

ABSTRACT

A Longitudinal Study of North Korean Migrant Youth in South Korea: A Preliminary Survey and Design Study

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The purpose of this study is to design a longitudinal study of North Korean migrant youth in South Korea, which will be implemented from 2011 to 2015. Such a longitudinal study is an essential element in developing the educational support and policy system for North Korean migrant youth. This study focused on factors influencing the adjustment of North Korean migrant youth, as well as creating a questionnaire and research model. As of July 2010, the total number of North Korean immigrants stood at 19,391 of whom about 1,300 were enrolled in full time public education. Over the last three years, the drop out rate has fallen by 50%; in 2007 the drop out rate stood at 28.1% for high schoolers, but in 2008 it had fallen to 14.2%. Likewise, in 2007 the enrollment rate stood at 57.3%. By 2008, it had risen to 73.2% and by 2009 it had reached 77.4%. However, the drop out rate for

middle schoolers and high schoolers remains stubbornly high; currently 9% and 14% respectively. Since 2000, there have been many previous studies on developing educational support systems for the better academic adjustment of North Korean immigrant youth, but none on the pathways that North Korean immigrant youngsters in South Korea.

In order to design this longitudinal study for five years from 2011, this study was done by re-analysing all data collected from a previous study of 2009, entitled *The Current Educational Status of North Korean Migrant Children and the Development of Educational Support Systems in South Korea; A Qualitative and Quantitative study*. This study also conducted pilot quantitative and qualitative research. This study clarified the subject of inquiry and the object of study and also created questionnaires which identified significant factors influencing the issue of adjustment for this longitudinal study.

Firstly, the subjects, comprising 745 students, together with 520 parents, and 595 teachers; have been analyzed once again, forming the basis of the quantitative research data collected in 2009. The full interview transcripts of the key interviewees, comprising 31 students, 4 mothers, and 14 teachers have also been re-examined.

In terms of re-analyzing the data, the key findings are as follows: Firstly, the quality of interpersonal relationships between parents, peers and teachers is the most influential factor in determining student school adjustment. Studying measures of self-esteem, ambition and the future expectations of students and their perception on South Korea would also appear to be important. Secondly, this longitudinal study needs to consider the influence of the transformation of family members. Most North Korean migrant children have experienced family break-ups in the process of

immigrating and adapting to South Korea, such as separation (forced, non-consensual, or otherwise), divorce and remarriage of parents (both or either). This was found to be the most significant factor influencing their adjustment. Lastly, the questionnaire for the longitudinal study should examine the degree of adjustment in terms of the duration of settlement and residence in South Korea.

This was essentially a pilot study which attempted to also conduct preliminary research utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. 322 North Korean immigrant students participated in the quantitative survey and 32 North Korean immigrant students, together with 4 teachers and 2 mothers participated in the in-depth interviews.

In terms of preliminary research, the key findings are as follows:

Firstly, the panel on the longitudinal study starting from 2011 should be consisted of North Korean students born from 1996 to 2001, who arrived in South Korea from 2008 to 2010; in other words, those who have resided in South Korea for a period of less than three years. The number of such students is estimated at about 300 and these students will be surveyed in a quantitative research exercise if possible. 50 students selected among this group will participate in in-depth interviews with consent.

Secondly, in particular, the management and maintenance of a research panel should be seriously considered in any longitudinal study. Therefore, researchers need to establish a close rapport with research participants and to make every effort to maintain such rapport. To this end, researchers will be given appropriate training prior to the survey.

Thirdly, the contents for the quantitative survey for the longitudinal study were selected as follows: family connectedness, motivations of the study, attitude in class at school, the ability of parents to provide

educational support, interpersonal relationship with school teachers, parents and peers, self-esteem, self-efficacy, levels of academic achievement, self-description, occupation, the expectations for their new life, self-satisfaction in academic work and citizenship awareness etc.

Fourthly, any quantitative survey should be undertaken by a professional surveyor face to face. Questions also should be concise and use simple sentences and simple vocabulary. This is because the cultural differences facing North Korean immigrants are significant and it is important that the data obtained from these immigrants is accurate.

Fifthly, it is necessary to understand their adaptative process in terms of their whole life context. Therefore, their past experiences, such as their life in North Korea and their experiences as refugees prior to arrival here should be surveyed in detail by means of in-depth interviews.

Lastly, the qualitative research should compensate for the weak points of the quantitative survey; therefore, it performs three roles in the longitudinal study as follows: 1) it examines the interdependent relationships between the factors influencing their adjustment and these are dealt with in the quantitative survey. In particular, 2) it examines how students contribute to their relationships with parents, teachers and peers and how these relationships influence their education and adaptation in society. It also analyzes the effects of current policies and the educational system on North Korean migrant youth. 3) The qualitative survey plays an important role in accumulating an enormous amount of data on their personal life stories; this can help us develop educational support systems to assist the adaptation of North Korean migrants to life in South Korea.