

# How education is approached by the United States and South Korea

Roy Park  
University of La Verne

## Summary

- The disparity between Asian and Western Education systems ultimately leads to one question – Which one of them is better?
- By some measures, South Korea is the most educated country in the world.
- Although most K-12 programs in Asia had been based on the original method of the United States, statistics have shown that the modified take of Asian countries have worked more efficiently.



## Introduction

- According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED), 70 percent of 24- to 35-year-olds in South Korea have completed some form of secondary education.
- This is the highest percentage worldwide and more than 20 percentage points above that of the United States.
- According to a study by America's Promise Alliance, the United States has a 30 percent rate of students failing to graduate high school.
- Despite these statistics, South Korea and the United States were both ranked 12<sup>th</sup> out of 35 countries by The Economist Intelligence Unit in its "Worldwide Educating for the Future Index".

## Background on South Korea

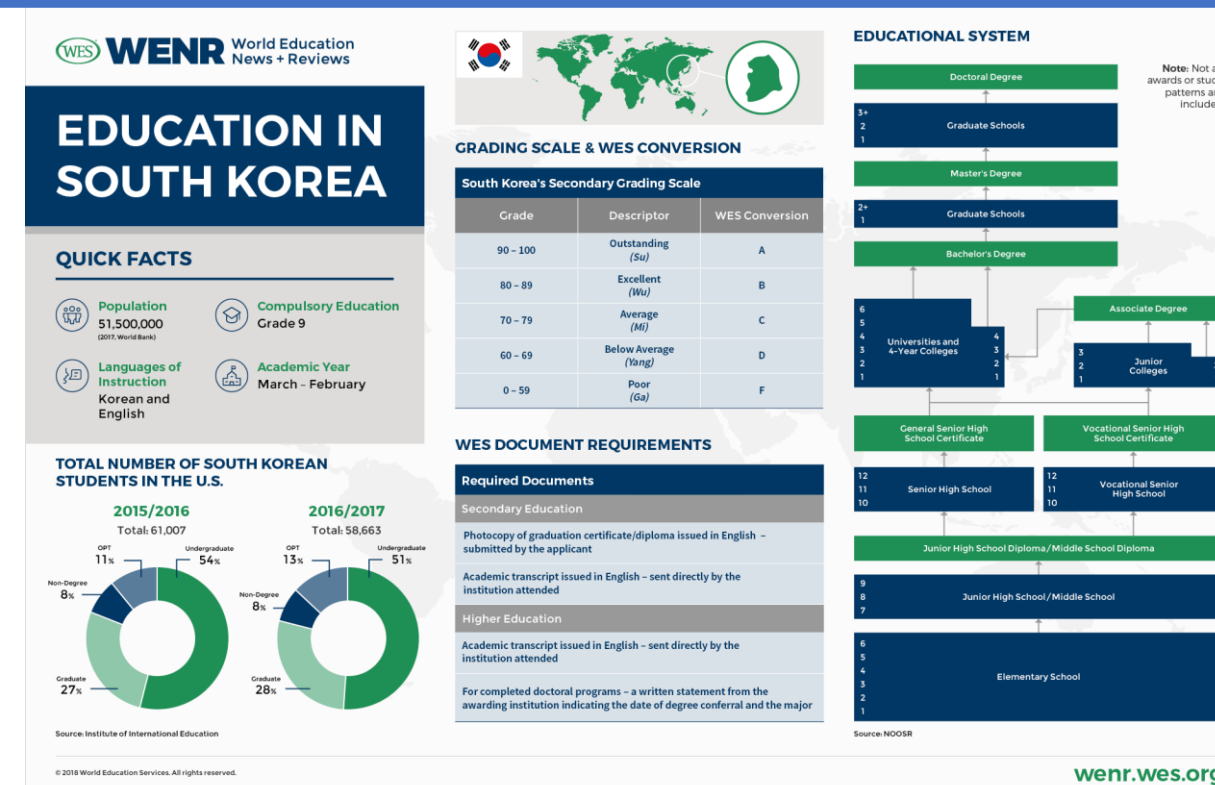
- After the Korean War, South Korea was left impoverished and one of the poorest countries in the world.
- Today, it is the world's 12<sup>th</sup> largest economy and the fourth largest in Asia.
- In the 1980's, the South Korean government began to strategically invest in human capital development, research, and technological innovation.
- A laser focus was an important pillar in South Korea's extraordinary economic rise.
- Between the early 1980s and the mid-2000s, the country's tertiary gross enrollment ratio increased fivefold, while the number of students in higher education jumped from 539,000 in 1980 to 3.3 million in 2015, per UNESCO data.
- In fact, it's hard to find another country in the world that places greater emphasis on education than South Korea. Educational attainment in contemporary Korea is of paramount social importance and strongly correlated with social mobility, income levels, and positions of power.
- Competition over admission into top universities is consequently extremely fierce, underscoring Korea's reputation for having one of the most merciless education systems in the world—usually described as "stressful, authoritarian, brutally competitive, and meritocratic."
- South Korea's students devote more time to studying than children in any other OCED country.
- South Korea is said to have the largest private tutoring industry in the world.

## Background on the United States

- The history of education in the United States has had a long journey from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, education was not a requirement and was a dream for many.
- The main purpose of education in the United States at the time was to teach children to read the bible and was heavily influenced by religion.
- Harvard was the first college established in 1636.
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States education philosophy shifted from a privileged, religiously based education to common, state-sponsored education.
- Over the last two centuries education has become an integral part of American society with attendance increasing from 59% to 94%.

## South Korean Education

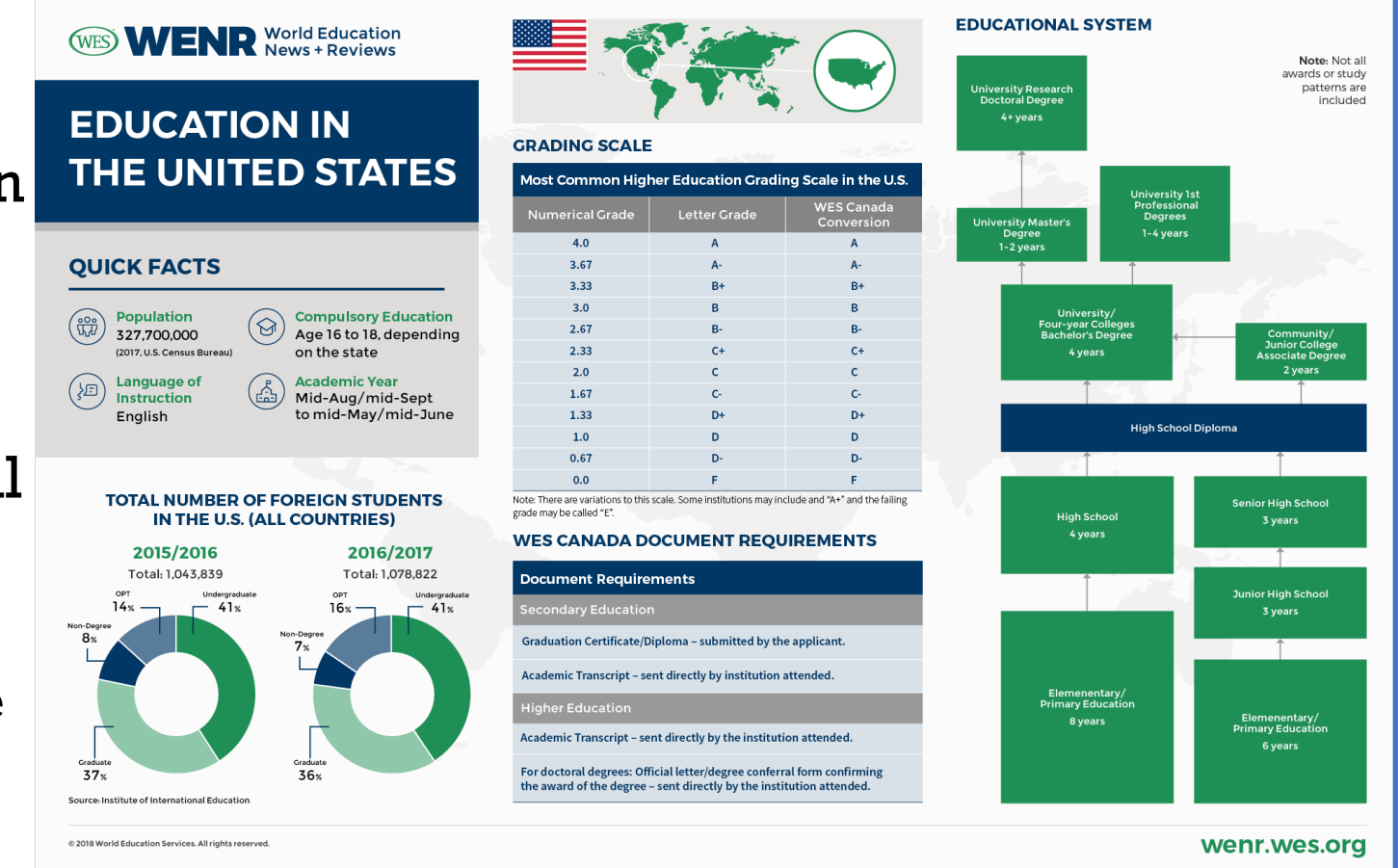
- Children between the ages of six and fifteen are required to attend school in South Korea.
- There are six years of primary school, three years of lower secondary school and three years of upper secondary school, which is either academic or vocational.
- South Korea offers a set of alternative upper secondary school such as autonomous schools and vocational schools.
- Vocational schools focus on a particular area, such as foreign language, science or the arts, and autonomous schools adhere to the national curriculum but have the flexibility to design their own instructional program.
- Both vocational and autonomous schools set their own entry criteria and are generally more competitive than other upper secondary schools.
- Ninety-five percent of students complete upper secondary school in South Korea.
- South Korean schools follow a national curriculum framework developed by the Ministry of Education.
- The national curriculum is revised every five to ten years.
- The curriculum for both primary and secondary school also includes Creative Experiential Learning (CEL) activities, which are hands-on activities such as participation in clubs, volunteering, and career exploration.
- An hour per week of career exploration is required in lower secondary schools.
- In primary school, students in grade one and two are instructed in Korean Language and Mathematics, as well as subjects that are roughly translated to: "Good Life", "Wise Life", and "Happy Life".
- These subjects focus on the transition to school life and include basic study skills, problem-solving, creativity, and learning through play.
- A very large portion of students in South Korea supplement their education with private tutors.
- Students from either academic or vocational upper secondary schools who want to continue to junior college, polytechnic college or university must take a College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT).
- About 70 percent of students completing some form of post-secondary education, South Korea has the highest post-secondary education completion rate in the OECD.



Source: <https://wenr.wes.org/2018/10/education-in-south-korea>

## United States Education

- American students attend primary and secondary school for a combined total of 12 years.
- Education is mandatory to the age of at least sixteen in all states, with some requiring students to stay in a formal education setting to eighteen.
- The 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution states that all powers not specifically delegated to the deferral government are delegated to state governments.
- As a result, the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and the territories, are directly in charge of their own education systems, resulting in tremendous diversity of education nationwide.
- Every state has its own department of education and laws regulating finance, the hiring of school personnel, student attendance, and curriculum.
- Elementary and secondary (K-12) education at the local level is provided by school districts, which run all public schools within their jurisdictions.
- School districts are often granted a good deal of autonomy in terms of budgeting and teaching of the curriculum, and they are responsible for hiring and supervising teachers and for raising funding, usually through property taxes.
- Public schools have also relied heavily on local property taxes to meet the vast majority of school expenses.
- American public schools therefore tend to reflect the educational values and financial capabilities of the communities in which they are located.
- Private schools (religious and non-sectarian) are also available, but students must pay tuition to attend them.



Source: <https://wenr.wes.org/2018/06/education-in-the-united-states-of-america>

## How are they different?

- I will list the comparisons of the South Korean education system because I am more familiar with the American education system myself.
- One difference between the South Korean high school system and the United State system is that they offer more choices for students who are interested in different career orientation before they pursue higher education through vocational schools.
- This offers a different route for students who usually opt to stop pursuing higher education and start working right after high school.
- Korean students also experience longer school days.
- President Barack Obama has once praised the boom of South Korean education and credited the improvement on the longer days of schooling.
- About 220 days out of the year are spent in school in South Korea compared to America's 180 days.
- Another difference between the K-12 education system is the uniformity of the curriculum followed.
- South Korea holds almost the same curriculum for both public and private institutions, therefore almost all students receive the same quality of education throughout the country.
- Both the South Korean and American education systems have their merits and flaws.
- For example, the South Korean education system simply put, rewards students for cramming and memorization, which results in students often lacking original ideas and creativity.
- On the other hand, the American education system encourages students to raise questions, discuss, and argue.
- South Korean and American education systems can compliment and supplement each other and there can be a lot to learn from their counterparts.

## References

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