowledge of subject matter between North and South Korea, they realized they would feel limited in teaching such knowledge, but they would be able to perform the teacher’s role of guiding students’ lives if they became teachers in South Korea.

By being called by the title of “teacher” during the program at NKTA, based on the fact that they had worked as teachers in North Korea, their identities as teachers were awakened, and this kind of awakening and realization of their past teaching experience was a source of great pride and joy. They realized the responsibility a teacher fundamentally must carry out for society, that is, they realized their task was “changing students’ lives.” By participating in the academy, they thought that they have a possibility and capacity to teach the students in South Korea, as indicated in the following remarks:

I saw how the lectures used creative methods to teach the students. At the same time I had the thought that I wanted to teach children again. My strong point of having taught students in North Korea was recovered, and when it comes to the subjects I taught, even if I may not have everything needed, when it comes to teaching character or unification, I thought I would like to give it a try (May 20, 2011, B1).

My strength is most easily being able to approach NK escapee youth in

education, and being able to help them adapt well to SK society. I may be weak in the knowledge area, but I've learned a lot about the differences between the North and South, and I think I can continue to develop my abilities. Because I've made good use of the SK education system, I've got confidence that I can do it no matter what (May 3, 2011, C3).

Significantly, those NK teachers who lost confidence in their professionalism due to differences between the NK and SK educational systems gradually obtained self-confidence and reduced the threat of being isolated from the SK system of education by participating in the NKTA program. In other words, they achieved confidence to do something constructive in the field of education in South Korea when they were well prepared in their teaching skills and proficiency as required.

### **The Differentiation of Teaching Skills between North and South Korea**

In accordance with the past experiences of the teachers in North Korea, they were able to quickly understand the characteristics of the SK educational system by passing through the NKTA program and also lucidly grasp the differences between the NK and SK educational systems. For instance, they recognized that the "professionalism" NK teachers were expected to pursue was different from what SK teachers already acquired. Compared to the SK system, education in North Korea uses cramming methods of teaching in the classroom according to an excerpt from a May interview:

Cramming methods of teaching were used in North Korea. It contrasted from SK education: there were no perfect answers and no perfect errors. The idea also seemed great. It is good to develop students' creativity (May 12, 2011, C2).

Teachers do not take care of levels of understanding of the NK students. The students have to follow whatever their teacher instructs them to do. Active learning led by the students doesn't exist in North Korea. The lev-

els of learning among the students matter here (South Korea) (May 4, 2011, L1).

Hence, the NK teachers were able to easily comprehend both the positive and negative features of both the NK and SK educational systems, respectively, based on their past and current experiences. For example, they reported some positive attitudes toward the SK educational system concerning the recognition of SK education to develop the creativity of individual students. However, they spoke out against the limited role of teachers in South Korea in that they are not as responsible for the learning of students in school as indicated in the following comments:

Teachers in North Korea guide the entire process of learning for each student with regard to counseling and teaching specific academic subjects. The SK teachers play only the administrative role whereas students have to take private afterschool programs despite long hours of formal instruction spent at schools regularly. Teachers do not take their full responsibilities in South Korea (April 27, 2011, J5).

Consequently, the NK teachers have an intelligent understanding of the SK educational system based on their varied personal experiences and active participation in the NKTA program where theoretical knowledge and practical skills were applied at the same time. They could expand the levels of their understanding, recognition, and judgment of the educational systems of both countries by means of comparative studies and observations.

### **The Development of Required Teacher Expertise in South Korea**

During the NKTA program, most of the NK teachers started to feel more confident that their worries about teaching and leading were alleviated as they were acquiring knowledge and information necessary for teaching subjects in South Korea. Moreover, they had chances to develop practical teaching skills, especially for the SK students, by assimilating SK teaching methods. The acquisition of the new learning methods showed them the

possibility that they could play certain roles as educational experts in South Korea. The interviewees mentioned specific teaching methods that they acquired in South Korea and also pointed out that they might have used a NK teaching style unless they learned the new methods, as noted in the following remarks:

I grew in analyzing SK teaching methods and other educational principles. It was practical and knowledgeable to compare North Korea and South Korea. Indeed, the motivation-oriented teaching method was a far better way than the cramming method of teaching (May 12, 2011, C2).

I would have 100% performed the NK teaching styles to my students if I did not pass the NKTA program. I could teach students in liberated and intensive ways based on what I learned from the NKTA program (May 4, 2011, L1).

To sum up, NKTA provided the NK teachers opportunities to develop educational expertise and understand the principles, curriculum, and methods of SK education, which served as a requirement to be able to work in South Korea in the field of education.

Furthermore, in taking part in the NKTA program held by a national research institute, KEDI had a special significance in recognizing the vocational careers and experiences of the NK teachers in the SK public section. Without this process, their professional experiences from North Korea would unlikely be recognized in SK society. Upon participating in the program, some of them could obtain chances to be employed as educators in the field of education in South Korea. For example, a group gained opportunities to work as assistant teachers in public schools where NK escapee students were located and were helped to adapt to school life (Kang, Han, and Lee 2014, 237).

## Recovering Teaching Efficacy and the Development of Psychological Stability

The counseling courses provided in the intensive training program helped the NK teachers to feel psychologically stable through analyzing their mental capabilities and finding solutions for some cognitive predicaments as well as acquire communication skills needed to counsel the students and parents, meaning that the counseling courses offered them a chance to understand themselves as well as serve as “counselers”:

How could I counsel parents when I myself was hurting? At first, I asked, “Why should I do this?” while the session entitled, “Let me understand myself,” was going on. In fact, the program was most useful when I actually went out to teach in the field. This might be the reason why I could be able to counsel someone as I finally understood myself (May 12, 2011, L3).

Consequently, the participants said that through participating in the training they thought about what role they could play in South Korea and found psychological stability. They overcame a depreciation in self-worth and the psychological frustration they experienced in South Korea, found stability, and discovered new possibilities to begin their career as educational experts as seen in the following interview:

To be specific, (the program) gave me confidence that I can help students develop themselves. It greatly eased the anxiety of the NK escapees, who’d all undergone similar experiences. It really implanted in me the confidence that I’m always an important person in SK society (May 12, 2011, C3).

As a result, through the intensive program, the participants stated they not only deepened their understanding of SK society, but also they solved difficulties in communication they had experienced in relationships with their family and neighbors. Participants in KEDI’s NKTA program said the 60 hours of regular training helped them understand the basic differences between NK and SK education, and furthermore, what happens on-site in

SK education.

In addition to being a source of general information regarding SK education, the training course was an opportunity for the participants to recover their self-confidence. As the NK teachers stated several times, both North and South Koreans see teachers as having a very good social status. The realization of participants that they had been raised as educated persons leading the future of the nation gave them considerable confidence. Through the training course, the participants at last managed to remember their forgotten title of “teacher” and exhibited a sense of contentment. An interview shows how a NK teacher recalled this confidence as a teacher after participating in NKTA:

The only thing that gives me confidence in myself is probably the fact that I was a teacher in North Korea. From attending the education course, I got confidence, and I enjoyed it. I had worked as a teacher for 15 years in North Korea. Actually, I had given up teaching after coming to South Korea, but I realized teaching is what I can do after all (May 6, 2011, B2).

### **The Formation of a Community and Support for Adapting to South Korean Society**

The NK teachers who participated in the training course formed a sense of community among themselves. Through sharing experiences that only those who used to be teachers in the North had, they developed a unique sense of closeness. By exchanging information about adapting to SK society and education programs, they developed a sense of belonging and fellowship that they were not able to form at other meetings of NK escapees.

This development of a community is extremely important because in South Korea, NK escapees, including NK teachers, find it very difficult to form human relationships that give them a sense of belonging. Given this impediment, a meeting of people who had held the same jobs smoothed communication among group members because they shared common topics for conversation, allowing them to develop a sense of kinship over

similar difficulties they faced. Their interviews indicated cohesiveness as a result of the NKTA meetings as follows:

At Hanawon, too, there were many people together, but everyone thought differently. If I come to this meeting, it's really great. The atmosphere is good, and there's the expectation that it's just for us, but because it's all people who've received a basic education, we speak the same language and emotionally are on the same page, too (May 3, 2011, C1).

As noted in the preceding excerpt, the unique setting of the group with teachers sharing the same cultural background provided NK teachers with chances to converse about their difficulties and identities as NK teachers. The NK teachers foresee that the confidence they regained through the NKTA meetings will be of considerable help in adapting to SK society. These meetings, which were made up of NK teachers with insufficient personal networks in SK society, played the important role of a community that they could rely on psychologically and emotionally. At the same time, they said the community of NK teachers was also significant when it came to finding solutions for various problems confronting them while living in SK society. They thought the NK teacher community was meaningful, and the members mutually supported one another in adapting to society. According to the following interview, the NK teachers exclusively exchange career information with NKTA members based on belief about the NK teachers' strong intelligence and competence.

So if there's a good job position, it starts with us teachers. Rather than others, I hope we teachers do well first. So, you know, if a job notice comes up, I first call other teachers, of course. Even so, if a person who was once called a teacher in North Korea comes here they have to do well, of course. And again, no matter how low the quality of NK education is, even so, it's just that the way an educated person thinks is different from the way an uneducated person thinks. We NK teachers, our reason for repeatedly coming was to connect with other educated people, which made it even better (May 6, 2011, B2).

Thus, the participants in the NK teacher meetings very actively exchanged information during the meetings. From sharing job listings to finding methods to deal with difficulties encountered when interacting with South Koreans, the meetings developed into a group for solving various problems. Having completed higher education, they were an actual “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991). They stated that the community allowed them to share valuable information, and in the midst of daily life and activities, they could seek different types of needed advice, as the following interview shows:

First of all, I visited NKTA's (online) “café” every day without fail. The best thing about that place was the part where we could look at material that could educate NK escapee students. I signed up and looked at the material and found it very helpful. We share information with each other, and in our own field, though we're busy, we listen to each other's opinions on the site and are exchanging information. In addition to that, we often talk on the phone and ask questions and work together. From meeting the NK teachers, we hear a lot of information about NK escapees, and it is really helpful for fostering self-development (May 12, 2011, C3).

Accordingly, the participants saw that the training program for NK teachers helped not only with the formation of the community but also with providing concrete help for the participants' career records as well. That is, attending the training course will not simply be a small contribution to the lives of NK teachers living in SK society. In an environment where one's work experiences had not been recognized, they expected that having attended training run by an institution that holds the confidence of the public will help in the recognition of their abilities. The participants often showed appreciation toward KEDI because it offered an official and recordable program for the NK teachers, as noted in an excerpt from a May interview:

We don't have anything to put on our resumes, of course. But even if we just put that we attended the NKTA, it's a really major help. We're doing



the Korean Educational Development Institute's NKTA training, and we receive assistance from the nation and it teaches NK escapee students, but when others look at it, they really think it's a volunteer service program (May 13, 2011, C4).

In short, the NK teachers characterized the NKTA program as a beneficial source of power and initiative that would lead them to flourish with regard to their career competence in the field of education in South Korea. The program seemed to have provided a chance to establish a voluntary NK teachers community, which contributed enormously in helping the participants adjust to SK society through cooperating with and supporting one another in a practical way, by providing a sense of belonging, a feeling of unity, and a spirit of community based on their past experiences in North Korea.

## **Conclusion**

After the NKTA programs the interviewees pointed to the importance of actively applying the cumulative work experiences NK escapees acquired in North Korea. Of course, NK escapees each had different work experiences when they came to South Korea, but the percentage of them who made use of their prior work experiences in the South was not high. As the participants in this study stated, the NK teachers, who had been working unrelated to the profession to which they had been employed in North Korea found the opportunity to work as education experts in SK society by participating in the NKTA program. They definitively understood what differed between the South and North Korean educational systems and advanced their teaching competence as required within the education milieu in South Korea. They made use of their teaching experience from North Korea to teach NK escapee students. Additionally, they were able to discover a new meaning in life. For example, some of the NK teachers volunteered to support the NK students in schools or tutored them one-on-one. In doing so, they overcame the devaluation in self-worth they experi-

enced in South Korea and displayed a new attitude toward life. This kind of change was helpful not only to their work skills but also to recuperating their psychological identity. Moreover, the NK teachers the researchers met showed a characteristic typical of adult learners that the most effective learning occurs when new learning is based on previous work and study experiences (Faulstich and Zeuner 1999).

As witnessed in the interview transcripts and our analyses, the NK teachers achieved meaningful results by studying content related to their studies and work experiences in North Korea. Based on having been educated and having worked as teachers and through the process of comparing and analyzing the content of their new and previous studies, they very rapidly learned the required knowledge and skills to adapt to SK society.

As a consequence of the analysis presented in this paper, some policy implications and recommendations for supporting the adaptation of NK teachers and escapees and going one step further, North Koreans in a unified Korea after reunification of the two countries in SK society, can be drawn as follows:

First, educational opportunities for the social adaptation of NK escapees should be provided in consideration of their past career experiences in North Korea. Currently, no regular and systematic education is available when they finish the three-month training program in Hanawon. After being discharged from Hanawon, regional resettlement and mastery of job qualifications became the full extent of the remaining training programs.

Notably, the short-term oriented adaptation programs in Hanawon and Hana Center are planned and conducted generally without consideration of the occupational experiences of the NK escapees back in North Korea. To help NK escapees achieve a successful adaptation, many quality programs should be provided for long-term education in order for them to actively use their past learning and career experiences in South Korea.

Second, new adaptation programs and policies stimulating the learning motives of NK escapees should be developed. By attending the NKTA program, the NK teachers started to recognize the importance of learning to develop their vocational competencies and skills. On the basis of such a desire for learning, they made an effort to improve their capabilities as

educational experts, and some of them even decided to continue their education and training in the graduate schools. Basically, their participation in various educational programs and studying in graduate schools has significant meaning in many respects, like adapting productively to SK society, building social networks, and improving individual career competence. From this point of view, that the programs are very necessary for promoting the learning motives of the North Koreans is more remarkable, which is why NK residents in a unified Korean society also need to engage in a resocialisation program in the future, considering that their learning motivation will play a crucial role in the process of adapting to a new environment.

Third, more practical training programs for the NK escapees are necessary. The NKTA program tried to provide the NK teachers necessary, concrete, and practical information as well as hands-on knowledge by using various forms of field experience. Still, the participants continuously show their strong desire to take part in some training programs, observe certain educational undertakings, or even work in different educational schools and institutions. Undoubtedly, they believe these experiences could bring about a more productive and powerful means of achieving their goals towards learning advancement, which shows that learning methods for a program to resocialise NK escapees and NK people in a unified Korean society should be planned. Instead of simply focusing on theoretical knowledge in lectures, practical fieldwork, empirical analysis, and observations are necessary.

Fourth, the resocialization program for the NK escapees should be connected with learning, practical training, and employment opportunities for credible application. Some of the participants of the NKTA program gained opportunities to work as one-on-one tutors and assistant teachers in public schools, which indeed helped them improve their vocational competencies. Such a specific, goal-oriented, learning process motivated them to engage in the program intensively. Therefore, policy makers are advised to design and develop social adaptation programs to offer an overall road map in the course of learning, practice, and professional specialization and employment for NK escapees.

Fifth, supporting the formation of communities in SK society for NK escapees is necessary. For those who have not yet built new personal networks in South Korea, interacting with other people facing the same struggles to adapt as they have tends to be very helpful for stabilizing their mental states and exchanging information.

Considering the very diverse prior work history of the NK escapees, forming communities based on common difficulties and aspirations appears necessary. As it emerged from the interviews, the NK teachers gained motivation for studying and practical help for adapting through their community. Moreover, they received encouragement through their community and gained a sense of psychological and emotional stability from the process of sharing similar difficulties, which means that the policy to support the building of NK escapee communities is very significant for helping them in solving obstacles that can arise in their everyday lives. In addition, supporting them in building their community is imperative in order to stimulate their learning motives as reflected in the mutual reciprocity practiced by members of the community.

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