

A Comparative Study of the Vocational Education Systems and Occupational Classification Standards of Korea and Finland

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I. Outline

Nowadays, a critical task for any nation is the raising of the competency and skill levels of its human resources in order to keep pace with rapid industrial and social change, facilitating the transition to a "knowledge-based society." A systematic strategy is needed to meet these emerging needs at a national level as well as at local and individual levels.

Using the education system of a nation that has already made the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and continues its development for this comparative study. Especially, it will help to show how a framework, which integrates national standard occupational classifications with a vocational education system, can be constructed to support the lifelong learning needs of individuals throughout their working lives.

From this perspective this research uses Finland's vocational education system and standard occupational classification system as respective benchmarks for Korea's VES and occupational classifications. Finland's systems were selected as benchmarks because of the country's successful

transition to a knowledge-based society and its continuing educational reforms to help it maintain its leading position among advanced nations in this area.

By conducting this comparative study in the context of Finland's education and vocational education systems, it is intended to draw inferences about the future development and direction of Korea's own vocational education system in a knowledge-based society.

II. Education in Finland

As an influence from the Swedish era, traditionally two structural principles have been followed within the State's central administration in Finland: the ministerial administrative system and the system of central administrative boards. In the case of education, the National Board of Education is a central board operating as an expert body of development, evaluation and information service under the Ministry of Education.

The Education policy of Finland is implemented by administration level such as national level, regional level, and local level.

The Ministry of Education which is the highest authority and responsible for preparing educational legislation and all necessary decisions transmits education policy to lower administrations and empowers authorities through legislation. Lower administrations provide education services to people according to local needs within a national education policy framework while paying attention to the decisions of the upper administrations. Thus, Finland makes an effort to achieve as high a level of education as possible for the whole population by connecting the upper lower administrations together.

The Ministry of Education issued the national strategy of education and training for 2000~2004 for an information society.

First, the growing competence requirements of the information society will be met by systematically developing the prerequisites for lifelong learning. Second, education and education establishment will be reformed to be able to meet the needs of a high level of knowledge and skills in a rapidly changing society. Third, the national strategy focuses specially on educational staff and teacher education to help them apply ICT (Information Communication Technology) to education. Fourth, everyone working or studying at an educational establishment will have access to the necessary information and communication technologies and technical and pedagogic support. Fifth, the information technology skills of students will be better incorporated in the curricula and practical operations of educational establishments. Sixth, many universities and educational establishments have joint network-based education and research consortiums in which enterprises are also involved as virtual universities or virtual schools. Finally, education provision in the information and content industries will correspond to demand both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The Finnish education system consists of voluntary pre-school, comprehensive school (compulsory school), post-comprehensive general and vocational education, higher education and adult education.

Education is provided free of charge except for adult education in Finland. Especially, for children during compulsory school, the teaching and educational supplies are free of charge. In addition, pupils get one free warm meal a day. As a rule, transportation is arranged by the education provider for distances of 5 km and over.

III. A Comparison of the Vocational Education System and the Occupational Classification Standards of Korea with those of Finland

By comparing the two countries it can be seen that both have a dual system comprising a general education track and a vocational education track. Also, both countries have shifted the focus of their vocational educational systems from upper secondary to higher education by reforming vocational education.

This is in response to the transition from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society and the demands for highly educated and skilled human resources able to acquire, manage and apply knowledge in the knowledge-based society.

While both countries have taken a similar approach to vocational education policy reform, Korea actually began implementing its reform measures to raise the standards of vocational education earlier than Finland, so there are more various vocational education institutions in Korea.

From the point of operation, both countries aim to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to acquire vocational competence. But, compared to Korea, Finland has made more progress in developing education fields according to a system of occupational classifications or common to both countries are the efforts being made to change from school based learning to work-based learning by, for example, implementing on-the-job learning or apprenticeship training.

And we could use the Finnish qualifications system as a model showing how to connect vocational education with a system of national qualifications. The Finnish qualification system is controlled by the Ministry of Education making it possible to integrate vocational education

with a system of acquiring qualifications.

From a comparison of each standard classification of occupation it was found that both countries classify occupations nationally based on the ISCO-88 (International Standard Classification of Occupation-1988) which was developed by the ILO (International Labor Organization).

Korea, however, has modified major groups of the ISCO-88 by dividing major sub-group 5 (Service workers and shop and market sales workers) into two sub-groups according to the actual situation in Korea, so Korea has 11 major groups in this classification system. However, Finland has only 10 major groups because it follows the major group classifications of the ISCO-88. It was also found that the major sub-groups in Korea were more detailed than those of Finland's.

Based upon the results from this study, it is suggested to develop vocational education of Korea in a knowledge-based society from points of view of a government level, a organizational level such as corporations and vocational education establishments, and an individual level.

First, the role of government should be changed from that of an authority or a director to that of a coordinator or a supporter through government-lead systematic research about a vocational education system, developing a pre-estimation program about occupational demand according to industrial structure change, and developing an evaluation and reward system for corporations and vocational education establishments.

Second, we should establish a local arbitration body for coordinating industrial demands and the demand of vocational education establishments. Then both corporations and vocational education establishments should make efforts to develop curriculums and an evaluation system for effective work-based learning.

Finally, each individual should make an effort to develop a self-learning competency (or self-directed learning) to prepare for a lifelong learning

society. It should be accompanied by guaranteeing an individual autonomy in the learning process and actively applying Information and Communication Technology to learning situations.