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# The Current Situation of Educational Gap and Tasks to Solve it in South Korea

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## Abstract

The continuous economic growth since 1960's helped the standard of living improved and absolute poverty decreased, but insufficient social welfare system could not meet the people's needs for a life worthy of man and unequal income distribution exposed new social conflicts. The most representative conflict caused by the unequal income distribution might be the inequality of education, that is, educational gap. This article focused on the education gap by the income and region.

The polarization of income and fixation of social strata has been explicitly noticed through the reorganization of economic structure since the economical crisis in 1997. The expansion of the poor and enlarged educational gap caused by economical inequality would disturb the social integration and finally weaken the national competitiveness.

To solve this condition, in the short term, the plan to more efficiently execute the budget should be established by understanding the problems of the projects that have been performed. In the long term, the educational base should be established that the fair competition in the more diversified fields can be realized through the education paradigm shift.

Key words : educational gap, social welfare system, economical inequality, social integration

## The relationship between educational gap and social welfare's income redistribution function

Economic growth affects the income redistribution indirectly through the redistribution mechanism of social welfare as well as directly.

The fact has been generally accepted that social welfare system positively affects equitable income redistribution of social resources by redistributing them in both direct and indirect ways for low income group to improve their income. Therefore, if social welfare system could not include the

institutional redistribution mechanism, the equitable income distribution could not be accomplished and even income gap between the poor and the rich would be increased. Social welfare system can help society avoid the confrontation between the poor and the rich by solving the gap between them through the income redistribution mechanism.

The confrontations among social classes such as the poor and the rich or employees and the employers have seriously done harm to our society by destructing the social order, obstructing industrial productions, paralyzing local economy, making subcontractors going bankruptcy, etc.

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[Table 1] Number of Juvenile Offenders by Standard of Living

Crime	Standard of Living				
	Total	High	Mid	Low	Unknown
Criminal offense	75,982 (100%)	233 (0.3%)	23,334 (30.7%)	50,333 (66.2)	2,082 (2.7%)
Special law offense	39,441 (100%)	87 (0.2%)	11,027 (28.0)	27,542 (69.8%)	785 (2.0%)

Source: Supreme Prosecutors' Office, Republic of Korea(2002)

Social welfare system contributes to economic growth and social integration by preventing the social chaos caused by conflicts and confrontations (Giwon Kim, 1995).

The continuous economic growth since 1960's helped the standard of living improved and absolute poverty decreased, but insufficient social welfare system could not meet the people's needs for a life worthy of man and unequal income distribution exposed new social conflicts. The most representative conflict caused by the unequal income distribution might be the inequality of education, that is, educational gap.

The realization of the constitutional right that "all citizens shall have an equal rights to receive education corresponding to their abilities" would raise the mobility among strata and facilitate the social integration. The situation, however, has been criticized that education has become the means to pass down the parents' social and economic stratum to their children, for the economic power of parents is being transmitted to their children by the private education (Heesam Kim, 2009).

Moreover, children are supposed to go to school from elementary to high school, but it is true that many children are quitting school. The fact that many of students who are quitting school are from the low or very-low income family shows the problem that was caused by educational gap in the level of unequal income distribution such as the burden for school expenses, the intergenerational transmission of poverty and regional gap. This article focused on the education gap by the income

and region.

### The Current Situation of Educational Gap by Social and Economical Background and Income Gap

In the situation that private education market grew and that the income gap that has increased since the financial crisis in 1997 never seems to be narrowed, the great gap in the quantity and quality of education by the economical power and social position of parents becomes the educational gap.

It is obvious that the educational gap among strata in the aspect of parents' support for education is being affected by the expenditure gap for private education by household(The utilization rate of private education in South Korea in 2008 was 75.1%. See [Table 2])

As Table 2 shows, high income class provides their children with more frequent and more expensive private educations. The influence of private education for college entrance examination and the gap of college entrance rates between students from low income family and ones from high income family grew and naturally the possibility to escape from poverty by education has been lowered.

Table 3 about the gap of school record by the income level shows the low possibility that the students from low and lower middle income level belong to upper 25% of school record.

Table 4 shows that the income level is in direct proportion to the Score of the National

Scholastic Achievement Examination for the College Entrance. Therefore, it reveals that more opportunities for more expensive and more

frequent private education students have, higher school score they receive.

[Table 2] The Expenditure and Utilization Rate of Private Education by Monthly Average Household Income

Income (Unit: won)	Monthly Average Expenditure of Private Education per a student (Unit: 10,000 won)		Utilization Rate of Private Education (%)	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Total	22.2	23.3	77.0	75.1
Under 1 million	5.3	5.4	36.9	34.3
1 ~ under 2 million	10.7	10.8	59.7	55.3
2 ~ under 3 million	17.7	17.7	77.0	73.7
3 ~ under 4 million	24.1	24.5	84.4	82.2
4 ~ under 5 million	30.3	30.6	89.2	87.2
5 ~ under 6 million	34.4	35.6	90.5	89.7
6 ~ under 7 million	38.8	40.2	92.7	90.5
over 7 million	46.8	47.4	93.5	91.8

Source: Result Analysis of Research on Private Education and Measures to Prevent Spread of Private Education (2009), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology(2009)

[Table 3] The Gap of School Record by the Income Level

Income Level	Bottom 25% of School Record (%)			Upper 25% of School Record (%)		
	Elementary	Middle	High	Elementary	Middle	High
Low	37.02	35.48	32.77	13.17	11.21	9.72
Lower Middle	23.61	20.27	25.65	19.05	20.32	18.89
Middle	19.60	17.09	17.41	22.73	25.77	27.94
Upper Middle	17.58	10.48	14.81	29.54	36.53	34.91
High	20.86	12.18	12.84	28.70	36.55	44.29

Source: Ryu, Bangran(2006)

[Table 4] The Gap based on the Score of the National Scholastic Achievement Examination for the College Entrance by the Household Income Level

Income Level (Unit: won)	Score of the National Scholastic Achievement Examination for the College Entrance
Under 2 million	291.81
2 million ~ under 3.5 million	294.84
3.5 million ~ under 5 million	311.09
Over 5 million	317.33

Source: Kim, Gyunggeun(2005)

[Table 5] Social and Economic Background of Freshmen of Universities  
(Korean Educational Development Institute, 2002)

Name of University	High(%)	Upper high(%)	Middle(%)	Lower middle(%)	Low(%)	No response(%)
Seoul National	1.1	21.0	58.1	17.6	2.3	0.5
Hanyang	1.4	24.3	58.3	13.7	1.9	
Korea	2.1	22.7	60.2	12.8	2.1	

Source: Shin Sangmyung, et al.(2003)

Table 5 shows the social strata that university students consider that they belong to. According to this table, most of the respondents feel that they belong to middle, upper middle and high classes. It means that it is no longer to say that, if one went to high ranking university, one could find a good job.

Table 6 shows School Record by the Occupations of Fathers. This table also tells that the wage gap of fathers definitely influences the school scores.

Table 7 also shows that, as fathers have higher occupational position, their children's university entrance rate in the capital area become higher.

[Table 6] School Record by the Occupations of Fathers

Occupations	Bottom 25% of School Record(%)			Upper 25% of School Record(%)		
	Elementary	Middle	High	Elementary	Middle	High
High ranking public officers and professionals	19.69	15.76	13.01	29.49	33.76	41.19
Semiprofessionals and office workers	19.61	14.84	15.81	25.06	30.34	32.93
Service, Sales and technical post	25.87	21.86	21.74	19.15	21.07	21.50
Agricultural and Fishery workers and laborers	32.44	30.53	34.02	15.68	14.99	11.39

Source: Ryu, Bangran(2006)

[Table 7] Occupations of High school Students' Fathers by the Level of Universities

Occupations of Fathers	College and University Entrance Rate(%)			
	Junior Colleges in Province	Junior Colleges in the Capital Area	Universities in Province	Universities in the Capital Area
Administrative position	22.3	30.5	38.7	46.6
Transportation and service worker	26.4	33.8	26.3	28.9
Construction workers	9.7	9.2	6.8	6.8
Production and technical worker	14.7	14.9	12.4	10.9
Agricultural and Fishery workers and laborers	26.9	11.6	15.9	6.8

Source: Ryu, Bangran(2006)

Consequently the students from families with low social and economical positions incline to experience multiple troubles in the aspect of culture, finance, etc.

Again, the gap of school scores and university levels by father's occupations might induce the same or wider gap of social and economical position for their children. For example, if a father had low income job, he could not give his children the opportunity of expensive private educations, which means that his children might not have a good school score and eventually might not have a high income job. Namely, the lowered social and economical position is transmitted to the next generation.

### The Current Situation of Educational Gap by Regions

The fast economic growth since 1960's produced unbalance of the wealth and poverty by regions and then eventually the separation of residence by the strata. In conclusion, the domicile became not only the place where one lives, but also the essential factor to decide the accessibility toward socially scarce resources such as job, education, amenities and social service facilities.

Among them, education became a major concern, for, if people with similar level and needs of education congregate in the specific area, they

would share and exchange the knowledge exclusively within where to live, which would make the separation more serious.

This polarization of education will make the possibility greater that the children from wealthy family would be raised in the better educational environment and other children would be raised in inadequate educational environment (Gyeonggeun Kim, 2005).

Moreover, the situation of the equalized public education even considerably differs from each regions, even though we consider the economical background of families. one fifth of schools from farming and fishing community have difficulty to operate just one class for one grade and doesn't have enough high school, which means that the students must go to near city or big city. Furthermore, the regional disparity also affects the accessibility to private educations.

Table 8 shows that both the expenditure and utilization rate of private education in seoul are highest comparing with other regions. The gap of the expenditure of private education becomes bigger as the grades become higher from elementary school to high school.

Those data present the gap by regions in the aspects of the standard of living and the quality, environment and opportunity of education between cities and small towns and villages.

[Table 8] The Expenditure and Utilization Rate of Private Education by Regions

Regions	Monthly Average Expenditure of Private Education per a student(Unit: 10,000 won)		Utilization Rate of Private Education(%)	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Total	22.2	23.3	77.0	75.1
Seoul	28.4	29.6	80.6	79.1
Metro-city	22.0	22.8	79.0	76.6
Small or medium-sized city	22.8	24.2	77.5	75.8
Eup and Myeon (Town and village)	12.1	12.5	66.4	64.0

Source: Result Analysis of Research on Private Education and Measures to Prevent Spread of Private Education(2009), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology(2008)

Table 9 also shows the gap between cities and small towns and villages. Comparing with the Seoul and cities where the expenditure of private education is high, it was found that towns and villages have more students who belong to bottom

25% of school record and less students who belong to upper 25% of school record. This tendency becomes much more certain when students go to high school.

[Table 9] School Record by Regions

Region	Bottom 25% of School Record(%)			Upper 25% of School Record(%)		
	Elementary	Middle	High	Elementary	Middle	High
Seoul	23.97	21.23	19.31	25.55	27.17	30.69
Metro-city	24.55	19.17	15.37	21.17	23.66	37.15
Small or medium-sized city	22.33	20.82	19.22	25.43	26.05	27.29
Eup and Myeon (Town and village)	29.57	28.74	37.97	17.40	17.59	7.15

Source: Ryu, Bangran(2006)

Table 10 also shows the educational gap by regions. It was found that the gap of percentile rank score of the National Scholastic Achievement Examination for the College Entrance between Seoul and Jeonbuk was greatest (Seoul: Jeonbuk = 0.00 : -12.92).

The data we have looked through show that educational gap, regions and economical class are closely related with each other. Population statistics shows that the farming and fishing

workers tends to live in the towns and villages and large income professionals tends to live in Seoul and other big cities. In conclusion, based on the premise that the school records are closely related with regions and class, it is found that the school records of students are influenced by their social and economical background, namely the income of their family or the income and resources of regions they belong to.

[Table 10] The Gap of Percentile Rank Score of the National Scholastic Achievement Examination for the College Entrance by Regions

Location of High School	Gap	Location of High School	Gap
Seoul	0.00(standard)	Ulsan	-5.07
Incheon	-0.86	Chungnam	-5.39
Daejeon	-2.91	Busan	-5.42
Daegu	-3.09	Chungbuk	-6.37
Gyungbuk	-3.15	Jeju	-6.48
Gangwon	-3.62	Gwangju	-7.81
Gyeonggi	-4.09	Jeonnam	-7.86
Gyungnam	-4.13	Jeonbuk	-12.92

Source: Kim, Heesam(2009)

[Table 11] The Gap of Junior College and University Entrance Opportunity by Regions

Region	Number of Graduates	Number Admitted to Universities(four years)	Numbers Admitted to Junior Colleges
Seoul and Metro city	274,373	150,883(55.0%)	57,437(20.9%)
Small or medium-sized city	214,944	126,707(58.9%)	48,381(22.5%)
Eup and Myeon (Town and village)	73,836	32,318(43.8%)	24,367(33.0%)
Total	563,153	309,908(55.0%)	130,185(23.1%)

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology(2006), Educational statistics database

## Conclusion

The polarization of income and fixation of social strata has been explicitly noticed through the reorganization of economic structure since the economical crisis in 1997. The expansion of the poor and enlarged educational gap caused by economical inequality would disturb the social integration and finally weaken the national competitiveness.

The data show that the educational gap by income, stratum and regions has reached a truly serious level.

Especially the expenditure and accessibility of private education greatly differ from income levels and strata and the residents in the city areas tend to have more opportunities to experience the private educations and high quality educations.

Therefore, it became certain that the educational gap produces the income gap and naturally the income gap of next generation. In this situation, how to decrease the income gap might be to cut the vicious circle that educational gap produces the income gap by decreasing the wage differentials in the labor market. The situation that people who have more wealth and knowledge get more compensation in the modern society, however, might not be easy to be changed by only policy. Therefore, the educational gap caused by the income gap should be decreased by building the education welfare policy for the less privileged in the state and government level.

Accordingly various policies like selecting the educational priority areas to reduce the educational gap among strata and regions and to give more educational opportunities to the less privileged have been implemented, but they are not sufficient enough to remarkably improve the living conditions and educational environment and to guarantee the educational opportunity to develop students' competence in the specific areas.

To solve this condition, in the short term, the plan to more efficiently execute the budget should be established by understanding the problems of the projects that have been performed. In the long term, the educational base should be established that the fair competition in the more diversified fields can be realized through the education paradigm shift.

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