

Abstract

Second-Cycle Longitudinal Study on North Korean Migrant Youths' Education(II)

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■ Contents and Purpose of Study

This study, “Second-Cycle Longitudinal Study of North Korean Migrant Youths' Education(II)”, was conducted in order to devise policy plans to help North Korean migrant youths so that they can manage their current lives well in South Korean society as immigrant minorities by identifying the states of their settlement; and to prepare the cornerstone for mutual understanding and coexistence of South and North Koreans in the era of the Korean Peninsula's unification or peaceful coexistence. Followed by the first-cycle longitudinal study of North Korean

Migrant Youths' Education, this study was conducted by selecting new subjects of the second-cycle in-depth interview, and collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. The subjects of the in-depth interview are composed of: North Korean migrant students of 6th grade in elementary school and 3rd grade in middle school; their parents and teachers in charge; and North Korean migrant youths who graduated or dropped out of secondary school.

This study was conducted with three goals. First, conduct in-depth interviews with North Korean migrant students attending elementary school and middle school, and devise education support policies based thereon. Second, conduct in-depth interviews with North Korean migrant youths who graduated or dropped out of secondary school, and devise education support policies based thereon. Third, systematically analyze school experiences of North Korean migrant youths, major features of their growth process, and aspects of changes in the features through quantitative data of first-cycle study and additional analysis, and suggest educational support policy plans for them in the long-term.

In order to achieve these research goals, the study found following results.

■ Study Results

[Analysis on Second-Cycle Interviews with 6th Grade Elementary School Students]

The results of research and analysis on 6th grade North Korean migrant student's adaptation, educational development, and integration in South Korea are as follows.

First, family consultations for North Korean migrant students and their parents need to be carried out at an early stage of resettlement. During the course of escaping from North Korea, North Korean migrant students experience parting

and reuniting with their parents in many cases. Also, during their lives in South Korea, many of them witness their parents' divorce or remarry. Under such circumstances, the relationship between the North Korean migrant students and their parents cannot develop amicably, and they live with conflicts and wounds. In many cases, such conflicts within the family lead to difficulties in school life in South Korea. Thus, family consultations need to be carried out for such North Korean migrant students and their parents so that they could heal their wounds and develop a well-integrated relationship.

Second, measures for supporting North Korean migrant students to build and maintain friendship are needed. Friendship is of great importance for children who migrate to other countries at a young age to adapt well to new schools and society, and lead such successful lives afterwards. Although students with experiences of defection must have much in common to share, becoming friends with other classmates in the same classroom would naturally lead to adaptation at school. In cases of North Korean migrant students born in China who experience difficulties in communication due to language problems, the existence of close friendship becomes a key factor in maintaining their emotional health and adaptation. Therefore, for the students from China, there need to be programs for sharing friendship beyond the language barrier together with Korean language education.

Third, most of elementary school students from North Korean migrant families experience lack of care, and some of them are neglected at a serious level. They require attention from school and local society, and support from the government. Most parents of North Korea migrant families fail to support their children with sufficient attention since they focus on earning a living so as to adapt to their life in South Korea, support livelihood of family members in North Korea or China, or their defection to South Korea. Since either of the parents go to work, the parents spend less time at home and have different living patterns from their children. Eventually, they can barely make up time for a family dinner even

though they live under the same roof.

Fourth, additional policy efforts are needed for providing even and qualitative educational opportunities in addition to resolving basic adaptation issues of the children of North Korean immigrant families. In many cases, the parents of North Korean immigrant families cannot provide proper educational support to their children as they cannot afford it and do not fully understand South Korea's school systems. Because of their background as North Korean immigrants, the parents cannot easily enter into a relation with teachers and even have a hard time communicating with them. Children of the North Korean immigrant families have to adapt to their school lives in South Korea with their weak social and economical conditions, and they are likely to miss a proper opportunity to growth due to relatively inadequate educational conditions. Particularly, since private education in South Korea has functions of: taking care of the lower grades such as elementary school students in place of the working parents; and letting the children socialize within their peer group, deprivation of private education might become an influence factor which would cause a lack of care or difficulty in socializing within the peer group for the North Korean migrant children. Therefore, measures need to be taken so as to make up for such situations.

[Analysis on Second-Cycle Interviews with 3rd Grade Middle School Students]

North Korean migrant students have voluntary or involuntary experiences of migration from places where they were born or grown, and, in the process, they receive stress from a sudden environmental change. Especially, in case of the students who were exposed to psychological or physical violation, they enter South Korea with trauma and their experiences act as crucial discouragement to their adaptation to school life, and overall society and culture. For their own sakes, it is very important to support psychological health of North Korean migrant students and their parents.

Teachers need to understand the “discontinuous courses” of defection that North Korean migrant students underwent, and act as a bridge among school, parents and students so that the North Korean migrant students can adapt well to their school life. In addition, more positive results were produced when students built a relationship with one teacher in the long term rather than a new teacher for every semester or year. In order to achieve these results, teachers’ constant interest and support are priorly needed toward the North Korean migrant students with life-changing experiences. Also, teachers need to make efforts to develop or introduce various educational programs and mentoring activities to the students so that they can open up their minds, and get interested in their school life or build close relationship within their peer group.

Generally, North Korean migrant students with huge insufficient basic learning skills tend to have difficulty comprehending lessons due to a lack of basic communication skills. In addition, students having basic learning skills also have difficulty with advanced vocabularies for learning and contents of the curriculum as they advance into a higher grade. There are many cases where students whose native language isn’t Korean only hang around with classmates who can fluently speak Chinese, or even fail to get along with their peer group as they are not confident with talking in Korean. Measures are needed to support the students to enhance their Korean skills so that they can learn not only everyday language, but also contents of the middle school curriculum overall.

It was found that North Korean migrant youths lead their independent lives based on their experience of overcoming difficulties during defection, make efforts to break prejudice against themselves, and enthusiastically help the weak of the society. This suggests that it is important to find the capabilities of North Korean migrant youths and recognize them as a foundation which could further lead to social integration, rather than as people who need unilateral assimilation or supports. Therefore, change in the perception needs to happen in students,

teachers, parents and society at large, and supports therefor should be available; so that North Korean migrant students' personal educational growth can be enhanced, and can eventually lead to overall social integration.

[Analysis on Second-Cycle Interviews with High School Graduates]

North Korean migrant students who participated in both first- and second-cycle longitudinal study of North Korean migrant youths' education are currently freshmen in university or office workers. It has been approximately a decade since they entered South Korea, and they show subjectively high satisfaction with their current lives in South Korean society. Therefore, it can be said that they have settled down in South Korean society to a certain extent.

In total 9 people participated as a graduate panel of the second-cycle longitudinal study of North Korean migrant youths' education, 4 out of which entered 4-year universities, 2 entered 2-year technical colleges, and 1 plans on retaking the college entrance examination. 3 out of 4 who entered 2-year technical colleges found employment and is now working. Those who entered universities have difficulties in their studies, but are confident that they will overcome them. The new workers are currently learning, so they are excited and interested rather than having emotional pressure.

The growth of the North Korean migrant youth panel after graduation can be witnessed in their ability to look back on their past and lives. They look back on their school days, constantly change themselves, and try to faithfully live their current lives. Furthermore, they have a sense of pride in having adapted to their new lives, which develops into their future confidence.

With regard to forming an identity, they are no longer concerned about publicly revealing their identity as a North Korean native. When they become members of a society, they meet people with varied ages and generations, values, perspectives on North Korea, etc. Since adults are more mature and thoughtful

towards the North Korean natives, they feel much less psychological burden about revealing their North Korean background. Some even intentionally revealed their North Korean background in order to regain their confidence that they lost with poor academic achievements in the past, and strategically utilized this as a method of adapting to their university lives. Also, they develop various identities as they are labelled with different names because of their North Korean background in the network of various people.

It is not easy for them to completely assimilate into South Korean society, and some even refuse to assimilate. They lead a difficult life with unbearable competitions and comparative deprivation in South Korean society, where gaps between social classes are widening due to the rich-get-richer and the poor-get-poorer phenomenon. Consequently, some dream of emigrating from South Korea to another country. They basically have dissatisfaction about South Korean society, together with a dream about a wider world. On the other hand, some suggest positive alternatives towards South Korean society by comparing against the reality of North Korea that they experienced, rather than utterly criticizing South Korean society.

[Analysis on Second-Cycle Interview of North Korean Migrant Youths with Discontinued Studies]

This chapter dealt with aspects of adaptation, growth and integration of North Korean migrant youths who “discontinued their studies.” at regular schools. . Some of the North Korean migrant youths who “discontinued their studies” start to earn a living for financial reasons, but most of them continue their studies at “alternative schools for North Korean migrant youths”, etc. Although the North Korean migrant youths who discontinued their studies do not take a great proportion among the whole North Korean migrant youths, we need to focus on them as they show complex difficulties which North Korean migrant youths go

through and the problems of South Korean society and educational environment.

The cases of the North Korean migrant youths who discontinued their studies show that they have personal reasons for stop studying and that complex causes affect their choices. The act of “discontinuing studies” cannot be simply concluded as a result of maladjustment. In general, North Korean migrant youths and the children of the North Korean immigrants have difficulty in the academic field for the reasons of a lack of basic academic skills, difficulties from different school curriculum, and competitive academic culture focused on university entrance. Also, some North Korean migrant youths are bullied by their classmates just because they came from North Korea or China, or have difficulties or psychological scar due to domestic environment factors such as parent-child issues, complicated family formation and financial difficulties. Unlike these factors which push North Korean migrant youths out of school, the presence of alternative schools for North Korean migrant youths, which provide financial inducement such as scholarship, living expenses and academy fee, and which has dedicated teachers who teach and guide students according to individual’s aptitude and academic skills, acts as a factor which pulls them into an alternative educational institution outside the schools. On the other hand, North Korean migrant youths who defected to South Korea alone do not get any financial or emotional support from their parents, and have to financially support their family in North Korea; thus, they are completely deprived of appropriate educational opportunities because of the financial burdens. Some North Korean migrant youths who “discontinued their studies” choose alternative schools for North Korean migrant youths which fit well with an individual’s aptitude, academic strength and environment, after worrying and considering about South Korean schools’ system and an individual’s career instead of regular schools. Some North Korean migrant youths choose alternative boarding schools which provide an independent life style and a partial financial support as they have problems with their parents or finances. These examples suggest that

their “discontinuation of studies” should be viewed from the aspect of “strategical choice” rather than mere “maladjustment.”

North Korean migrant youths who quit a regular school and re-entered an alternative school for North Korea migrant youths show certain signs of growth through discontinuation of studies and their lives at the alternative school. With the help of professional counselling, and compassion and emotional support from teachers of alternative schools, some students overcome their psychological scar from family troubles and conflicts with parents caused during defection from North Korea and settlement in South Korean society, and regain their passion and confidence in their studies and future. Other students overcome their academic failure from regular schools and find their career paths through career guidance specialized for North Korean migrant youths. Emotional connectedness and mutual trust with the teachers of alternative schools can be commonly found in the cases of North Korean migrant youths who recover their independent control over their lives and confidence after “discontinuing their studies” at general schools.

Most of North Korean migrant youths who “discontinued their studies” at regular schools felt that South Korean students at regular schools looked at them with hostility, sympathy or exclusion. China-born North Korean youth also feel stereotype and experience discriminative attitude toward them by South Korean classmates. North Korean migrant youths show various kinds of responses on this issue. Some youth confidently reveal their identity as a North Korean, whereas other youth act cautiously by hiding their native place of North Korea or China, or by revealing their native place to only close friends after some time. Rather than attaching their identity to either one of South Korea, North Korea, or China, they show fluid identity connected with various places such as their birth place, living space and home. This suggests that integration of North Korean migrant youths is a matter of building a social environment where they can confidently reveal their identities rather than an issue related to individual efforts or adjustment.

[Expert Group Interview Analysis]

The contents related to educational support of North Korean migrant students drawn from the analysis on an in-depth interview of educational support experts on North Korean migrant students can be summarized as below. Above all, a few points were suggested related to the adjustment of North Korean migrant students.

First, education and supports for parents of North Korean migrant students are needed in order for the students to receive enough help from family so that they can live and study properly in South Korean society and schools. North Korean migrant students hardly receive parental support for their school life, and some students have difficulties in adjusting themselves in schools because they cannot receive basic care from parents. Those students who have continuous attentions and supports from parents and teachers tend to have high self confidence and level of school adjustment.

Second, many of North Korean migrant students, especially those who spent years separated from their parents and did not receive enough care, show psychological instability. Psychological support for these students are needed because their psychological instability works as an important negative factor on the North Korean migrant students' school life. Psychological stability of the North Korean migrant students is considered as a prerequisite for their basic school life, such as making friends and studying in schools.

Third, the expert group suggested that continuous and consistent long-term supports are needed since the North Korean migrant students' adaptation to schools happens throughout years of long-term attentions and supports rather than as a short term event. Considering the fact that North Korean migrant students commonly experience difficulties during the early stage of immigration, and gradually live stably after two to three years, the supports for them have to be focused in the early stages of their entrance.

Fourth, among the North Korean migrant students, those who lived many years

in China have difficulties in study due to their low Korean language abilities. Many students born in North Korea also experience difficulties in study since they do not have sufficient Korean language abilities for academic purpose. Therefore, supports for their Korean language learning are required.

A few important measures about improving educational support for North Korean migrant students are suggested as below.

First, systematic psychology test as well as emotional and psychological supports are needed for the North Korea migrants students. The supports such as psychology test, psychological counselling, and psychotherapy needs to be conducted in a systematic collaboration between related institutions.

Second, parent education has to be systematically provided to support North Korean migrant students. The parents of North Korean migrant students likely show a tendency that schools manages every matters related to the students which may caused from their experience of schooling in a socialist society. And many students experience difficulties because there is a gap between their parents' parenting style and schools' education style. Since this difficulties may cause another conflict between generations, it is needed to build a foundation for educational collaboration between schools and parents of North Korean migrant student through providing education programs for parents.

Third, it is not gaining many attentions, but Korean language education for students born in North Korea is an important issue. Although North Korean migrant students do know Korean language, but many of them have difficulties in understanding classroom lessons because the "Korean language" they use is not the same Korean language which is spoken in classroom lessons. For this reason, research on Korean language education for this population needs to be conducted and related measures need to be prepared.

Fourth, a year-based mentoring program for North Korean migrant students needs to be conducted in a continuous format, thorough out many years. In order

for the mentoring program to be conducted as a long-term project, it is needed to make an institutional platform for teachers from other schools or experts from various fields to participate in the mentoring program.

[First-Cycle Quantitative Data Analysis]

The results of additional analysis on the quantitative data collected from the first-cycle of longitudinal study of North Korean migrant youth are as below.

The quantitative research was analyzed on mainly three topics.

Foremost, analysis results of North Korean migrant youths' adaptation characteristics by type are as follows.

First, according to the statistics, "lesson comprehension" of North Korean migrant students depending on their birth places showed significant differences. On the 1st survey, "lesson comprehension" of China-born students was high but it decreased continuously, and on the 5th survey, "lesson comprehension" of North Korea-born students was shown to be high.

Second, residences, birth places, and "school-life satisfaction" were shown to have a statistically significant 3-way interaction. It was shown that students residing in Seoul had high "school-life satisfaction." On the other hand, "school-life satisfaction" of North Korea-born students living in metropolitan cities is continuously decreasing.

Third, according to the statistics, the number of North Korean migrant students per school was shown to have a significant influence on "stress levels" and the "teacher-student relationship." "Stress levels" were shown to be lower in schools with "10 or more" North Korean migrant students. The "teacher-student relationship" was shown to be enhanced in schools with "less than 3" North Korean migrant students.

Forth, according to the statistics, the students attending specialized schools for North Korean migrant students and the students attending regular schools were

shown to have significant differences(T-test) in “lesson comprehension”, “school-life satisfaction” and “stress levels” variables. Over the period of the 4th survey, the group of students attending specialized schools were shown to have high “lesson comprehension”, low “school-life satisfaction” and high “stress levels.” On the other hand, according to the statistics, two-way interaction between attending specialized schools and “friendship” seemed to cause significant differences. The group of students attending specialized schools seemed to have continuously enhanced “friendship.”

Next, we analyzed the relationship among the 4 fields(learning, psychology, society, and relationship) of North Korea migrant students’ adaptation.

According to the results, the relationship among the 4 adaptation variables showed statistical significance. Especially, it was confirmed that “friendship” and “self-esteem”, and “school-life satisfaction” and “stress levels” had relatively strong correlation. The same tendencies were shown when we analyzed the correlation among the adaptation fields based on school levels(elementary/middle school students) and birth places(North Korea/China-born). Especially, an elementary school student group and a China-born student group had a significantly strong correlation between “self-esteem” and “friendship.”

Finally, we analyzed the characteristics of North Korean migrant students’ learning adaptation(lesson comprehension) according to survey periods.

First, “self-esteem” generally had 0.5 correlation with “lesson comprehension”, and had lower than 0.3 correlation with “stress levels”, “friendship”, and “teacher-student relationship.” Second, as a result of correlation analysis on “school-life satisfaction” and “lesson comprehension”, a higher correlation was shown with “lesson comprehension ”measured after the survey period($t+1$), rather than at the survey period(t). In other words, “school-life satisfaction” is influenced by “lesson comprehension” as the former is a dependent variable of the latter. Third, as a result of correlation analysis between “self-esteem” and “lesson comprehension”,

these two variables showed significantly high correlation between the values surveyed at the same period.

■ Policy Proposals

Based on the result of this study, we proposed the following policies.

- ☐ Build specialized psychological consultation system
 - Establish supporting systems for individual North Korean migrant students and family consultations
 - Establish a research center for psychological consultation of North Korean migrant youths
- ☐ Establish a cooperation system for providing systemic support from early stage of settlement to entry into society of North Korean migrant youths
 - Establish and revise relevant rules for cooperation between related departments and organizations
- ☐ Reinforce Korean language education for children of North Korean immigrants born in a third country
 - Develop and provide educational materials such as textbooks for speaking and writing
- ☐ Reinforce Korean language education for North-Korea born migrant students
 - Develop study and educational materials for North Korean migrant students' Korean language education
- ☐ Reinforce cooperation between alternative educational institutions for North Korean migrant youths

- Establish a cooperation system between alternative educational institutions for North Korean migrant youths and neighboring schools in the settlement
- ☐ Support North Korean migrant students based on studies on educational difference between North and South Korean schools
 - Systemize support for North Korean migrant students' adaptation in South Korean schools based on studies about difference in teaching vocabularies in North and South Korea, instruction methods, and evaluation methods
- ☐ Reinforce support for North Korean migrant students entering universities
 - Systemize pre-university programs for North Korean migrant students
- ☐ Establish comprehensive support systems for North Korean migrant youths
 - Convert school adaptation-focused support into overall and complex support
- ☐ Develop and spread integrated education for the public
 - Develop and spread education for reinforcing cohesion competency, in other words a cohesiveness which embraces diversity

☐ **Key words:** North Korean Migrant Youth, Longitudinal Study, Adaptation, Educational Growth, Social Cohesion, Educational Support