



# Comparison of Lifelong Education Policies Between China and Korea and Its Implications

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**Abstract.** Policy is a kind of guidance and a kind of regulation, which can create a good environment for the development of lifelong education. The formulation and implementation of reasonable policies are necessary for the development of lifelong education and play an important role in promoting the development of lifelong education. The goal of lifelong education policy development in China is the same as that in Korea, i.e., to continuously improve residents' survival skills and quality of life by eliminating the inequality of educational opportunities. The purpose of this paper is to grasp the process of change and characteristics of lifelong education policy in Korea by comparing the lifelong education policies of China and Korea, and on this basis, to find insights into the cause of lifelong education development in China. First, China's lifelong education system is equipped with the environment and conditions to take advantage of local characteristics and facilitate the development of lifelong education programs that meet local realities. Second, it is necessary for local governments in China to study the implementation of a system for the integrated management of citizens' personal learning experiences the lifelong learning account system. The local governments invest in building and operating an integrated network of lifelong learning so that the funding support and learning history management can be systematically linked together. Third, it is necessary to expand the leading role of local governments in the process of lifelong education policy and program development by clearly sharing responsibilities according to the operating entities. Fourth, China is committed to building a lifelong learning society, which requires the training of a large number of professionals for lifelong education programs lifelong educators. The development trend of lifelong education in China has taken shape, and lifelong education career should become the new education development strategy of China.

**Keywords:** Lifelong education policy · Lifelong learning account system · Lifelong education support system · Comparison

## 1 Introduction

Korea's lifelong education policy began with the Social Education Act in 1982 and was renamed the Lifelong Education Act in 2000. As early as the 1970s, the concept of "lifelong education" emerged in Korea, and in 1980, the Constitution was adopted,

stipulating that “the nation shall promote lifelong education”, and the government not only built a system to promote the development of lifelong education, but also guaranteed the right of all citizens to receive lifelong education. The Lifelong Education Act, which has been amended several times, will be fully implemented in 2019, and the lifelong education support and operation system will be rapidly developed, the infrastructure will be increasingly improved, and the lifelong education policy will be continuously developed and systematized.

The period from 1979 to the early 1990s was a reserve stage for the introduction, introduction and theoretical research of Western modern lifelong education ideas in China [1]. In October 1979, the Foreign Education Research Office of Shanghai Normal University translated and published the book “Learning to Live The World of Education Today and Tomorrow” published by UNESCO. After 1985, modern Western works on lifelong education were translated and introduced to China one after another, such as “Lifelong Education” by Paul Langeland. In the decade of 1980s, more than 100 papers and books on the topic of “lifelong education” were published in China. The concept of “lifelong education” first appeared in the 1993 Outline of China’s Education Reform and Development. In 1995, the Education Law of the People’s Republic of China mentioned “establishing and improving the lifelong education system”, and in 1999, the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century was proposed. In 2010, the Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) was published, and the goal of lifelong education development in China is to modernize education, form a learning society, and enter the ranks of human resource power by 2020. Although China has not yet formulated a lifelong education law, local governments have been taking the lead and actively formulating lifelong education regulations, accumulating practical experience and achieving good results, and the construction of a learning society continues to develop.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in 1992, the two countries have maintained close exchanges in various fields, including economy, culture, and trade. The policy direction of lifelong education in both countries is similar in that it promotes the “lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated” pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons by promoting learners to accumulate skills and knowledge throughout their lives. It enhances not only social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability [2]. Although the two countries have different social systems and administrative systems and differences in lifelong education policies, they can learn and learn from each other. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct some comparative studies on the lifelong education policies of the two countries to provide insights for the cause of lifelong education development in China.

## 2 Overview of Lifelong Education Policy in Korea

Korea’s lifelong education policy is divided into two broad directions. One is the “lifelong learning city” project centered on local self-governing bodies, and the other is the “lifelong learning university” project centered on universities. Lifelong learning cities aim to improve the quality of life of local residents and strengthen regional competitiveness [3], while lifelong learning universities aim to transform universities into learning

**Table 1.** Number of online lectures in K-MOOC 2015–2020 (cumulative)

Year	Number of lectures (cumulative)
2015	27
2016	143
2017	324
2018	510
2019	745
2020	999

communities for students and adults. Korea is one of the countries with advanced life-long education in the world, and its systematic policies provide a reliable institutional guarantee for the development of lifelong education, and the good operational cooperation and division of labor between the central and local authorities provide stable organizational conditions for the sustainable development of lifelong education. Korea attaches importance to the participation rate of residents and disadvantaged groups in the process of lifelong education development.

## 2.1 Introduction of “Lifelong Learning Account System” and Establishment of a Lifelong Learning Certification System

Korea has paid a lot of attention to the lifelong learning account system and has established a national lifelong learning certification system to systematically manage the learning history of learners throughout their lives. Article 23 of the Lifelong Education Act specifies that the learning account system is “a system for the comprehensive management of the individual learning history of the nationals,” including not only the learning history at school, but also the learning history outside of school. The first purpose of the system is to ensure the visibility of different forms of learning through the certification and integrated management of lifelong learning experiences. The second is to strengthen the systematic links between flexible and diverse learning. The third is to help the learning outcomes recognized by society.

## 2.2 Balancing Higher Education Opportunities Through the Operation of K-MOOC

Korea started to provide university excellent lectures (Korea Massive Open Online Lectures: K-MOOC) to all citizens via the Internet from October 2015. K-MOOC courses can not only revolutionize the teaching methods of universities and achieve the balance of higher education opportunities, but also become the basis for lifelong learning in the age of advanced age. It contributes to the construction of an open higher education system. The number of lectures has increased from 27 in 2015 to 999 in 2020 after the K-MOOC basic plan was established (see “Table 1”).

**Table 2.** Increase in K-MOOC online lecture services in Korea as of December 2020

Classification	Visits (times)	Course selection (times)	Number of registered members
Number of people (cumulative)	17646931	1169118	739140

**Table 3.** Number and percentage of members in each age group

Age group	Number of people (%)
Under 20 years	121307 (16.4)
Age 20–29	360446 (48.8)
Age30–39	95131 (12.9)
Age40–49	80594 (10.9)
Age50–59	59652 (8.0)
Age60–69	21990 (3.0)
Total	739140 (100)

After the K-MOOC service was launched, about 40,000 + students applied to participate. By February 2017, there were about 4.74 million website logins, about 450,000 listening applications, and 230,000 member users; by December 2020, the number of website logins surged to 17.64 million, 1.69 million listening applications, and 739,000 joined members (see “Table 2”).

In terms of the current status of members joining, 40.8% is between the ages of 20 and 30, 12.9% is between the ages of 30 and 40, and 10.9% are between the ages of 40 and 50. K-MOOC is an online lifelong education system established by the Korea Lifelong Education Promotion Institute to meet the needs of the fourth industrial revolution and society, which is free from the traditional university education method of the past and allows learners to study anytime and anywhere. K-MOOC provides a new form of lifelong learning for adult learners and enables adult learners to have access to high-level learning resources (see “Table 3”).

### 2.3 Proactive Response to the Challenges of an Aging Society

Education policy is influenced by demographic changes. According to the population statistics released by the Korea Statistics Agency in September 2020, the population naturally decreased by 10,633 people from January to July 2020, with a monthly average decrease of 1,519 people, the first time in Korea’s history. The natural increase in Korea was only about 100,000 people in 2017 and has been decreasing every year since then. Due to factors such as lower birth rates, increased longevity and increased migration, Korea has entered a low-fertility, high-age society with significant demographic changes. In 2006, the proportion of people over 65 years of age was over 9.5%, already an aging

**Table 4.** Comparison of the speed of entering the aging society between China and Korea (unit: year)

Country	Arrival year			Time required for proportional increase (years)	
	7% Aging Society	14% Aged Society	20% Super Aged Society	7%-14%	14%-20%
China	2001	2024	2038	23	14
Korea	2000	2018	2028	18	10

society; in 2018 the proportion reached 14%, entering an aged Society, and it is expected to reach 20.8% in 2026, entering a super-aged Society. In China, the elderly population has increased dramatically due to the significant improvement in living standards and the increase in average life expectancy. 2019 saw the number of elderly people aged 60 or older exceed 250 million, accounting for 17.9% of the total population, and it is expected that the elderly population will approach 480 million by around 2050, accounting for 34.1% of the national population (see “Table 4”). The aging society will have a huge impact on China’s social development, and lifelong education will definitely become a new education development strategy for China.

### 3 The Process of Lifelong Education Policy Change in Korea

Lifelong education policy is strongly influenced by social, political, and economic factors. To observe the process of lifelong education policy changes in Korea, it is necessary to understand in what direction the lifelong education policy in Korea has developed under what specific conditions. This is not only the basis for understanding Korea’s lifelong education policy, but also the need to provide inspiration for the development of China’s lifelong education policy.

#### 3.1 Preparatory Period of Lifelong Education Policy in Korea (1970–1980)

The Korean government introduced the concept of education for all in the “Program for Standardization of Education and Elimination of Overheating in Private Education” published on July 30, 1980. On December 31, 1982, the Social Education Act was enacted, and on September 10, 1983, the Enforcement Decree of the Social Education Act was promulgated, and Article 31(5) of the Constitution, as amended on October 29, 1987, states “The nation shall promote lifelong education.” In addition, Korea has often emphasized concepts such as national spiritual education and lifelong education in various educational reforms. The Roh Tae-woo administration has proposed 10 educational reform programs related to lifelong education, including the establishment of a lifelong education system and the strengthening of the lifelong education function of universities.

### 3.2 The Formative Period of Lifelong Education Policy in Korea (1990–2003)

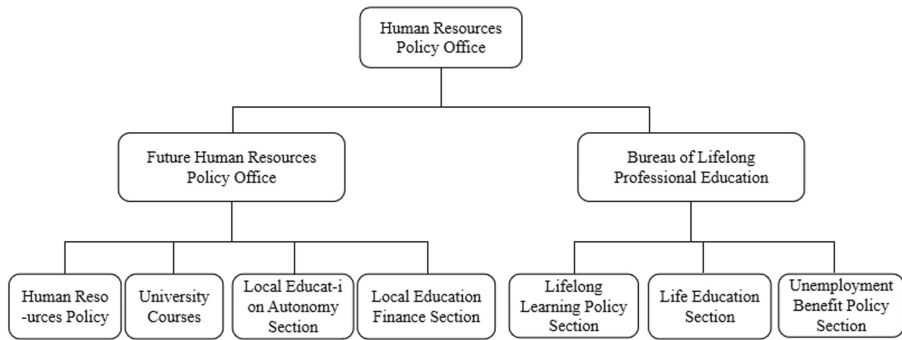
In the 1990s, the Kim Young-sam administration emphasized education reform as the starting point for building the new Republic of Korea, and in April 1995, Kim Young-sam put forward ten new educational concepts for “creating a lifelong learning society” at the National Educators’ Conference. In May of the same year, the “Reform Plan for a New Education System in the Age of Globalization and Information Technology” defined the direction of lifelong education in Korea. The provisions on credit banking, development of distance education technology, and curriculum revision laid the foundation for the formulation and practice of lifelong education law. The Kim Dae-jung administration revised the Social Education Act (1999) into the Lifelong Education Act, reorganized the Ministry of Education into the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in February 2000, established the National Basic Plan for Human Resource Development in December 2001, and established the Basic Plan for Lifelong Learning Promotion in 2002.

### 3.3 Development and Maturation Period of Lifelong Education Policy in Korea (2003–Present)

After 2003, Korea’s lifelong education policy focused on eliminating polarization, and in 2007, the Center for Lifelong Education was established, and in 2008, the National Institute for Lifelong Education Promotion was established to promote the expansion of lifelong learning cities and other projects with a focus on supporting lifelong learning for disadvantaged groups [4]. The Park Geun-hye administration has set the highest value as “national happiness” and emphasized the need for active national support for lifelong learning, especially the need to support learning jobs.

In 2019, the Moon Jae-in administration significantly revised the Lifelong Education Act and further improved the lifelong education policy system. The 4th Basic Plan for Lifelong Education Promotion (2018–2022) was announced. The “sustainable lifelong learning society where individuals and society grow together” was promulgated with the 4P strategy as the conceptual blueprint. 4P refers to people, participation, growth and prosperity, and partnership, which represent lifelong learning. The Ministry of Education started a lifelong education voucher system in July 2018, aiming to reduce the burden of tuition for people with disabilities and the underprivileged. At the same time, the budget was increased to expand opportunities for the socially disadvantaged to participate in lifelong education.

The division of labor and cooperation between the central government and local governments in Korea is relatively smooth. Lifelong education is managed at three levels: the central government, provinces, large cities, eups, and myeons. At the central level, the National Institute for Lifelong Education is responsible for researching lifelong education policies, formulating macro plans for national lifelong education development, and providing guidelines for lower levels of management. At the level of provinces and large cities, a network of community lifelong education organizations and associations is established to guide lower-level management organizations (see “Fig. 1”).



**Fig. 1.** Organizational chart of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development of Korea.

## 4 Comparison of Lifelong Education Policies Between China and Korea

Lifelong education in Korea has been led by the government since its early days. The government formulated relevant policies and systems, and established a support system and operation center responsible for the implementation of lifelong education policies and systems. In the early stage of lifelong education in China, the focus was in the field of adult education and it was practical and utilitarian in nature [5]. The Chinese government mainly issued the principles of lifelong education policy, and the development of lifelong education was not directly managed and restricted, but mainly implemented by universities and private groups. “The stone of other mountains can be used to attack the jade”. Understanding and learning from the legislative experience of lifelong education in South Korea is enlightening for China’s lifelong education legislation and promoting the sustainable development of lifelong education. At the same time, China must base on the actual situation in China, encourage local governments to formulate lifelong education regulations, take early and pilot measures, and accumulate replicable and extendable experiences.

### 4.1 Comparison of Lifelong Education Policy Goals

Firstly, in terms of common points, both China and Korea start with adult education training and adult university education at the beginning of lifelong education, and cultivate a large number of human resources who can perform economic activities through citizen education. Secondly, both countries focus on the construction of lifelong learning cities. Third, Korea’s lifelong education policy initially aimed at improving the economic self-reliance of its citizens and began with government encouragement and financial support. The situation is similar in China, which initially focused on developing the knowledge and skills of the people and put the emphasis on their independent survival.

There are three differences: First, Korea’s lifelong education policy is government-led and places great emphasis on the development of professionals related to the lifelong education business. Lifelong education in China is conducted by adult universities and

**Table 5.** Lifelong education support and promotion system in China and Korea

	Lifelong Education Support and Promotion System			
Korea	National Institute for Lifelong Education Promotion	City and provincial lifelong education promotion institutes	City, county and district lifelong education centers (running various programs)	Eup, Myeon and Dong resident centers (running various programs)
China	Ministry of Education / State Council	University Lifelong Education / Civil Society	DegreeCenter/ Qualification Center	Community Run various projects

private groups. Second, in terms of implementing lifelong education, Korea consists of local groups (city, county, district), universities, public institutions, and private institutions. China is dominated by higher education institutions and educational institutions with degree-granting qualifications. Third, the Korean government maximizes the effect of lifelong education by expanding the scope of lifelong education through active financial support. In China, on the other hand, individual learners invest in lifelong education learning by means of funds, and learning expenses are mainly paid by individuals.

## 4.2 Comparison of Lifelong Education Policy Implementation Processes

### 4.2.1 Common Points of the Implementation Process of Lifelong Education Policy

First, to promote the implementation of lifelong education policy, both countries take necessary legal and administrative measures. For example, South Korea has formulated the Lifelong Education Act. China has issued guiding and principle policies, and local governments are not allowed to violate the guiding and principle policies of the central government when formulating regulations on lifelong education.

Second, both countries actively encourage their citizens to participate in relevant lifelong education activities. Participation rate is a core part of the implementation of lifelong education policy. Both China and Korea encourage and support various forms of practical lifelong education activities [6]. Both countries attach importance to the role of persuasion and guidance, and often conduct a variety of publicity activities in order to raise the attention of the people to participate in lifelong education. The main means of publicity are magazines, brochures, websites, lifelong learning festivals, seminars, lifelong education award programs, media, etc. Through these activities, lifelong education concepts are established for the nationals, their awareness of lifelong education is raised, and they are guided to participate in lifelong education on their own initiative.

Thirdly, both countries attach importance to the leading role of local governments and autonomous groups. In order to realize the effective implementation of lifelong education policies, the central governments of both countries attach importance to the leading role of local governments and self-governing groups. In the process of building learning cities in Korea, emphasis is placed on the leading role of local governments (see “Table 5”).



#### 4.2.2 Differences in the Implementation Process of Lifelong Education Policy

First, there are differences in the lifelong education operation system. Korea's lifelong education policy is more systematic, and the comprehensive implementation of lifelong education policy is continuously strengthened through the lifelong education support system. In recent years, Korea has been able to achieve balanced development of senior colleges, lifelong education institutes of general universities, cultural interpretation education, correctional education, technical education and qualification education. China's lifelong education policy system is not yet fully established, and its development is relatively slow, with room for further improvement. The landlord government mainly relies on and develops the power of community residents to provide various human resources for economic development, and provides knowledge and technical education to residents based on local universities (see "Table 5").

Second, the Korean government supports the cause of lifelong education development through adult literacy education, vocational lifelong education, credit banking system, self-study degree system, lifelong learning city cultivation, K-MOOC, etc. In China, lifelong education is mainly conducted with the goal of acquiring qualifications and has not been expanded to include leisure education, education for the elderly, humanistic education and quality of life. In fact, in 1999, Shanghai proposed the slogan "Building a Learning City, Challenging the New Century", and more than 60 cities have responded positively towards the development of learning cities. However, the level of economic development and cultural and educational backgrounds of Chinese cities vary greatly, so uneven lifelong education opportunities and different lifelong education policies are common.

Third, lifelong education in Korea is jointly operated by university lifelong education institutes, local lifelong learning centers, welfare halls, women's halls, cultural houses, rural guidance offices, religious organizations, private lifelong education institutes, and tutorial classes, and the funds are paid free of charge to each operating entity. Lifelong education in China is for the purpose of obtaining academic and technical qualifications, so most of the costs are borne by individual learners.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper shows that the change process of lifelong education policy in China and Korea is closely related to four factors in general.

First, lifelong education policies in China and South Korea are closely related to political factors in their countries. The political factors that influence lifelong education policies are mainly political institutions and political party group interests [7]. For example, the lifelong education policies from Kim Young-sam's government to Moon Jae-in's government have obvious differences in terms of contents and goals. Compared with Korea, China's lifelong education policy is a top-down model with a relatively strong administrative authority system, which is directly influenced by the administration in the formulation of lifelong education policy.

Second, lifelong education policies in China and Korea are closely related to economic factors. The relationship between economic development and lifelong education is not a purely linear one. Korea, which has already entered the ranks of developed

countries, has solid economic strength and sufficient funds to invest in lifelong education, so that lifelong education policies can be promoted smoothly. China, the world's second largest economy, has been increasing its financial support for lifelong education. By encouraging and supporting local governments to be early and pilot, China promotes local development and implementation of lifelong education development models that meet the realities, such as Shanghai and Fujian Province, where lifelong education development has been effective.

Third, lifelong education policies in China and Korea are closely related to cultural factors. In lifelong education policies, cultural factors not only have potential and continuous influence, but also have deep influence on the lifelong education values of community residents. For example, Seodaemun-gu in Seoul combines the community's long-standing cultural resources and rich educational resources to continuously promote the development of lifelong education in the community, and the cultural literacy of residents is generally high. Chinese culture advocates the principle of collectivism, government authority is relatively high, and it is a generally accepted perception that lifelong education policy is led by the state. In promoting community lifelong education in Shanghai's Jing'an District, a top-down administrative approach at three levels, including district, street, and village committees, is generally promoted.

Fourth, the implementation and promotion methods of lifelong education policies in China and Korea are closely related. In Korea, local self-governance administration and education administration are separated and operate independently of each other. Lifelong education policy is promoted under an equal relationship between district administrative authorities and lifelong education authorities. Each cooperative institution of lifelong education, for the most part, is characterized by autonomous operation. However, in China, lifelong education policies are formulated and implemented under the leadership of the government, creating a clear administrative hierarchy for promotion. Although local governments have the advantages of being efficient and stable in building lifelong education city networks, they also have the weakness of over-reliance on local administration.

**Authors' Contributions.** Xihua Hu is responsible for experimental design, analysed data, and wrote the manuscript. Yining Yin contributed to revising and editing.

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