

Abstract

Expanding Lifelong Education for Enhancing Social Equity

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This study stems from a problematization of the role of lifelong education in relation to addressing social inequality. Whereas lifelong education seeds the positive potential for enhancing social equity, lifelong education also bears the danger of reproducing or expanding educational inequality from schools in its manifestation in reality.

As supported by much literature, inequalities regarding lifelong education participation according to gender, educational attainment, and forms of employment appears not only in the Republic of Korea but in all countries albeit in different degrees. Scholars have analyzed policies that seek to facilitate lifelong education participation of the marginalized or on the effects of these policies amidst such social contexts worldwide.

However, inequalities in lifelong education participation differ according to the types of welfare states or the systems of lifelong education institutions that underpin its provision and demands. This suggests the necessity of not only a perspective toward how to support the marginalized for lifelong education, but a perspective that focuses on how lifelong education is bridged with demands from the labor market leading up to the question of how to construct a system that recognizes the outcomes of lifelong education into occupational competence and educational credentials.

This study takes the latter perspective and examines ways to expand lifelong education, focusing on vocational education of adults. Although lifelong education encompasses learning from all stages of the life cycle, addressing all the stages including schooling is beyond the scope of a single study. Thus, this study is specifically focused on adult education, with a specific emphasis on increased attention being paid to vocational education due to shortened cycles for skilled labor, polarization regarding skilled labor, or perceived threats of technology substituting human labor in the current waves of ‘the Fourth Industrial Revolution’.

Although a wide range of discussion is possible regarding the breadth and speed of technological change as examined in Chapter 2, what is evident is that the current technological changes have a huge influence on ‘work’ and the labor market. In particular, some evident changes include the previous linear structure of “schooling → entry into the labor market → retirement” changing into a cycle between work and education due to factors such as shifts in the demands for the skilled workforce or the substitution of jobs by machines. Moreover, another possible change may be that the polarization of workforce substitution and skilled labor can lead to intensified social inequality.

Amidst such changes, the importance of vocational education in adulthood is increasingly becoming emphasized as a way of increasing social equality. International organizations such as the OECD or World Bank have accentuated the importance of lifelong education from the framework of Inclusive Growth. ILO has also stated that lifelong learning is a universal right throughout all stages of the life cycle.

Based on factor analyses of institutional factors related to lifelong learning using datasets of PIACC, the dashboard on Priorities for Adult Learning provided by the OECD, and national statistical data, policies implementing active investment in the labor market have been relatively consistent in increasing

lifelong education participation rates while mitigating social inequalities in participation. On the one hand, the Republic of Korea has shown a relatively low rate of active investment in the labor market when compared to other countries, as well as showing large gaps in lifelong education participation according to income quantiles. On the other hand, the Republic of Korea shows relatively higher rates regarding employment security of full-time employees and lifelong education participation of employees working from a system of employment insurance. Even with limitations arising from difficulties in comparing international contexts and differences in how statistical data are collected in each country, the international comparisons in Chapter 3 confirms that the Republic of Korea has insufficient public support regarding lifelong education participation for the marginalized, resulting in gaps in lifelong education participation.

We examine the increased demands for lifelong education through changes in work and the labor market in the Republic of Korea, while also analyzing the limited provisional structure of lifelong education in Chapter 4. We address problems such as the separation of provisional systems, the limitations of employment-insurance-based vocational education and training, repercussions from higher adult education being operationalized separately from previous higher education programs, and the difficulties of recognizing vocational education and training or professional expertise in the current recognition and validation system of lifelong learning. As many scholars have addressed in the literature, gaps in lifelong education participation based on gender and education attainment co-exist. Our analysis shows that the problems rising from employment-insurance-based vocational education and training are above all the causal factor for such gaps in participation.

In addition to international comparative analyses and discussions on the current statuses and debates regarding lifelong education in the Republic of

Korea, Chapter 5 suggests the following policy tasks to expand lifelong education from the perspective of universal human rights for education throughout one's life.

1. Lifelong learning needs to become positioned as a universal right for citizens, supported by public provisional structures for lifelong education participation.

Amidst social changes that require continuous cycles between work and education, lifelong education is not a mere means of complementing formal education such as schools or increasing labor market outcomes. Rather, lifelong education is necessary to promote economic development and social integration, which makes public support for lifelong education an active initiative of social investment.

First, regardless of how it may be called, it is necessary to introduce a 'personal account' that people can use throughout their life cycles. 'Personal accounts' are currently structured as an amalgam of lifelong learning accounts that record and manage learning experiences and vocational competency development accounts that actually provide financial support. However, an important caveat is that finances for 'personal accounts' should break away from the current method of employment-insurance-based funding to taxation-based or a hybrid of the two. Moreover, the currently practiced Learning Leave System needs to be expanded from the purpose of expanding learners' rights in terms of where and when they engage in learning.

Second, the current system of lifelong education governance, which is split between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Labor, needs to be integrated into one. This is necessary for a holistic process of lifelong education policy establishment or for collaborations between institutions and programs of lifelong education. A first option that can be considered is an inter-ministry organization directed by the Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs. Alongside inter-ministry collaboration in the central government level,

tasks for the local level include 1) encompassing a wide range of institutions such as local industries, committees, labor unions, civil society organizations, higher education · lifelong education · vocational education institutions, 2) predicting the workforce demands for a specific region, 3) invigorating governance for educating skilled labor, and 4) improving the system so that learners can readily obtain both educational and employment information.

Formal education has broken away from a narrow focus on training workforce for socioeconomic purposes. In line with this change, the goals of lifelong vocational education need to break away from the workforce training paradigm that focused on highly professionalized expertise toward education conducive to converging technologies. Moreover, such vocational education needs to be propelled in relation to social protection and active policies in the labor market. Higher lifelong education also needs to transform from the current system focused on traditional learners to become more inclusive to non-traditional learners. Specific details will differ according to the characteristics of each higher education institution. Yet, public financial support for higher education institutions focused on vocational education, such as technical colleges, should be increased. There is also a need to connect current vocational education and training institutions to related higher education institutions to utilize the infrastructure and enhance the levels of educational quality.

2. The following tasks need to be dealt with in order to match the demands and provisions of lifelong education.

In order to build an appropriate provisional structure of lifelong education to match the demands, which is expected to increase with the changes in work and the labor market, it is necessary to construct a monitoring system for information on skilled labor. A monitoring system that helps understand and predict changes in skilled labor will be a starting point for a comprehensive information system that include national/local/individual demands for skilled labor, information on

how skilled a learner is and what kinds of educational opportunities are provided in relation to diverse skilled labor demands. Following aforementioned suggestions, higher and continuing education demands of adult learners need to be buttressed through measures such as 1) organizing various degree and non-degree curricula, 2) providing lifelong education programs streamlined with the demands of the community, 3) academic management and support in consideration of the traits of adult learners, complementary educational programs or preparatory programs to assist adult learners.

3. Various forms of social recognition for the outcomes of lifelong education is necessary to expand participation.

For outcomes of lifelong education to be socially recognized especially in the labor market, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) needs to be improved as well as a need to expand institutional structures to validate and recognize a wider range of learning experiences. The NQF is important to connect learning to vocational qualifications; a comprehensive recognition of learning experiences is important for the interchangeability between various types of learning. Efforts need to be put into NQF to systematize competency levels for higher education and above as well as to concretize actual competencies and vocational qualification that is used in the workplace. For a comprehensive recognition of learning experiences, quality management regarding recognition processes and standards are necessary as well as professional development for personnel. Since the forms and contents of learning span a wide spectrum for lifelong education, it is crucial to continuously examine staff duty and curricula for recognizing learning, as well as securing professionals and evaluators to manage this process.

■ keywords: changes in work, lifelong education system, vocational education and training (VET), lifelong learning in higher education, lifelong learning as a basic human right, national qualification framework (NQF), skill monitoring system