

KOREA

Educating the Youth for Political Participation and Sustainable Democracy

**<Case Studies at the Civic Education Institute for Democracy of
the National Election Commission>**

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Case Studies at the NEC's Civic Education Institute for Democracy

I. Introduction

The Republic of Korea has achieved remarkable economic growth and political democratization since its establishment in 1948. The growth and development that Korea has achieved is almost unprecedented, and huge progress has been made in terms of political rights, civil liberty, and political pluralism.

In terms of economy, Korea is ranked 9th for the amount of export (204 billion USD) and 14th for the size of GDP (969.8 billion USD) according to 2009 data. Korea joined the OECD in 1996, and in November of 2009, Korea has become a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. Korea's DAC membership is significant both domestically and internationally in that it is the first former aid recipient country to join the committee. The 2010 G-20 Summit, which is to be held in Seoul, demonstrates Korea's active participation in solving global problems.

Korea has also achieved significant development of democracy. As democratic electoral system and culture progressed, Korea's democracy index also has been moving up every year. According to the data published in 2008 by Freedom House, which measures the level of democracy of 198 countries in the world, Korea has been categorized as a democratic nation with high scores in political rights and civil liberty. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy published in 2008 also categorized Korea as a full democracy. These data reflect the rapid growth of democracy in Korea, serving as an example for other developing countries. In 2006, fourteen countries from the Asian and African region participated in the "Election Body Partnership for Democracy" training program hosted by the NEC's Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy, and the number of these training programs and participating countries have been continuously increasing since then.

In the dark side of Korea's economic and democratic development existed numerous obstacles. There still exist obstacles such as political conflicts, distribution of wealth, confusion of social values, globalization, informatization, lack of understanding for cultural diversity, and increasing political distrust and apathy. Korea is dealing with these problems and strengthening the foundation for democracy.

Advanced democracies have not only a solid foundation for civic awareness, but also democratic systems and procedures that are firmly established. As demonstrated by advanced democracies in the western world, consolidation of democracy requires establishment of democratic system along with mature civic awareness. Therefore, it can be shown that a system is needed to improve civic awareness and political participation in Korea as well. In order to overcome the aforementioned problems and to achieve sustainable growth of democracy, various programs on civic education are offered.

Civic awareness improvement necessitates continuous political socialization. In addition to civic education programs offered at school, home or work, diverse organizations and groups including press agencies, national agencies, NGOs and NPOs participate in civic education. The NEC has been active in offering civic education programs based on the neutrality and credibility formed by fair administration of elections. Based on the principles of universality and comprehensiveness, various programs are offered for all citizens of Korea.

The NEC is recognized for its huge contribution to establishing a clean and fair election culture during the democratization in Korea. The Election Commission played a pivotal role not only in clean and transparent administration of elections but also in building an advanced political culture. During the postwar era, the Election Commission played an active role in leading the development of democracy in Korea. On the road to democracy, a new role for the Election Commission is demanded.

The innovative changes made in pluralism and election culture were essential in placing Korea as a full democracy in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy published in 2008. For continuous development of democracy, Korea is trying to establish a new political culture based on the

principles of democracy, constitutionalism, conflict resolution through communication and compromise, mutual respect and political participation. Civic education programs are offered since mature democracy is not possible without change in civic awareness.

This paper focuses on the need for educating the youth for political participation, related case studies, and significance for sustainable democracy and political participation. The subjects to be discussed in the paper are as following: The organization and duties of the NEC, which is in charge of education programs for the youth; goals, contents, and effects of the education programs for the youth; and the implication of the youth education for the development of democracy.

II. Organization and Duties of the NEC

1. Organization and Status

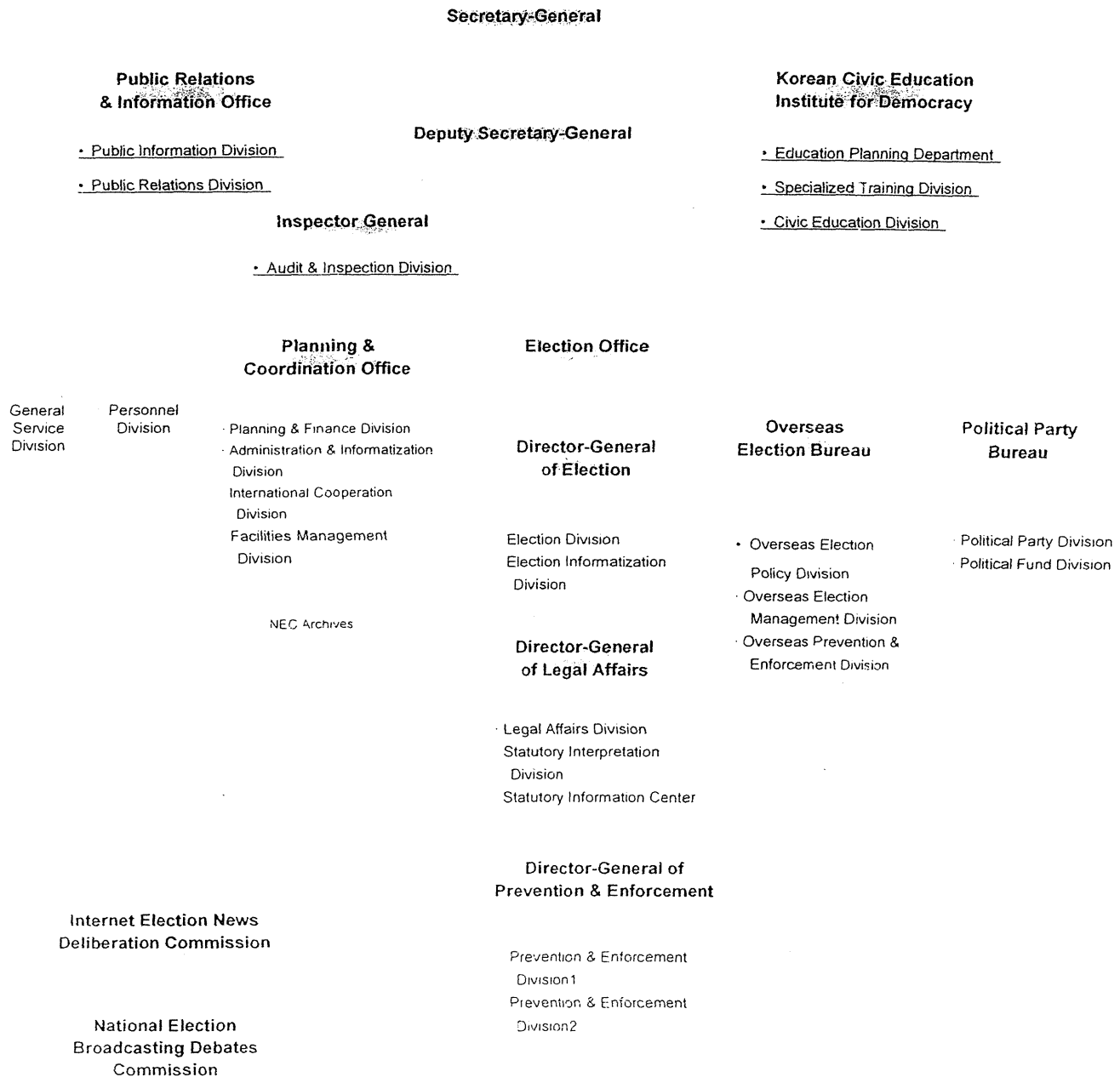
The NEC of the Republic of Korea was established as a national agency for the purpose of fair administration of elections and management of political party affairs. It is an independent constitutional agency established in accordance with the Article 114 of the Constitution in 1963, equal in status with the government, the National Assembly, the Supreme Court, and the Constitutional Court.

The NEC is composed of nine members: Three are appointed by the President, another three members selected by the National Assembly, and the rest nominated by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Among these nine members, one chairperson and one standing commissioner are elected. For political neutrality, the commissioners are prohibited from joining a political party or participating in any political activities. The NEC is unique in that it is an independent constitutional commission.

The secretariat, which assists the NEC, is headed by a minister level secretary-general, and consists of a vice minister level deputy secretary-general, two offices and five bureaus. Under the NEC Secretariat is a nationwide network of city/province and township/ward election commissions. There

are also Internet Election News Deliberation Commission and National Election Broadcasting Debates Commission. To draw an analogy, the 9-member commission would be the head of a human body, the National and city/province commissions the trunk, and township/ward commissions the arms and legs.

< Figure1. Organization of the NEC >



2. Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy

The NEC's Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy was established in 1996 for job training of the public officials at the Election Commission. Its main duty is to educate and train the officials so that the 9-member commission, the National and city/province commissions, and township/ward commissions properly function. In 2000 a political education department was newly set up in response to the social and political need since political awareness is crucial in electing qualified political leaders. With the new political education department, civic education programs have been offered to voters and politicians. Since 2005 the education programs have been offered to the youth, the future voters, making the institute a mecca for civic education. The Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy has been recognized for its role in increasing civic awareness and serves as a hub for civic education in Korea by providing educational institutes and civic organizations with educational contents, lecturer, programs, and information.

< Figure 2. Organization of the Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy >

President		
Education Planning	Special Training Division	Civic Education Division
Professors	Job Training	Civic Education 1
Education	Cyber Education	Civic Education 2
General Affairs		

Currently the Institute consists of Education Planning Department for lectures and researches, Special Training Division for training of public officials, and Civic Education Division for civic

education of politicians, voters, students, etc. Training and education programs are offered not only at the existing facilities but also using the Internet by offering cyber civic education programs. An overview of the civic education programs offered by the Institute and township/ward commissions is as follows: 32 civic education programs over 23,000 sessions for over one million people in 2008; a total of 70,000 sessions for over 4 million people since 2000.

3. Functions of Civic Education

People's political apathy translates into low turnout in elections, bringing up many problems on the electoral process. In order to overcome this crisis, political apathy needs to be solved since voting is at the root of political participation, one of the basic principles of democracy.

Among the diverse concepts behind civic education, it is defined in Korean society as cultivating the ability to decide political situation and having objective knowledge about national and local political phenomena as a sovereign citizen. Based on this political knowledge and ability, people participate in the political process to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Educating the youth for political participation is focused on cultivating talent and teaching the roles as a responsible citizen. In the end, civic education in Korea is political socialization for strengthening democratic political system and fostering members of democratic society.

As an organization in charge of election management, the NEC has contributed to the establishment of democratic election culture. Even before full-scale civic education took place in 2000, the Commission provided support for school and community elections, and education for social organization to increase a sense of sovereignty. However, after realizing the limits of these rather passive roles with a limited scope for activities, the role has been changed to actively lead democratization. The goal of current civic education program is to realize mature democracy by increasing civic awareness. Moreover, the NEC has expanded the scope of election management by providing a touch screen voting system in school elections, entrusted elections, and intraparty competitions. For overseas voting, which is to be introduced in 2012, education for political participation will be offered for overseas citizens as well.

Since civic education is responsible for stabilizing the political system and fostering the members of democratic society, youth education is very important. In Korea, 9- to 24-year-olds are defined as youth according to the Framework Act on Juveniles (UNESCO defines youth as 15-to 24-year-olds).

Considering the impact of democratic civic awareness formed during this time, the Institute is very active in offering youth civic education programs. The importance of youth in the process of political socialization cannot be emphasized enough, and that is why the Commission has started youth education program for political participation. Youth education program for political participation offers an opportunity for not only direct training, but also content development and distribution. The Commission also provides support for social studies offered at schools since youth education is mostly carried out by formal school curriculum.

The background for the NEC's active role in offering civic education programs can be summarized as following:

1. The Commission's political neutrality is constitutionally guaranteed.
2. People's trust for neutrality and impartiality of the Commission based on the 46 years of election management.
3. 16 city/province commissions and 249 township/ward commissions can be mobilized effectively for systematic civic education during a non-election period.

However, these are only necessary foundations for conducting civic education. More important factor is the Commission's strong willingness to respond to the demand of the times based on the role it played for the development of democracy during the postwar era of Korea. The NEC can be considered as one of the most active agencies in the world for fair administration of elections and promotion of democracy.

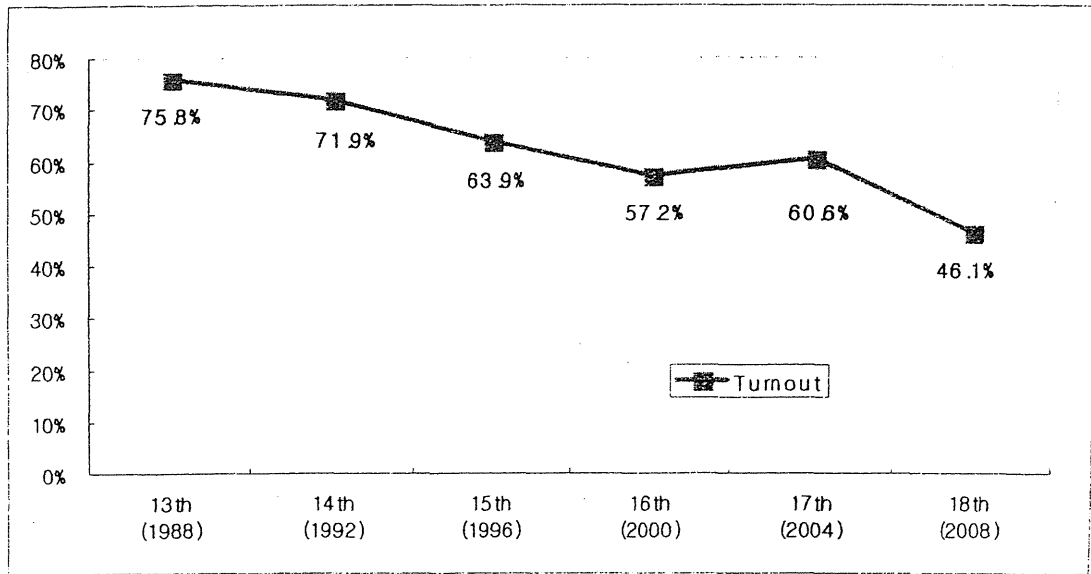
III. Cases of Youth Education for Political Participation by NEC

1. Background and Goal for Youth Education for Political Participation

In Korean society, the need for civic education is necessitated by various aspects such as overcoming the separation of the nation by the south and north, consolidation of democracy, resolution of regional, generational, and ideological conflicts, and the identity of citizens in the global community. The political conducts related to election and political party politics are especially of urgent issues.

The modern political system was introduced in 1948 after the enactment of the Constitution. Since then, 17 presidential elections and 18 National Assembly elections have been conducted. In the early years, there were problems of unfair elections. However, after democratization in 1980s, mature civic awareness brought about a large reform, resolving the problems like unfair election.

< Figure 3. Turnout in the National Assembly Elections in Recent Years >

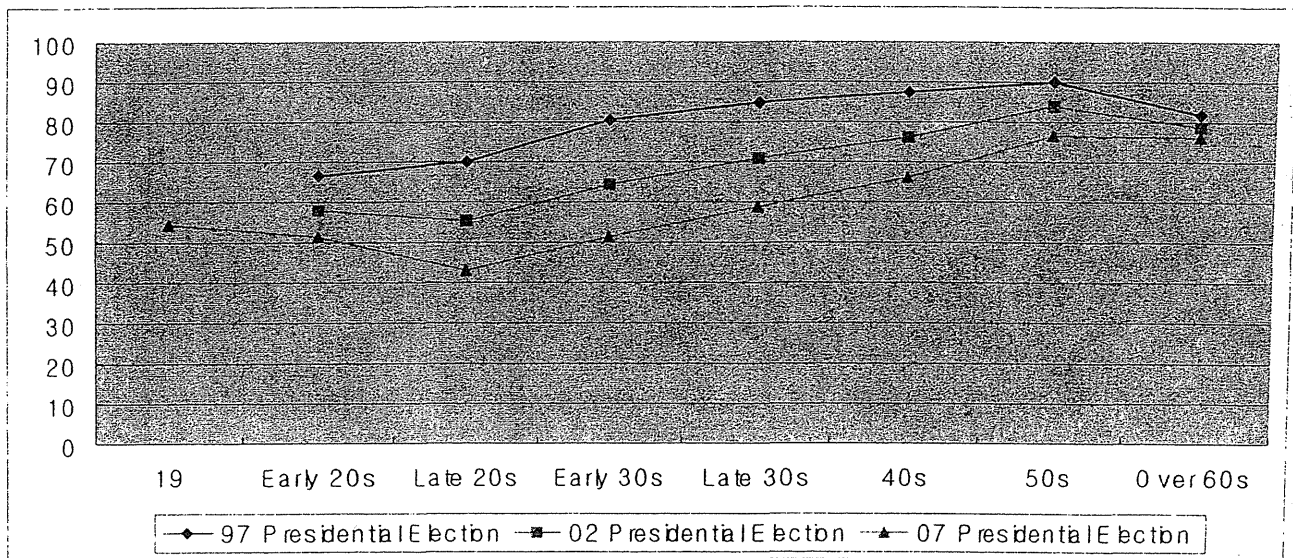


As shown in the Figure 3, the turnout in the elections held after mid-1980s has been declining. Declining turnout in elections is not exclusive to Korea. According to the studies by American scholars, Putnam (2000) and Norris (2002), major democracies in the world, such as the US and UK have experienced about 20% decrease in turnout since 1960s.

In Korea there has been about 30% decrease in turnout over 20 years since 1988. The problem is that the turnout in Korea is declining more rapidly in a shorter period of time than the US or UK. Besides, the turnouts in advanced countries such as the US, UK and Japan show an increasing trend in turnout while Korea is experiencing continuously decreasing turnout. Since the decreasing turnout in Korea is in absolute value, the problem is more serious.

Currently, the turnout in elections in Korea is so low that the principle of majority rule is not exercised properly. The turnout in the 2008 National Assembly Election was 46.1% and in an election for superintendent of education held last year, the turnout was 12.3%. Decreasing turnout has become a serious problem.

< Figure 4. Turnout by Age in Recent Elections in Korea >



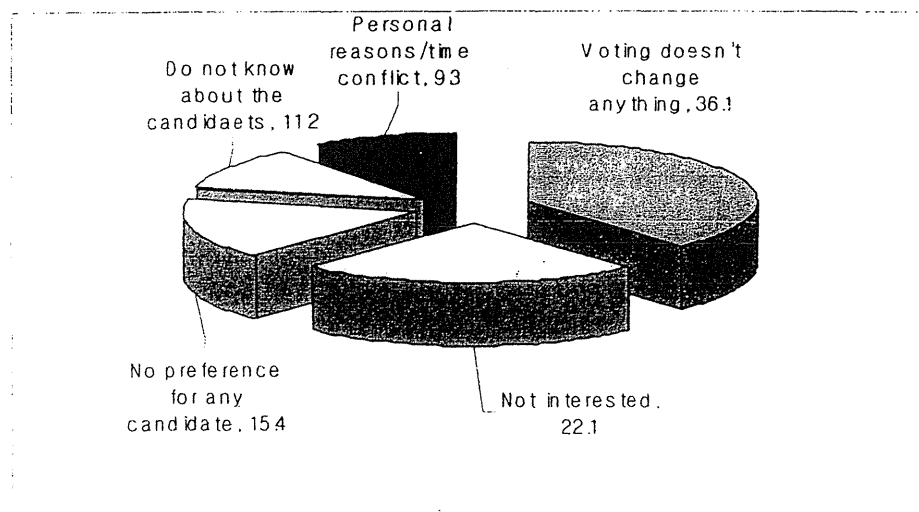
The line graph presented in the figure 4 depicts the results of the turnouts in the presidential elections by different age groups during the 10-year period from 1997 to 2007. According to the graph, the voting rates had been declining continuously during the 10 years-period since the presidential election in 1997. In addition, the voting rates had been decreasing in all age groups from 1997 to 2007 considering the increase of the voters' age. In other words, it shows that the voting rates do not increase even though the voters grow older.

The 'ageing effect' is often used to explain the fluctuation of voting rates. The ageing effect insists that the likelihood of a person to vote increases as he or she grows older. Looking at the current turnout of Korean voters, the ageing effect is supported ostensibly as Koreans show higher voting rates in their 50s and 60s rather than their 20s and 30s. However, the ageing effect loses its argument when explaining the change of voting rates by generations. The results of presidential elections in 1997 and 2007 provide empirical evidence. The voting rates of early 20s in 1997 went down in 2007 when they reached their early 30s. Similarly, the late 20s in 1997 did not actively participate in the election in 2007 when they turned their late 30s. The early 30s in 1997 did not take an active part in the election when they were in their early 40s in 2007. All the age groups showed no increase of voting rates as they grew older. In this regards, the aging effect is not applicable anymore to explain Korean society.

What is the reason behind this decreasing voting rate? Although there are various factors, the institutionalization of 20s abstention is the main reason preventing the growth of turnout as they get older. Thus, youth participation in elections in their 20s is important in terms of participating in elections and forming the sense of political effectiveness. People who did not take part in elections in their 20s are politically passive even after they get older since they did not have any chance to experience the impact of their ballot on politics.

Weakened sense of sovereignty, decreasing public interest, lack of understanding on the basic principles of democracy and increasing political apathy are other reasons behind the situation of low turnout. The weakened citizenship hinders political stability and social integration.

<Figure 5. Reasons for Abstention - the 18th National Assembly Election in 2008>



(Source: 2008 Survey Results by the NEC)

A survey was conducted to find out the reasons for abstention in the 2008 National Assembly Election. The most common reason for not voting was that 'voting doesn't change anything' (36.1%). It shows that voters who do not have a sense of political effectiveness tend to give up their right to vote. Another 22.1% of the respondents answered that they are 'not interested in politics'. The sum of these

two reasons takes up 58.2%, meaning that weakened sense of political effectiveness and increasing political apathy lead to low turnout.

Youth education for political participation needs to focus on stimulating their political interests. To lead their interests, knowledge and information related to politics are provided and various opportunities to visit political institutes are offered. Democratic civic education aimed at youths put more emphasis on 'institutionalization of voting' and creation of mature political culture. The sustainability of Korean democracy will be guaranteed when the youth are aware of their political role and fulfill their responsibility as citizens of Korean society.

The circumstances of political situation in Korea require fundamental solutions to develop Korean democracy to exceed the limited activities to increase the voting rates. The NEC takes a leading role in developing democracy by innovating election culture. Thus, the Commission has made new attempts to ensure sustainable democracy by improving civic awareness, which requires the Commission's new role for mature democracy.

Although Korea was able to introduce a modern political system and achieve procedural democratization in rather a short period of time during the postwar era, the development of democracy has been delayed due to absence of democratic civic education. Consequently, Korea has made new attempts to facilitate the development of democracy by reducing the disparity between drastic democratization and civic awareness through democratic civic education. The Commission is vigorously implementing youth education programs for political participation since it is more effective to instill democratic values during the adolescent period where socialization process takes place than the adult period where fixed concepts are already developed.

2. Structures of Youth Education Program for Political Participation

The education programs aiming to enhance the youth political participation emphasizes self-

development and capacity improvement by building up their individual abilities. The program contributes to the development of democracy by helping the youth learn the basic principles of democracy and the fundamentals of operating political systems. Also, necessary education programs for political socialization as a member of community, which is crucial in sharing basic knowledge and identity for the integrated society, are offered as main goals of the programs.

A long period is required to develop and change civic awareness. For this reason, the NEC has carried out education programs based on a long-term plan. Education programs for the youth participation in politics by Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy emphasize two main tasks. Firstly, a task for training teachers and leaders who will take charge of education programs for the youth participation in politics is carried out since adolescents belong to schools and various educational institutes. Secondly, developing education programs and facilitating the youth participation in political education programs. The programs implemented by Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy are: ① programs for training democratic civic education instructors for the youth - i) a program for teacher training, ii) a program for training instructors of democratic civic education, ② democratic civic education programs for the youth - i) a course for university students, ii) a course for fostering future political leaders, iii) a course of democratic civic education for elementary, middle and high school students, and ③ cyber democratic civic education program for the youth.

Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy pushes ahead with the development and distribution of educational materials to enhance citizenship besides directly providing youth education programs for participation in politics. Moreover, the institute plans to implement civic education programs targeted for the second and third generations of overseas Koreans with the introduction of overseas voting for presidential election and National Assembly election for proportional representatives.

Education programs for the youth participation in politics are not limited to political participation. The programs emphasize the development of democratic thoughts and ability to act to help the youth

acquire the capacity for taking part in politics. The educational effect has been visualized since 2000 because of the activation of education programs for the youth participation in politics. According to the survey on the participants of the youth education program, the course helped them have more interests in politics and their participation rate in elections has subsequently increased.

Now, this paper will suggest specific programs for adolescents provided by the NEC.

1) Programs for Training Democratic Civic Education Instructors for the Youth

(1) Teacher Training Program

Above all, the teacher training program aims to provide knowledge, information and educational methods that are required of teachers to teach the youth about political participation at schools and other educational institutes. The teacher training program is carried out based on the teaching method asking for learners' participation to make easier approach to understand the basic principles of democracy and political issues.

The program is for primary, middle and high school teachers. Besides, the program is divided into 'in-service training course of democratic civic education for primary and middle school teachers' during vacation and 'open lectures' (six sessions) on Saturdays for the convenience of teachers.

The in-service training course of democratic civic education for primary and middle school teachers, certified as a special education course by the Office of Education, is designed to train about 40 teachers at a time. The course is popular among teachers and has been chosen as the most recommended in-service training program by teachers in Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. Additionally, the course is considered to contribute to enhance students' democratic civic awareness since the contents and concepts are applied straightforwardly in the classrooms. The program is comprised of six different contents: educational method based on participation for fostering democratic citizens, understanding education for raising democratic citizens, training of conversation and

consultation, book discussion, understanding of election system and understanding of multicultural society.

The open lecture is provided to teachers who are not able to attend the full course but wishes to attend specific sessions by arranging popular sessions (e.g. educational method based on participation for fostering democratic citizens, training of conversation and consultation, etc.) in specific months (April, May, June, September, October and November). Approximately 60 teachers attend the course per session.

(2) Instructor Training Program for Democratic Civic Education

The program for training instructors for democratic civic education aims to foster lecturers among qualified staffs in the NEC and trains the staffs on basic knowledge, lecture techniques and lecture training. The program is divided into two courses: training lecturers for adults and lecturers for adolescents, respectively. Moreover, there are three categories within a course such as elementary level, intermediate level and advanced level.

The intermediate and advanced levels consist of understanding democratic civic education, instructors' image making, lecture skills, methods for organizing a lesson plan, speech techniques, and understanding of multicultural society. The intermediate level emphasizes training focused on real lecture situation through team project of organizing and presenting lesson plans. On the other hand, the advanced level motivates instructors to develop contents and lecture skills by hosting a lesson planning contest for the participating instructors.

The civic education instructors who have completed the program provide support for school elections for student bodies and the youth leadership education program by visiting elementary, middle and high schools. 'Centers for Democratic Civic Education' will be established soon from region to region and will carry out education programs for citizens under the leadership of local election commissions.

2) Democratic Civic Education Programs for the Youth

(1) A Course for University Students

'Credit Approval Course' is the most representative one for university students by signing an MOU between the NEC and universities. A class titled 'Understanding of Korean Politics' within the department of political science and diplomacy at certain universities is offered and 15 sessions per term (once a week) are required to earn the credit for the course. The course offers political experience program to university students to teach the students the issues that cannot be learnt effectively in the classrooms by implementing field trips to the National Assembly, NEC, political parties, Constitutional Court, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. and by giving special lectures on politics and power system, election and political development, assembly and party politics, election system, political paradigm shift, etc.

In addition, there is a 'Democratic Civic Education Program for University Students' targeting students at teachers' colleges, colleges of education and department of political science and diplomacy. It is a two-day program with about 40 students attending the program per session. Though it does not provide various programs like credit approval course due to its short period, the program allows participating universities to choose a specific topic for the program, on consultation with the Commission, among topics such as issue discussion, political culture observation, and leadership training. Besides, the program offers a lecture on 'Understanding Laws related to Politics' such as Election Act and field trips to the National Assembly, the Blue House and various political parties.

(2) A Course for Fostering Future Political Leaders

There is a 'Training Camp for Future Political Leaders' for presidents of student bodies at high schools during their summer vacation for three days. There is also a one day course for middle school students called 'Course of Field Trip to Political Institutes.'

The training camp for future political leaders is offered to about 100 high school student

presidents per session and is very popular among the students. The program is comprised of leadership training, discussion, special lectures given by celebrities, global leadership program, etc. Moreover, students who participated in the course organize clubs with other participants and maintain their friendship. Senior participants often volunteer to help junior participants of the program and improve their leadership skills as well.

The one-day field trip course for experiencing politics in action is programmed for the presidents of student bodies at middle schools. Students visit the National Assembly, political parties and local councils and attend lectures dealing with leadership training and rights and responsibilities of democratic citizens. This course focuses on improving the skill set required of the future leaders.

(3) A Course for Democratic Civic Education for Elementary, Middle and High School Students

The Commission provides 'Leadership Course for the Youth' by giving lectures on five topics. The five topics are: ① leadership training for adolescents, ② how to hold a classroom meeting, ③ rights and responsibilities of democratic citizens, ④ integrated civil society and ⑤ Internet etiquette. Schools may apply for the course through the Internet homepage of the Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy (<http://www.civicedu.go.kr>) and choose a specific topic. On the basis of individual school's application and selected topic, an instructor will visit the school and give a lecture. Additionally, there is a 'Course for Supporting Election of Members of Student Body,' which supports the whole process of election management such as candidate registration, political campaign, voting and counting.

The Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy nurtures lecturers of democratic civic education and provides developed lesson plans and lecture materials to enhance the specialty and quality of this course.

3) Cyber Democratic Civic Education Programs for the Youth

The Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy developed teaching materials for democratic civic education in an e-book form and posts the e-book on the website to allow free access of lecturers and adolescents. A certificate is given upon completion of the course on the Internet. The teaching materials of civic education program have ten categories: ① election and political participation, ② democracy and law-abiding, ③ realization of human rights, ④ learning skills and manners of discussion, ⑤ practicing cyber civil ethics, ⑥ practicing public order and civic awareness, ⑦ practicing responsibilities, ⑧ understanding multicultural society, ⑨ contributing to global civil society, and ⑩ respecting privacy. In particular, the program is developed as multimedia programs using video and animation to stimulate adolescents' interests.

IV. Political Implications of Youth Education for Political Participation and International Cooperation

This paper will now discuss the implications of the youth education for political participation to develop democracy and the necessity of international cooperation.

The education for adolescents' participation in politics is closely related not only to the development of democracy but also to the self-development and improving the quality of life. Self-development of the youth is important to both adolescents and to the nation. Adolescents will have a clear perspective on encountering social problems since they have political knowledge and interests in politics based on education.

Raising adolescents' individual ability is linked to improving national competitiveness. The improvement of individual and national competitiveness will contribute to the development of Korea. Northern European cases such as Sweden and Denmark present that activating civic education for developing individual ability enhances the quality of life and improves both individual and national competitiveness.

In addition, democratic civic education for adolescents will lead to the sustainable development of

Korea by fostering the future generation with national identity. Democratic civic education helps develop the problem solving ability for social conflicts based on conversation and compromise. The enhancement of community members' problem solving ability contributes to social integration. Eventually, education for the youth participation in politics will contribute to guarantee the stability of the political system stemming from democracy.

Korea has accomplished democracy in a dramatically short period of time, unprecedented in the world history. During the process of democratization in Korea, the NEC has contributed to fair election management and election culture. The Commission is active in fulfilling its role by leading the development of Korean democracy rather than passively getting on the bandwagon of democratization.

The Commission, not finding comfort in its past glory, is offering democratic civic education for all Korean citizens to solve the problems stemming from the development of democracy since 1987. In particular, the Commission's Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy offers various education programs recognizing the significance of civic education for future generations' political participation. The effects of this education are well demonstrated by the number of youths wishing to attend the programs and their increasing interest in volunteer work and political issues.

The NEC can be considered as an agency responsible for the development of democracy by fair management of elections and other related affairs. The role played by the NEC in the history of Korean democracy is considered as an unprecedented good example in the world. In this regard, the Commission can serve as a good model for developing countries.

It is convinced that the case studies of Korean youth education for political participation will be a useful model for other Asian countries. Problems awaiting solution by education for adolescents' participation in politics and democratic civic education are not exclusive to Korea. It has great implication on other countries in similar political situation. Additionally, it may provide an answer to the problems that developing nations will encounter in the near future during the process of democratization.

Korean solutions to democratic crisis will be a good model to Asian countries sharing similar political culture with Korea. Korea expects to cope with the crisis of democracy on the basis of mutual cooperation. The formation of global citizenship and understanding of multicultural society due to globalization necessitate international cooperation and coalition. In other words, fostering of global citizens as members of global society requires new values and civil ethics transcending the different nationalities. In connection with this, mutual cooperation of Asian countries is acutely requested.

Korea will provide empirical cases and contents for political education for adolescents in the process of international cooperation. Korea has many responsibilities as a member of Asian countries, not only in the areas of politics, economics and socio-culture, but also in the fields of election management and democratic civic education. Korea will spare no effort for the development of democracy and prosperity of Asian countries and international community in the years ahead.

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