Review article  The Past, Present and Future of Korean Social Environmental Education

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Abstract

In Korea environmental education (hereinafter EE) is classified into an institutional, school EE and a noninstitutional, social EE. This study reviews how social EE has formed and evolved since 1970s and characteristics appearing during the process, driven by environmental organizations, the main actor. Corporate EE is chronologically analyzed as well. In 1970–1980s the purpose of social EE was to enlighten people about the seriousness of pollution and nurture activists joining environmental movement. In 1990s EE driven by environmental organizations pursued social changes. In this period, social EE became diverse, in which various audiences can participate ranging from children and adolescents to grown-ups. In 2000s the citizen-participatory EE expanded, and the diverse social EE actors appeared such as the organizations specializing in EE, grassroots environmental organizations and the network of citizen EE instructors. Lastly post-2010 is a transit period. New changes occurred at home and abroad and its scope and arena have expanded. At this time the EE policies at the national level have laid the foundation for systemization of social EE. This study concludes by proposing future tasks for the development of social EE.

Keywords: Development, Environmental Education Movement, Korean Environmental Education, Social Environmental Education

I. Introduction

EE is classified into two different types in Korea: institutional education such as school EE and noninstitutional education driven by environmental organizations, civil society organizations and businesses (Lee 1999). This study focuses on social EE, which is a type of noninstitutional education and reviews its evolutionary process since 1970. In Korea, noninstitutional education is translated into not only social EE but also nonformal EE. Social EE emphasizes the characteristics of noninstitutional one as both social education and EE movement.

Social EE in Korea is targeting various audiences in various ways with various topics. Specific features have appeared in the course of institutionalization of social EE and dynamic changes of Korean society.

The relevant laws and regulations on EE are introduced in this part. A representative one is the Article 25, ‘education for environmental preservation’ in the Basic Environmental Policy Act enacted in August 1990. According to this article, the state and municipal governments should establish and implement policies, which can help people deepen the understanding of environmental preservation through relevant education and promotion and put into action in everyday life.

The 1st and 2nd National EE Master Plans were established after the EE Promotion Act had enacted in 2008, which reinforces learning and practice for sustainable society (Ministry of Environment 2015). This encompasses the international debate and trend, which are reflected in ‘UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development’ (hereinafter DESD; 2005–2014).

New environmental issues recently emerged: climate change, environmental health and environmental wellbeing. Social elements also have a critical influence on social EE in terms of a radical change in population structure due to the low birth rate and aging population, the active debate on an alternative social system centering on local communities and the active lifelong education activities (MoE 2015).

In Korea, researches on social EE have been carried out as follows: the research on the need and awareness of social EE, the investigation of the current state, and the cooperation between schools and society for EE (Lee et al. 1998, Lee 1999, Song 2006, Kim et al. 2014). The research was also conducted from the perspective of EE movement (Won 2009, Noh...
and Kim 2010, Jang and Yun 2012). The current state of social EE was also covered in the National report of DESD (Lee et al. 2010, Lee et al. 2013). Lee (2001) and Jang and Yun (2012) conducted the research on the evolution of social EE.

In this study, the past, present and future of Korean social EE are covered. The past is a key to understanding of the present and preparing for the future. This study reviews how social EE has been formed and evolved and what features have been revealed since 1970s. Depending on actors leading social EE, its educational purposes and pursuit may differ. The actors of social EE in Korea are civil society organizations including environmental organizations, businesses and government. On top of this, local governments, lifelong education institutes, museums, national parks and arboreta also run EE programs. In this study, the evolution of social EE is analyzed focusing on environmental organizations, a main actor of social EE. Corporate EE is also analyzed, whose original purpose is profit-seeking.

Research questions are as follows: how has social EE evolved in the midst of social and environmental changes in Korea? What are their characteristics in different times?

II. Research Method

In this study, research papers on national EE policies and social EE are analyzed. The study also investigates data on the current state of social EE in the context of education for sustainable development (hereinafter ESD).

National EE policies were analyzed centering on 'the 1st National EE Master Plan (2011–2015)' and the 2nd National EE Master Plan (2016–2020)' announced in 2010 and 2015 respectively (MoE 2010, MoE 2015).

Social EE, nonformal EE, EE movement, school-social cooperation for EE and corporate EE were the main key words for information search on the Korea Education & Research Information Service (http://www.riss.kr).

Social EE can be categorized chronologically because it has gradually evolved and acquired its identity and characteristics in the midst of environmental changes at home and abroad, not based on specific events (Jang 2011). In this context, this study reviews the evolution of social EE driven by environmental organizations in the chronological order of 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Corporate EE was also analyzed in a chronological manner. And the study investigates how the social EE driven by environmental organizations and corporate EE have evolved under the social and environmental influence and how the actors have worked together.

III. The Characteristics of Korean Social EE

1. Social EE as a social education

Social education has been complementing or replacing the conventional school education system in Korea. Consequently, great emphasis is laid upon the relevance to society, the attention to the marginalized and communities and social changes (Oh 2010). The social education has been developed into 'another format of education holding a variety of values (Jung and Kim 1986). Also, social education has intentionally excluded profit seeking, functional orientation and vocational training. This implies the unique perspective and educational philosophy and spirit of social education (Han 2001).

Social education of Korea originated from education movement on the basis of humanitarianism in 1960s and 1970s. Freire's education philosophy had an impact on social education and education movement in Korea. People-oriented education based on humanitarianism has been reinforced, which is expressed as 'intellectual intervention on people's life world' (Han 2001). Consequently social education is considered 'an education triggering social change.

2. Social EE as EE movement

EE has a nature of environmental movement because it emerged for the purpose of resolving globally aggravating environmental problems (Nam 1995, Fien and Gough 1996, Gough 1997, Choi et al. 2007, Jang and Yun 2012). Moreover, social EE driven by environmental organizations highly tends to pursue a social change but such a tendency has appeared differently in different times.

In 1980s the seriousness of environmental problems was laid bare due to rapid industrialization and urbanization. Meanwhile there was a paradigm shift in Korean society during democratization in 1980s. From the perspective of social movement, the early EE movement in 1980s was a strategic instrument for 'regime reform' and focused on environmental pollution with a strong tendency to enlighten people. In 1990s the public came to learn the seriousness of environmental problems after experiencing some environmental accidents such as Penol pollution of Nakdong River. As the public recognized environmental issues as not only a social but also an individual problem, social movement was divided into
'the movement to reform life world' and 'the movement for an alternative life world.' The EE movement of the time was diversified with an EE through nature experience and a movement for an alternative life centering on ecological thoughts. This means that EE movement as a social movement has shifted to human centered education pursuing a social change. In 2000s diversity emerged as an important value, and the leisure culture spread in Korean society. The importance of local and village communities also increased. The EE movement since 2000 has specialized, integrated and restructured removing the existing barriers. Joint participation and practices have been bolstered in the social EE.

IV. The Past and Present of Korean Social EE

We will try to explain how the social EE by environmental organizations and corporate EE have evolved in the midst of social and environmental changes. And the study also investigates changes in the cooperation between schools and society for EE.

1. The social EE driven by Environmental Organizations

The EE by environmental organizations has a relatively stronger tendency for social changes than that by other actors. In this sense the EE by environmental organizations is called an EE movement in the context of citizen movement for education. In this section, evolutionary processes of social EE driven by environmental organizations are analyzed from the view of EE movement.

EE movement began in 1970s and 1980s. At the time, the seriousness of environmental problems surfaced caused by rapid industrialization and urbanization. The main issue of environmental movement shifted from nature conservation to 'anti-pollution' movement. The EE at that time was to deliver the message of environmental movement and to enlighten people. That is, the focus was given to education for nurturing activists who were going to join the movement and enlightening people. In late 1980s the number of environmental organizations increased and the horizon of social EE expanded with published books such as 'My land is dying,' 'Pollution map of Korea' (Jang and Yoo 2016).

In 1990s EE movement formed its identity. EE became popularized, specialized and rapidly grew. Various types of social EE were formed as can be seen from the education through experiences and lectures targeting various audiences from children and youth to adults. At that time citizen leaders of EE appeared, including eco guides, forest interpreters and eco instructors. Their emergence extended opportunities for citizens' voluntary and ongoing participation in social EE. The full time educator position was created in environmental organizations, some of who majored in EE. This resulted in enhancing the expertise of EE movement.

The trend also had an impact on building partnerships among environmental organizations, government, businesses and schools. EE projects were carried out in partnership with environmental organizations and companies and the government. The government established an association in 1994 to financially support EE projects led by civil and environmental organizations. The need for school-social cooperation for EE increased as EE became a separate subject in middle and high schools.

In 2000s the citizen-participatory EE expanded, and organizations specializing in EE was established. Also grassroots environmental organizations were spawned to locally practice EE. The organizations made up of eco guides and forest interpreters appeared, pursuing EE through experiencing nature. Networking became integral with the appearance of various actors of social EE such as organizations specializing in EE, grassroots environmental organizations and citizen leaders for EE.

The need for collaboration between school and social EE has continuously been emphasized (Lee 2000, Kim et al. 2005, Kim et al. 2013). In fact, students have taken part in the EE program organized by NGO, NGO members have lectured students at school, and NGOs have supported the design and implementation of school programs of EE (Lee 2001, Shim et al. 2003). However, such collaboration has a limitation in terms of continuity because it is carried out only when there are teachers, principals and NGOs who put a high value on it (Kim et al. 2005).

Meanwhile, the EE Promotion Act passed in 2008 provided an opportunity for expanding and systemizing social EE but did not lead to actual change under the government pursuing economic-growth driven policies.

Lastly, post-2010 is a transition period. New changes have emerged at home and abroad: the EE Promotion Act in 2008, implementation and termination of DESD, adoption of SDGs and a paradigm shift in the Korean society (Jang 2016). Also, the scope and arena of social EE have expanded with the emphasis on ESD in the national curriculum and the National EE Master Plans.

In general the ground for a systemized social EE is laid. Under the National EE Master Plan based upon the
promotion law, the National EE Centers were established in 2012. Seven EE centers are operated in six metropolitan areas such as Kyunggi-do, Chungnam-do and Gangwon-do. Eight EE centers are run in seven municipalities such as Suwon city and Seocheon-gun. The national support was given for cooperative EE projects between school and society, and the focus was given to the EE tailored to each life cycle. In the 2nd EE Master Plan (2016–2020), various ways were proposed to strengthen social EE.

The plan also encompasses the diversified EE for various audiences such as press, the religious, civil servants and the elderly, an active EE at the local level, reinforcing EE for the marginalized to remove the educational gap, and to promote the environmental well-being (MoE 2015a). The Ministry of Environment has led support for EE program between schools and NGOs since 2013, and the collaboration between the two actors seems to expand.

2. Social EE driven by Businesses

The corporate awareness of environment has changed depending on environmental situation at home and abroad and environmental regulations. By 1980s businesses viewed the environmental consideration as an additional cost to their management. The Phenol contamination of Nakdong River in 1991 not only drew national attention to environmental issues but provided an opportunity for companies to realize the necessity of environmental management. The need for corporate environmental consideration increased with the introduction of international certification of environmental management as developed countries apply their environmental standard to the international trade (Kim 1994). After Rio Summit, the five major economic organizations announced 'the Corporate Environmental Declaration' in May, 1992 (Ku 1993).

Since 1992, the corporate awareness of environment has led to the declaration of environmental management by big corporations and the establishment of affiliated environmental research institutes. Growing number of companies released information of their environmental management through publishing environmental reports and made efforts to receive the certificate of ISO-14000 series. The target audience of education for environmental management ranged from the department of environmental management to all employees and contractors (Cha 1994, Min 2004).

Big businesses at the time offered environmental classes for primary school students and opened their business places to the public including local residents so that they could watch disposal of waste water, waste collection and recycling system. In addition to EE programs targeting students and the public, various activities were organized such as the restoration and preservation of local mountains and rivers where business places are located, recycling campaigns and painting competitions for children (Min 2004, Lee 2012).

Since 2000 environmental management has extended its scope to corporate social responsibility and sustainable management, with increasing number of companies publishing reports on sustainability. These changes have taken place in response to the market change such as the extension of Global Compact and the agreement on ISO 2600 since the proposal of reporting frame on sustainability by Global Reporting Initiative in 2000.


In the national reports of DESD (Lee et al. 2010, Lee et al. 2013), the current state of ESD of businesses was assessed from the perspective of sustainable management. It revealed that the education for corporate social responsibility was provided to executives and staff members. The proportion to support education, schools and academic researches has increased as a social contribution activity. A network was formed for information sharing and learning sustainable management. Sustainability Forum and SME Corporate Social Responsibility Forum are cases in point. The Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency was founded to nurture human resources for social enterprises.

As reviewed earlier, corporate EE in 1990s was offered to executives and staff members of big companies or students or the public. In 2000s it has extended its scope to education and learning within companies pursuing sustainable management, corporate network and education support as a social contribution activity. The corporate EE has emerged in corporate response to the global market change. Debates on corporate social responsibility are underway.

V. Conclusion

The study reviews how Korean social EE has formed and evolved since 1970s, focusing on environmental organizations, the main actor. The major research results are as follows:
First, the social EE in Korea driven by environmental organizations has the characteristic of pursuing social reform. This is commensurate with the trend of Korean social education whose attention is paid to the disadvantaged and communities, aiming for social changes. The social EE in Korea also has the characteristic of EE movement in that it seeks to resolve environmental problems and pursue social changes through education.

Second, the social EE in Korea has evolved under the influence of environmental movement and social change, appearing to have certain characteristics by period. As the social EE in 1970s and the early 1980s was the part of anti-pollution movement, it was diversified with an EE through nature experience and a movement for an alternative life centering in 1990s. Since 2000s it has been specialized through the establishment of NGOs focusing on EE and integrated and restructured removing the existing barriers.

Third, the EE policies at the national level have laid the foundation for systemization of social EE as can be seen from the EE Promotion Act (2008), the 1st and 2nd Master Plan of the National EE (2011–2015, 2016–2020). But the concern is also raised that the characteristics of social EE such as autonomy and diversity can be weakened when social EE is reorganized under the influence of national EE policies.

Future assignments for the development of Korean social EE are as follows: first of all, we should pay attention to the problems, which are raised in the process of reorganization of social EE under the influence of national policies. Together with this, we should lead the community based EE and need to establish its strategies based on life cycle to prepare for aging society.

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Website: Korea Education & Research Information Service (www.riss.kr).