



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program

Country Informational Reports

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Country: South Korea

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South Korea

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Country-Specific Informational Report

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- South Korea, or the Republic of Korea, is the southern-most tip of the Korean Peninsula on the east coast of Asia, in the northern Pacific Ocean.
- The capitol is Seoul.
- The population is 48,860,500. Except for about 20,000 people, South Korea is almost completely homogeneous. Foreign born residents of South Korea report extreme discrimination. Anglo visitors do not experience this ostracization.
- In a 2010 survey, Christians represented 31.6% of the population, 24.2% were Buddhist, 0.9% claimed “other” or “unknown”, 43.3% claimed no religion.
- 83% of South Korean people live in urban areas.
- There is a 15% poverty rate.

The Korean Peninsula

- South Korea and North Korea were once one country. When World War II ended, so did the 35-years of Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. During the Cold War, Korea was divided along the 38th parallel, creating two separate governments on the peninsula. The splitting of Korea into two governments led to the Korean War in 1950, when the North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea. After the fighting ceased, the

temporary partition became permanent and the peninsula still remains divided today.



The Korean Peninsula

- Since 1987, South Korea has grown as a multiparty democracy, and the government has pursued peace initiatives and trade with the unpredictable North Korean regime. Road and railway projects are under way to link the two Koreas, and in 2003 more than half a million South Koreans visited the North—and 1,023 North

Koreans traveled to South Korea, mainly for sporting events. The potential military threat posed by North Korea keeps some 37,000 U.S. troops here.



The Korean Peninsula

- South Korea has a 98% literacy rate. In 1945, the literacy rate was 22%.
- South Korea currently shares the top ranking of national education achievement with Finland. The rankings are calculated based on various measures, including international test scores, graduation rates between 2006 and 2010, and the enrollment rate in higher education.
- Korean children go through six years of primary education and three years of middle school, followed by another mandatory three years of high school.
- 82% of high school graduates go on to university.



Education in South Korea

- There are academic and vocational high schools in South Korea. Most children attend academic high schools so that they can go on to higher education.



- Teachers are very respected in South Korean schools . Lessons often focus on health, moral values and independence.
- A day at a typical high school follows a rigorous schedule, beginning at 8am and ending at 10 pm. Most children also study before and after school, though tutoring after 10 pm is illegal.
- In 1996, only 5% of all schools in South Korea were co-ed. Co-educational schools have only recently become more common. Today, many schools still even teach boys and girls separately.
- [Culture of Study in South Korea](#)

Education in South Korea

- Although the state supervises teacher certification in Korea, there exists no agreed-upon national standard as to the educational curriculum of teacher preparation.
- At present, in Korea, there is an undersupply of teachers for elementary schools, and in the secondary schools there is an oversupply of teachers. This is most likely due to the increased level of honor and respect given to teachers of older students.
- A person must acquire a teaching certificate in order to teach at a school, even as a part-time lecturer. In Korea, regardless of the type of teacher training institutions, i.e., either national/public or private, completion of designated courses in nationally accredited teacher training institutions results in conferring of a standard teaching certificate.
- Entering the teaching profession is a considerably competitive market. Teaching is favored by the Korean youth because of its unusual guaranteed tenure and its traditionally upheld social status. Also, the teacher turnover rate is very low, so that most teachers remain in the profession until the point of retirement.

The Profession of Teaching

- Children attend school from kindergarten through the third year of secondary school (12th grade).
- Children may join kindergarten from ages 3 to 7. Children must be 7 upon entering first grade.
- Mathematics, science, Korean, English (from third grade), and social studies are considered to be the most important subjects.
- The average class sizes in elementary schools is 36, and between 40 and 50 in secondary schools.
- Despite a history of gender bias, the gap between boys and girls in South Korean schools is closing.

Classrooms and Curriculum

- English is taught as a second language in most schools, though most schools use Korean, the official language of Korea.
- Speaking English fluently is seen as a status symbol and is often the key to professional success.
- In 2000 the government introduced a new phonetic system for transcribing Korean into English, changing names like Cheju to Jeju and Pusan to Busan.



Koreans and English

- U.S. Census results show that foreign born from Korea (864,125) make up the 7th largest immigrant group in the U.S. in the year 2000, following the foreign born from Mexico, the Philippines, India, China, Vietnam, and Cuba.
- More than 1.5 million ethnic Koreans reside in the U.S.
- Most ethnic Koreans live in California, New York, New Jersey, or Washington



Koreans in America

- Due to the high pressure environments of South Korean schools and the status of fluency in English, many families are sending one parent and the children to live in America, Australia, and New Zealand for the children to attend schools and learn English.
- The parent who stays in Korea is typically the father, or “goose father”, who works in order to support households in both countries.
- Some public schools charge these non-resident families tuition.
- American private schools are accepting more South Korean and Chinese students.
- South Korea and China are tied for first place for top sending foreign country to U.S. private schools.



[Goose Families Video](#)

Goose Families

- Confucianism has heavy influence on Korean education. One of the major tenants, “filial piety”, involves great respect for teachers and the wisdom of elders. South Korean youth always allow their elders to speak first, often complimenting them on their good health.
- In a group of South Korean students, the oldest male will take on the dominant role. From the American perspective, this can manifest into a negative “master and servant” relationship.
- Peer group acceptance is a crucial factor in the access to academic learning and maintenance of social standing within student groups.



Cultural Influences

- Objects are passed with both hands and physical contact is very rare and considered inappropriate unless it's between close friends and peers. Do not touch a Korean person's arms or back, even if it is in a friendly manner.
- South Koreans are very polite people. They lower their voice when talking or laughing in public, and criticism should only be communicated in private.
- Blowing your nose is considered rude. Koreans are expected to step away to even wipe their noses.
- Pointing the soles of ones feet towards other people is considered extremely rude and even vulgar. Koreans will not cross their legs, especially in front of an authority figure.

Cultural Influences

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Videos

- South Korean Goose Families, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whJWmfuCsyM>
- Culture of Studying in South Korea, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ5hOaXD6Oc>

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