



## World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council

### "Libraries - A voyage of discovery"

August 14th - 18th 2005, Oslo, Norway

Conference Programme: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/Programme.htm>

June 13, 2005

**Code Number:**

**115-E**

**Meeting:**

**124 SI - School Libraries and Resource Centres**

*Session: Policy – Empowering School Libraries*

#### **A Study of the school library policy and it's development in Korea**

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#### ***Abstract***

*The object of this study is to contribute to the development of school libraries in other countries by describing school library developments that have occurred and continue to occur in South Korea. The Korean Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development has developed a five-year master plan for 2003-2007 that will improve school libraries. The key concepts of the policy are to: 1) redesign and renovate school libraries; 2) activate the cooperative program planning and teaching; 3) hire professional school librarians; and 4) devise a public-private sector collaboration system that will ensure the continued improvement of school libraries.*

*Until the 1990s, school libraries were a very low priority in the South Korean educational system. They were not integrated into the schools' overall curriculum. Students in regular classes were not taught how to use the libraries or encouraged to use them. Often, the school libraries were closed. But, after two years of implementing the five-year master plan (2003 and 2004), over 2,400 school libraries have been built, redesigned, or renovated, and students have been encouraged and taught how to utilize more school libraries.*

*One thing that has triggered the recent movement to improve the school library system in South Korea has been the desire of parents who urge their children to read a lot of books. Initially the movement was a local phenomenon which caught on with NGOs who then received the cooperation of local governments. This enthusiasm for an improved school library system quickly spread throughout the nation. It was rapidly followed by the formation of the five-year master plan, which commenced in 2003. The master plan of the South Korean Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development has significantly improved the prosperity of South Korea's school libraries. Today, South Korea has a modern, well-developed school library system.*

## **1. Introduction**

Recently, school libraries in South Korea have taken on a rapidly increasing role in the South Korean education system. They are now becoming a hub of information in South Korean schools. Yet, amazingly, until 1990, such a role for school libraries in South Korea was totally unthinkable.

The Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development is currently implementing a five-year master (2003-2007) plan (Herein referred to as the “five year master plan”) for improving South Korea's school libraries. The key points of the policy are to: 1) build, redesign, renovate, and repair school libraries; 2) integrate school libraries into the overall school curriculum by promoting their use in the regular classrooms; 3) hire professional school librarians and trained staff to work in the school libraries; and 4) improve cooperation between the public and private sectors aimed at enhancing the development of the school library system. The policy of the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, which generated the driving force of the prosperity of school libraries in South Korea, will likely be a model all over the world.

## **2. Changes in School Libraries and Korea's Social Background**

Until the 1990s, school libraries in South Korea had a very minor role in schools. They were typically located in tiny, isolated rooms somewhere on the top floor. Most of the time, they were closed. When they were open, access was usually restricted to the best students. The libraries were poorly equipped. They contained only small book collections. This was at a time when the entire public education system in South Korea was very poorly funded, and people underrated the importance of libraries. Instead, they over-emphasized the importance of university entrance exams. Getting accepted into the most prestigious universities was the ticket to success in South Korean society.

According to Jong-Sung Kim, school libraries in South Korea have undergone a number of major changes since the 1950s<sup>1</sup>. Four of them have been:

1. The formation and Development of the school library movement (For the first time, some schools began to build school libraries.): 1950s ~ 1960s
2. The decline of the school library movement (Stopped building school libraries): 1970s ~ 1980s

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<sup>1</sup> Kim, Jong Sung (2000) The History of School Libraries in Korea. (in Korean) Seoul : Korean Library Association.

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| 3. The recovery of the school library movement (Started to build more libraries):                  | Early 1990s      |
| 4. The expansion of the school library movement (Today, almost every school has a school library): | Late 1990s ~ now |

After several decades of foreign domination, South Korea didn't become a fully independent country until 1948. This was soon followed by the Korean War (1950-1953). Until the 1950s, South Korea didn't have any school libraries. But, after the war, South Korea, as a newly independent country, began to place great emphasis on education in order to build a strong economy. The government adopted an education policy which was based on John Dewey's democratic education ideology and progressivism. These liberal principles of education provided a favorable environment for setting up school libraries.

In the 1950s, for the first time ever in South Korea, school libraries began to appear. They were open to all students and housed a good collection of materials. The opening of the libraries commenced in the South-Eastern part of South Korea: a half-open shelved library opened at Jinju Girls High School in 1952, and at Masan Girls High School in 1954. This soon spread north into the Seoul area: Kyonggi High School opened a library in 1958 and Jaemulpo High School opened one in 1959.

In the 1960s, the school library movement continued to expand. From 1962 to 1970, a national school library seminar was held annually. In South Kyongsang Province, a school library manual and a curriculum for library use were developed. In 1963, the South Korean government enacted the first library law. The Library Law required every school to have a library. But in reality, few schools were equipped with a library.

The school library movement in the 1970s declined because during this period, the public education system focused its efforts mainly on university entrance exams. Higher education was demanded by society, and all students competed fiercely for entrance into the most prestigious universities in order to get the best jobs. Extra-classes were set up to prepare students for the entrance exams; even regular curricula included preparation for such exams. School libraries were no more than study rooms with carols, and contained no library materials. In these rooms, students prepared for their entrance exams. Like in the 1970s, the library world saw little progress in the 1980s. The military regime that ruled South Korea, regarded education only as a convenient tool to produce a vast reservoir of "economic" beings. The economy, rather than personal development, was its only concern. This pragmatic view of education is what caused the great emphasis on examinations. Those who performed well academically would be rewarded with a place in the best universities, which was the passport to earning a fortune. Meanwhile, those who did not perform well on the entrance examinations were left behind. School libraries at this time had a very insignificant role to play, and librarians were people who merely loaned their services to the library.

By the 1990s, South Korea had become a democracy, and school libraries entered a new era. Free from military rule, South Korean society became more liberal and open. Education began to play a greater role in society. It was no longer seen merely as a stepping stone to climbing the social ladder but also as a vehicle for developing a well-rounded personality. The Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development adopted such concepts as "Open Education", "Independent Self-Study" and

“Resource-based Learning” in the seventh version of the national education curriculum for elementary and secondary schools. Besides government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and passionate parents also contributed to this creation of a liberal educational environment. Children were encouraged to read more and think more. Knowledge would bring them wisdom, and the library became viewed a “good” place to visit.

Ever since 2000, the South Korean school library system has undergone significant improvements such as: larger book collections, introduction of computers and the Internet, better facilities and improved services. The following two newspaper articles describe the scenes at two school libraries :

...third grade’s social studies class at Sungpo Primary School in Ansan, Kyeonggi-do. A group of students are heading towards the library, located in the center of the school, to do their assignments. Each group is required to read a historical novel and set up some questions about the characters in the novel. The novels are selected by the students themselves after reading book reviews on the school library’s website, which are up by their teacher...(Hankeorae Daily, March 3, 2003)

There’s a small, cozy library in my school. On average, 400 students visit the library every day. I can see a lot of happy, contented faces there. They go to the library for various purposes. Some are browsing the shelves; some are reading books or magazines; some are surfing the Internet; some are doing research; some are listening to music; some are watching video tapes; and some are having a discussion in the conference room... (Kyeonghyang Daily, June 7th, 2003)

The above passages not only illustrate how the libraries are being used, but they depict the typical environment of today’s school library. School libraries are no longer cold, dark, isolated, forgotten corners, but have become an information hub, an incubator for ideas, a culture center and above all, a cozy place to spend some quality time.

### **3. The NGOs’ School Library Activity**

The NGOs were instrumental in the development of the Korean school library system. One notable example was the *Suwon Woman’s Council’s* suggestion of using school libraries to promote reading to children. Suwon is a city in Kyonggi province, the largest and most populous province in South Korea. Kyonggi province surrounds Seoul, the national capital. Suwon is 30 km from Seoul, the council held a Suwon citizen’s public forum.<sup>2</sup> One question on the agenda was “Is our children’s reading environment appropriate?” The council held that most of the school libraries were under-developed and urged the schools, the local governments and the national government to spend more money on school libraries. In 1999, it resulted in the establishment of the *Kyonggi Province Council for Good School Library*. Kyonggi Province surrounds the city of Seoul, the nation’s capital city. In 2000, this council became the core body of the *National Union for Revival of School Libraries*<sup>3</sup> These NGOs

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<sup>2</sup> Han, Ok Ja (2001), *Kyonggi Province Councils for Good School Library: Progress and Further Subjects*. 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of Symposiums by Councils for Good School Library Campaign in Kyonggi Province. Suwon : p.34

<sup>3</sup> Participants of National Union for Revival of School Library are as follows : Korean Federation of Teacher’s Association, National Parent’s Association for Ideal Education, Korean Association of Community Education, Korean Teachers and Educational Worker’s Union, Citizen Movement for Educational Reformation, Association of Librarians for Promotion of School Library, Kyonggi Provinces Council for Good School Library

had a major influence in persuading local governments to give money to schools for school libraries and to build more libraries.

In 1998, South Korea was burdened by the IMF financial crises. During the crisis, *the Suwon Women's Council* (along with other NGOs) began to request funding from the Kyonggi provincial government to create more school librarian jobs.<sup>4</sup> It was supported by a local government fund for relieving unemployment. *The Council of Korean School Libraries* in Seoul participated in this program too. It hired 100 school librarians. Under the influence of the Seoul and Suwon NGOs and the *Evergreen (Sangroksu) Culture Lover* in Ansan, Kyonggi Province persuaded the government to hire librarians for primary schools in March 1999, and a similar campaign was initiated by the *Gunpo Citizens Council for Economic Righteousness* in May 1999.<sup>5</sup> The results of those campaigns were remarkable and spread to other cities. NGOs in other cities also joined the school library campaign. During that time, the work conditions and temporary status (many librarians only had one-year temporary contracts) of librarians was raised as a big social issue.

In Seoul, one NGO, the *Council of Korean School Libraries* gave up the project, and disbanded because the local government stopped funding it. However, in December 1999, the above mentioned organizations in Kyonggi Province organized a new body for maintaining the campaign. It was called the *Kyonggi Province Councils for Good School Library*. It received provincial government funding. The governor of Kyonggi province fully supported the campaign and therefore the council began a fresh period with a new project body. The Council which had support from the local government, motivated to established a very large NGO, the 'National Union for Revival of School Library', and ultimately triggered greater interested in school libraries among not only the general public but also government officials throughout South Korea. Until this time, the government had only been an observer and never a player in the history of the Korean school library system.

The establishment of nationwide organizations for the school library campaign and their activities planted the seeds for the birth of a department of school libraries within the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development<sup>6</sup>. It was created in 2001. This was the first ever government "department of school libraries". Although school libraries were just one of the ministry's responsibilities, it was the first time a government department would administer school libraries directly. This was the greatest impact of the NGOs' school library campaign. With the expansion of the school library campaign and increasing social interest in reading, practical and concrete alterations have been reinforced.

#### **4. Current Policies for Developing School Libraries**

##### **4.1 Government Policy on School Libraries**

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<sup>4</sup> Kim, Jong Sung(2004), Finding a Way for School Library. Seoul : Naramal. P. 84

<sup>5</sup> Han. Ok Ja(2001), op., cit, p. 35-6

<sup>6</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Policy Coordination Division passed over school library issue to Information Technology Support Division under International Cooperation and Information Technology Bureau due to reorganization of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development as of August 2003

In 2002, the National Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development formulated a landmark policy called The Master Plan for Promoting School Library: Making Good School Libraries (Herein referred to as the “five-year master plan”).<sup>7</sup> It is the first master plan for school libraries in Korean history. With a budget of KRW 300 billion (USD 30 million), it aims to improve school libraries nationwide from 2003 to 2007. It has four major targets for improvement:

- (1) Expanding book collections and improving library facilities;
- (2) Promoting the use of school libraries in the classroom;
- (3) Hiring experts and providing professional training for librarians; and
- (4) Devising an adequate framework for cooperation between the public and private sectors.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development now requires local governments to pay more attention to school libraries. It has developed a checklist of criteria for local governments to follow. The level of services and collections provided by school libraries is to be assessed as part of the performance of the local educational authorities. Encouraged by this policy, the educational authority in Kyonggi Province has formed a task force to plan and execute the libraries promotion program. The team, which consists of one supervisor, three librarians and one administrator, is called the *Supporting Team for School Library Promotion*.<sup>8</sup> Other provinces have set up similar teams.

## 4.2 Implementation of Government Policies

The Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development has put the Master Plan into action. It’s doing the following:

### 1) Expanding the Book Collections and Improving of Facilities

The five-year master plan which started in 2003, has enhanced book collections and improved the facilities of school libraries. A total of 1,259 libraries were completed in 2003. Another 1,260 were built, renovated in 2004. The number of books increased from 5.5 per student in 2002 to 7.5 per student in 2004.<sup>9</sup>

### 2) Promoting the Use of School Libraries in the Classroom

The Ministry of Education & Human Resources selected 48 schools throughout South Korea to participate in a study on how to best use school libraries in the classrooms. The main purpose of the project was to identify how to make the best use of school libraries. The project included schools from all levels (elementary, middle, and high schools) in sixteen cities.<sup>10</sup> As part of the project, the schools promoted use of the school libraries in regular classrooms (*E.G.* in science class, math class, history class, etc.) and tried to integrate libraries into the overall curriculum. The findings of the study were then submitted to the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development for review. The

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<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2002), *The Master Plan for Promoting School Library: Making Good School Libraries*. Seoul : The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development

<sup>8</sup> Kyonggi Ministry of Education (2003), *Proceedings of Annual General Meeting of Principals*. Suwon : Kyonggi Ministry of Education.

<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2005a), *Meeting Material of Advisory Board for the Master Plan for Promoting School Library Project*.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

Ministry subsequently 1) held open seminars where representatives from all the schools were invited to attend and share their experiences; and 2) set up a web page which showed the results of the study and provided information. As a result of the study, a wide range of methods to promote and maximize the use of school libraries was recommended. A second similar project is now underway with 48 other schools take part.

### 3) Hiring Experts and Professional Training

Despite building, redesigning, and renovating a large number of school libraries, currently there are very few teacher-librarians. There are two kinds of school librarians: 1) those who are certified librarians; and 2) those with both teacher certification and library certification (teacher-librarians). Most schools don't have teacher-librarians. Most of the schools have only temporary school librarians. The government intends to increase the number of teacher-librarians. However, this is difficult because it requires enormous funding. It's the second type that the government is most interested in hiring. They are more qualified. But as previously mentioned, this requires extensive funding.

There are a lot more school librarians than teacher librarians. In Kyonggi Province, for example, over 800 school librarians are currently employed, and nationally there are 1024 employed. On the other hand, the number of newly recruited teacher-librarians has been much lower. In 2002, 33 were hired. In 2003, 45 were hired. And in 2004, 34 were hired. In the first half of 2005, another seventeen were hired.<sup>11</sup> These numbers are low, but since 2001, the number of permanent full-time teacher librarians has increased by nearly 100 percent from 129 to 258. This is a significant improvement. Now there are 258 permanent, full-time, teacher-librarians.

In addition, the government is continuing to hire more part-time temporary librarians and is providing them with workshops to upgrade their skills. Workshops are also being held for principals, vice principals, and teachers. These provide principals and teachers with a greater understanding of how to use the libraries. The workshop trains teachers how to use the libraries to improve their classroom teaching and how to integrate the libraries into the school curriculum.

### 4) Devising an Adequate Framework for Cooperation Between the Public and Private Sectors

It is important to develop community awareness of school libraries. With increased awareness members of the community might initiate fund raising or volunteer their time to work in the school libraries. In 2004, to promote awareness of school libraries in the community, seven organizations were granted KRW 100,000,000 (USD 100,000), in 2003 five organizations were granted KRW 50,000,000 (USD 50,000).<sup>12</sup> They were delegated the responsibility of promoting school libraries to parents, students, and other members of the community. Parents and students were informed about the role of libraries in the educational system, and how they could improve reading skills, personal development, and even life-long education. Today, because of elevated community awareness, an increasing number of parents are volunteering their time to work in the school libraries.

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<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2005b), Meeting Material of Advisory Board for Assessment of Non-governmental Organization's School Library Supporting Project.

### 4.3 Implications of the Five-year Master Plan and its Challenges

The five-year master plan has brought big changes in school libraries. It not only affects the education setting but also has grave implications on the social and political landscape in Korea. (For example, the rights of school librarians v. teacher-librarians, etc.) However, the rapid changes in school libraries also poses challenges to the present set up in terms of human resources, concept of school library, and co-ordination between various bodies.<sup>13</sup>

#### A) Implications of the Master Plan

##### 1. Support for a New Educational Paradigm

- The school library as a knowledge facilitator has an important role to play and can make significant contributions to a knowledge-based society. It is a convenient tool for such educational initiatives as student-focused education, individualized teaching and learning, and even life-long education.

##### 2. Responsive to Social Demands

- A liberal education system and the cultivation of a knowledgeable society are sure signs of a modern society. Building up libraries and nurturing reading habits fulfills the educational, cultural, and social needs of a democratic society with a responsible government.

##### 3. Strengthening Co-operation Between the Government and the Communities

- The educational authority took the lead in the school library project while NGOs, librarians, parents, and other parties concerned are also playing an active role in the consultation, planning, and implementation of various projects, campaigns, and activities.

#### B) Challenges of the School Library Promotion Project

##### 1. Status and Hiring of Teacher-librarians

- Teacher-librarians are now recruited on a part-time basis. It goes without saying that it is rather difficult for part time-staff to plan and organize any activities or long-term programs. It's difficult for them to develop a close working relationship with school administrators and other teachers, which is very critical to the proper implementation of any programs. As more and more teacher -librarians are recruited, this issue has become more acute.

##### 2. Lack of Interest of Principals and Teachers

- Although more and more educators have recognized the role of the library in a school, it still takes time for them to understand what it can do and how it can do things. Many teachers are resistant to change. They are not interested in learning how to use

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<sup>13</sup> Han, Yoon Ok (2004), Study on Assessment of The Master Plan for Promoting School Library Project. Seoul : The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development



the libraries and don't understand why they are important. A lot of them still have not heard of information literacy programs, online databases, or evaluation of web resources, to mention but a few. Some treat libraries as nothing more than physical workshops with some books, magazines and computers. There is still a long way to go before school libraries can fully function in the schools.

### 3. Proper Co-ordination Between the Ministry, Local Governments, and Schools

- There is still insufficient co-ordination between the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, local governments, and schools. A well-planned, coordinated effort is much needed. The Ministry should take a leading role in planning national programs while local authorities should oversee and provide sufficient resources for their implementation. Among schools, there should be more sharing of experiences and resources.

## **Conclusion**

The object of this study is to contribute to the development of school libraries in other countries by introducing the case history of school libraries in South Korea. Looking back at the last ten years, the school library environment in South Korea has dramatically improved. Until the mid 1990s, few people were concerned with school libraries or appreciated the usefulness they could play in the Korean educational system. However, parents in South Korea wanted their children to read more. To encourage their children to read, they began demanding improvements in the school library system. This parental interest triggered NGOs to begin lobbying governments to establish policies to improve the school librarian system. Soon the school library movement expanded to a nationwide phenomenon that included cooperation between local, provincial, and national governments, local communities, and the private sector. The entire South Korea society is becoming increasingly aware of and interested in school libraries. There now exists a very positive attitude toward school libraries. The National Government is now implementing a five-year plan to greatly enhance the overall strength of the school library system. The policy, which includes the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development's five-year master plan, is currently generating the driving force behind the prosperity of the school libraries in South Korea. As a result, the school library system in South Korea is now a very modern, well-developed system.

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1997- 1998 : Participated in the IFLA Project with six countries ( France, Finland, Australia, Scotland, Canada, and Korea) on the School Library. The theme was “The Role of the Principal in an Information Literate School Community” (IFLA Express vol.4 p.6-7, 1998)

2003- : A member of the Consultative Committee of the National Library Policies in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Korea

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