

Moving Outside the Hermit Kingdom:
Policies and Programs that Aid North Korean Adolescent Refugees in
South Korean Alternative High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Currently, there are over 20,000 North Korean refugees in South Korea with at least 2,000 entering each year¹. North Koreans hope to experience freedom and comfort in their new home but tend to find only poverty and discrimination^{2,3}. With growing public dissent towards unification, policy makers have turned to adolescent refugees' education in hopes of refuting South Koreans' negative stereotypes as well as to nurture the future leaders of unification⁴. As a result, several groups outside of the government have opened alternative schools that cater to these young refugees. After conducting interviews with sixteen refugee students and six teachers/school administrators, this study will identify as well as analyze policies and programs that aid North Korean refugees in being academically and acculturatively successful.

¹ "Ministry of Unification," Ministry of Unification, accessed April 16, 2012, <http://eng.unikorea.go.kr>.

² Kim, Soon-yang, "Tackling the Social Exclusion of the North Korean Refugees in South Korea," *Korea Observer* 41.1 (2010): 114.

³ Koh, Kelly, and Glenn Baek, "Handling with Care: South Korean Government Policy and North Korean Defectors Living in South Korea," *Korea Observer* 30.3 (1999): 483.

⁴ Song, Sang-ho, "North Korean Defectors Emerge from Periphery," *The Korean Herald*, April 18, 2012, accessed April 19, 2012, <http://nwww.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120418000968>

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INTRODUCTION

In the past two years, there has been a surge of news related to North Korea. On December 17, 2011, Kim Jong-Il died, leaving his third and youngest son a country full of poverty and nuclear weapons⁵. On July 25, 2012, North Korean state media revealed that a mysterious woman following the new leader, Kim Jong-Un, was his wife, marking the first public appearance of a first lady⁶. On September 14, 2012, new evidence arose blaming the sinking of the *Cheonan*, a South Korean naval ship, on old U.S. water mines instead of the previously accused North Korean regime⁷. Readily available information regarding North Korea tends to focus on geopolitics and nuclear weaponry, rarely touching on the North Korean people and even less on the struggles of North Korean refugees living outside of the hermit kingdom.

As North Korea's economic and political health decreased in the 1990's, the rate of refugees entering South Korea has increased⁸. Life in South Korea, however, is not as ideal as these refugees initially believe. North Korean refugees live in poverty, struggle to find and keep employment as well as combat the stereotype that they are uneducated and waste South Korean tax dollars^{9,10}. Today, more than 50% of South Korea's teens and young adults do not support

⁵ Choe, Sanh-Hun and David Sanger, "Kim Jong-Il, North Korean Dictator, Dies," *The New York Times*, Dec 19, 2011, accessed Sept 30, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/asia/kim-jong-il-is-dead.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶ Choe, Sang-Hun, "That Mysterious Woman in North Korea? Turns Out She's the First Lady," *The New York Times*, Jul 25 2012, accessed Sept 30 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/26/world/asia/north-korean-leader-marries-reports-say.html?ref=andrewwlehen&_r=0.

⁷ Kang, Tae-Ho, "New evidence that Cheonan was sunk by an old mine," *The Hankyoreh*, Sep 14, 2012, accessed Sep 30 2012, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/551681.html.

⁸ Chan, E., and A. Schloenhardt, "North Korean Refugees and International Refugee Law," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 19.2 (2007): 215.

⁹ Kim, Soon-yang, "Tacking the social exclusion," 114.

¹⁰ Fackler, Martin, "Young North Korean Defectors Struggle in the South," *The New York Times*, Jul 13, 2012, accessed on Sept 30, 2012

unification and while it is fair to assume that adolescent refugees have a better chance at adjusting, due to their victim-like image and young age, this is hardly the case¹¹. As a result of discrimination and a lack of prior education, North Korean adolescent refugees are ten times more likely to drop out of school than South Koreans¹².

Refugees and policy makers believe that education will revive support and pave the way towards unification and thus the government's attention has shifted to adolescent refugees¹³. Several groups outside of the government, such as churches, have opened alternative schools that cater to North Korean refugees by providing a tailored academic curriculum and additional services, such as mental counseling. Even with these alternative schools, however, it appears that North Korean refugees are still struggling to compete academically once they graduate; after their first semester in college, around 70% of refugee students take a leave of absence and 50% drop out all together¹⁴. To assist these refugees further in their endeavors, what policies and programs in alternative high schools can aid them in being academically and acculturatively successful? By increasing the number of successful, educated refugees, South Koreans will learn that North Korean refugees can be beneficial to their society, not just another tax burden¹⁵.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/13/world/asia/young-north-korean-defectors-struggle-in-the-south.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹¹ Harlan, Chico, "South Korean Youth Grow Wary of Unification," *The Washington Post*, Oct 14, 2011, accessed on Sept 30, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/south-korean-youth-grow-wary-of-unification/2011/10/14/gIQA3ujmqL_story.html.

¹² Kim, Soon-yang, "Tacking the social exclusion," 114.

¹³ Song, Sang-ho, "North Korean Defectors Emerge from Periphery."

¹⁴ Fackler, Martin, "Young North Korean Defectors Struggle."

¹⁵ Song, Sang-ho, "North Korean Defectors Emerge from Periphery."

BACKGROUND

Currently, there are over 20,000 North Korean refugees in South Korea (Ministry of Unification). Forty three percent of these refugees are 29 years old or younger, signifying that approximately 40% are of the age to enter school¹⁶. While many seek employment immediately, 50% of this group chooses to pursue an education¹⁷. North Korean adolescent refugees who attend public high schools are often much older than their South Korean peers, generally between the ages of 16 and 24 instead of the normal 16 to 18. In addition, refugees face the hardship of living in a society where South Koreans stereotype them as uneducated, selfish, and a threat to national security. These images coupled with little to no prior education in North Korea have led to low levels of academic success and difficulties in acculturation. High drop out rates coupled with the homogenous-striving culture of South Korea has resulted in many North Koreans either attempting vocational training or depending on government unemployment benefits^{18,19}.

Scholars have begun to suggest that the challenges of North Korean refugee assimilation into South Korean society may reflect the social reality that would follow the unification of North and South Korea²⁰. Thus, the government's performance in facilitating the integration of North Korean refugees foreshadows its ability to manage the challenges of a post-unification Korea²¹. Given the increasing negative sentiment towards unification due to high economic costs and security interests, North Korean resettlement policies have attracted public criticism, leading to cuts in North Korean resettlement packages.

¹⁶ Song, Sang-ho, "North Korean Defectors Emerge from Periphery."

¹⁷ "Ministry of Unification."

¹⁸ Kim, Soon-yang, "Tacking the social exclusion," 114.

¹⁹ Koh, Kelly, and Glenn Baek, "Handling with Care," 483-484.

²⁰ Ibid., 469.

²¹ Ibid.

History of North Korean Resettlement Policies

After the end of the Korean War in 1953, both North and South Korea attempted to spur nationalist pride by demonizing the other²². As a result, South Korea portrayed North Korea as a threatening and backwards nation²³. When North Koreans first started defecting to South Korea in the 1970's, however, they were accepted into South Korea as national heroes who donated valuable information to the South Korean government²⁴. When the number of defectors increased in the late 1970's, the South Korean government developed policies to aid their transition and provide resettlement assistance²⁵. For example, the South Korean government built an adaptation facility named *Hanawon* where all North Koreans, upon arrival in South Korea, spend two to three months learning about South Korean culture and daily life. **Table 1** below outlines the process refugees experience when first arriving in South Korea.

Table 1: Outline of South Korean Resettlement Process

Step	Description
(1) Examination by South Korean agencies	Upon arriving in South Korea, agencies such as the National Intelligence Service and the National Policy Agency interview refugees to confirm that they are not spies. Afterwards the government decides their settlement package and place of residence.
(2) <i>Hanawon</i>	Refugees are sent to an educational center for 60-75 days to learn about South Korean culture, receive counseling, and develop vocational skills.
(3) Resettlement	Refugees move into their new homes and receive support to find jobs or education.

Policies that aid refugees, however, were amended in the 1990's due to increasing national security threats and a spike in refugee numbers. The government cut funds and benefits

²² Ibid., 471.

²³ Ibid., 472.

²⁴ Ibid., 468.

²⁵ Ibid., 477-478.

dramatically, such as decreasing the years of gratuitous education to a maximum of five years^{26,27}. **Table 2** below shows the history of benefits starting in the 1960's.

Table 2: Brief Summary of South Korea's North Korean Resettlement Policies

Year	Policy	Policy Description
1962	Initial Aid Package	The government gave generous aid packages that included a settlement fund (around \$32,000), an apartment, and free education at the university of their choice.
1993 & 1997	Law No. 4568 & 5259 (Aid Package Reductions)	Radical reductions were made to the settlement funds to discourage current refugees from helping family members escape to South Korea.
2004	Government Opposes Planned Defections	While the government could not openly reject defectors, they hoped to decrease numbers by blocking defectors' connections with brokers.
2005	Most Recent Aid Package	The government decreased settlement funds to around \$9,000 and private university coverage decreased to 50%.

Now that incoming refugee numbers have exceeded 2,000 per year and continue to increase, more scholars and policy makers have called for changes in South Korea's resettlement policies to address the increased diversity of refugees as well as to focus on successful adaptation instead of short-term solutions²⁸. Since most North Koreans stay in Seoul where they believe they have the most opportunities to secure a job and can give the best education to their children, many refugees today fight urban poverty and the title of "second class citizen."

Academic Success Among North Korean Adolescent Refugees

Before the 1990's, North Korean refugees often came from the upper class of North Korean society, representing an educated and valuable addition to South Korean society²⁹. As the number of refugees increase over the years, however, North Koreans in South Korea now

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kim, Soon-yang, "Tacking the social exclusion," 105,113.

²⁸ Koh, Kelly, and Glenn Baek, "Handling with Care," 468, 473.

²⁹ Ibid., 479.

represent all levels of education, occupation, age and motivation³⁰. Given the new spectrum of refugees, educational support is particularly important for those who are unfamiliar with a structured education and have stopped attending school while escaping from North Korea³¹. As a result, groups outside the government have opened alternative schools, running off of stipends from the South Korean government and donations from religious groups. These alternative schools allow North Korean students to study with specialized materials at their own pace apart from South Korean students. Regardless, North Korean academic achievement is much lower than that of South Korean students resulting in feelings of inferiority and a dropout rate ten times higher than that of South Korean students³². Furthermore, even if North Koreans have the ability to attend a university with subsidized tuition, they still struggle with living costs and making friends, giving them more reasons to drop out³³.

Acculturation Among North Korean Adolescent Refugees

North Korean adolescent refugees also tend to face significant difficulties acculturating into South Korean society³⁴. While North Korean refugees tend to isolate themselves, South Koreans add another barrier by resisting heterogeneity and harboring negative impressions³⁵. Due to the high numbers of North Koreans entering South Korea without any accompanying family members, South Koreans tend to believe that North Koreans come to South Korea to live an affluent life, even if it means abandoning their families³⁶. Inability to acculturate can also

³⁰ Ibid., 473.

³¹ Kim, Soon-yang, "Tacking the social exclusion," 114.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 103, 114.

³⁶ Ibid., 103.

occur due to clear differences in social class and a lack of efficiency at assimilation facilities, such as *Hanawon*³⁷.

Negative assumptions harbored by South Koreans are unsettling to North Korean refugees who are attempting to assimilate. According to a poll of 41 North Korean refugees, 33.3% of refugees describe South Koreans as cold and 25.6% said their neighbors treated them contemptuously³⁸. Many refugees believe that South Koreans treat them worse than foreign workers, causing some to move abroad where they believe they will be welcomed as a true foreigner³⁹. While many refugees do feel accepted in South Korea, the North Korean struggle for legitimacy plays a large role in their livelihood and success. It appears that many of their struggles and insecurities start in school with many not knowing what to do about it.

ACADEMIC & ACCULTURATIVE SUCCESS: EXPLANATIONS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Schools play an influential role in the overall lives of adolescent refugees by serving three important emotional purposes: (1) creating a sense of normalcy and student identity, (2) restoring a sense of hope for the future, and (3) offering a setting for socialization and networking⁴⁰. Maryam Kia-Keating emphasizes that schools play a central role in defining a young refugees' sense of community, sometimes as a "second family" or, at times, one's "mother and father"⁴¹. This dependency on school life, however, is very fragile due to the

³⁷ Ibid., 104, 110.

³⁸ Koh, Kelly, and Glenn Baek, "Handling with Care," 471.

³⁹ Ibid., 471-472.

⁴⁰ Montgomery, Edith, and Anders Foldspang, "Discrimination, Mental Problems and Social Adaptation in Young Refugees," *The European Journal of Public Health* 18.2 (2008): 156-157.

⁴¹ Kia-Keating, Maryam, and B. Heidi Ellis, "Belonging and Connection to School in Resettlement: Young Refugees, School Belonging, and Psychosocial Adjustment," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 12.1 (2007): 30.

common struggles associated with school including lack of academic achievement and inability to acculturate.

Policies/Programs that Showed Positive Results in Aiding Refugees

By looking at previously written studies, it may be possible to identify policies or programs in other parts of the world that aid refugee students academically and acculturatively. One such program mentioned by several studies was **mental counseling**. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression are common in refugee adolescents due to previous trauma they faced in their homeland. When studying Somali adolescents resettling in the United States, PTSD prevented adolescents from interacting with their host community, resulting in feelings of isolation⁴². Isolation limits the development of relationships with other students and teachers as well as leads to low levels of academic achievement⁴³. Other studies, such as cases of Cambodian and Central American refugees in the United States as well as Middle Eastern refugees in Denmark, showed a direct relationship between sense of belonging and academic achievement^{44,45}. According to teachers at alternative schools, North Korean refugees also commonly suffer from PTSD, which can inhibit them from interacting with South Koreans in public schools or in their local community.

Many studies also supported an **emphasis on English** regardless of the host country's native language. It appears that in the majority of developed host countries, English proficiency is a desired and, at times, necessary skill to succeed academically. Depending on the level of use,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rousseau, Cecile, and Aline Drapeau, "Scholastic Achievement of Adolescent Refugees from Cambodia and Central America," *Adolescence* 35.138 (2000): 254.

⁴⁵ Montgomery, Edith, and Anders Foldspang, "Discrimination, Mental Problems and Social Adaptation in Young Refugees," *The European Journal of Public Health* 18.2 (2008): 156.

English can also impact refugees' ability to acculturate. A study looking at refugee families from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East in Australia found that language fluency is one of the most common resettlement stressors facing refugees⁴⁶. In a study focusing on Bosnian and Albanian refugees in the United States, refugee children "viewed English acquisition to be important to their future success in their new country"⁴⁷. This is truly the case in South Korea, where South Koreans begin learning English in primary school and naturally use English words in their everyday conversations. Even though South Koreans and North Koreans both speak Korean, they still have difficulties understanding each other with one reason being South Koreans' heavy use of English⁴⁸.

Policies/Programs that Showed Mix Results in Aiding Refugees

Previous studies also revealed policies and programs that showed positive results for some refugee groups but negative results for others. One such policy was **increasing parental involvement**. A study looking at Hmong students in the United States focused on the need for parental involvement to ease the transition of adolescent refugees⁴⁹, who studied Bosnian refugees in Croatia, however, reported that parents might have a negative influence on their children's identification and perspectives of their host country, by projecting their own troubles

⁴⁶ Atwell, Rebecca, Sandra Gifford, and Brooke McDonald-Wilmsen, "Resettled refugee families and their children's futures: coherence, hope and support," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* (2009): 3.

⁴⁷ McBrien, J. L., "Educational Needs and Barriers for Refugee Students in the United States: A Review of the Literature," *Review of Educational Research* 75.3 (2005): 10.

⁴⁸ Lankov, Andrei, "Bitter Taste of Paradise: North Korean Refugees in South Korea," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6.1 (2006): 64.

⁴⁹ Rah, Yeonjai, Shangmin Choi, and Thu Suong Thi Nguyen, "Building Bridges between Refugee Parents and Schools," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 12.4 (2009): 347.

in the host country onto their children⁵⁰. In a literature review of refugee needs and barriers in the United States, McBrien states that parents are “often ill-equipped to provide their children with the emotional support and positive models [they need] to succeed socially and academically⁵¹.” McBrien also found that parents and their children might find cultural dissonance upon resettling in their host country since children tend to pick up the language and necessary skills faster than their parents⁵². As a result, researchers from McBrien’s study suggest that parents should be welcomed and informed by school personnel to increase their knowledge of the education system and decrease cultural dissonance⁵³. The effect of parents, however, may vary with age as seen with young children who remain dependent on their parents compared to adolescent children who tend to defy their parents⁵⁴. In the case of North Korean refugees in South Korea, refugee parents tend to struggle with adapting and keeping a steady job, which could impact the relationship they have with their children.

Academic segregation also showed positive results in some areas but negative results in others. It is clear that refugees often fall behind their South Korean peers when arriving in their host country, but Kia-Keating & Ellis, who studied Somalis in the United States, believe that the problem lies with assuming that refugees are dysfunctional due to their label as refugees⁵⁵. Segregation, in this case, can negatively impact a refugee’s self esteem. On the other hand, separation of local and refugee students can also reduce the pressure on young refugees to acculturate as fast as possible. McBrien’s review of studies on refugees in the United States

⁵⁰ Sujoldžić, A., "Adjustment of Adolescent Refugees in Croatia," *International Journal of Anthropology* 16.2 (2001): 151.

⁵¹ McBrien, J. L., "Educational Needs and Barriers," 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁴ Sujoldžić, A., "Adjustment of Adolescent Refugees in Croatia," 151.

⁵⁵ Kia-Keating, Maryam, and B. Heidi Ellis, "Belonging and Connection to School," 37.

points out that “school settings that do not require rapid language and cultural acquisition to be the best settings for refugee children⁵⁶.” The South Korean government does not intend to separate all North Korean and South Korean students but appears to believe that it is beneficial for North Korean students who are older and less educated than their South Korean peers. At alternative schools, North Koreans can learn at their own pace instead of attending South Korean public school where they may face discrimination.

Policies/Programs that Showed Negative Results in Aiding Refugees

Studies consistently found that interventions made by the host country to **remove the national and cultural identity** of the refugee, by emphasizing colonial superiority and minimizing the refugee’s own culture, had a negative impact on refugee students⁵⁷. “Advocates of cultural pluralism believe that newcomers acculturate best if they are able to retain cherished values of their homeland while adding the language and some customs of their new home⁵⁸.” After studying Bosnians in Croatia, Sujoldvic emphasized the need for the refugee to retain a strong identification with their native country and culture given that the removal of one’s previous identity does not aid refugees in terms of academics and acculturation⁵⁹. Even though studies agree on the negative impact of the removal of national and cultural identity, the South Korean government adopted a similar policy by sending all refugees to the educational center, *Hanawon*, where they learn how to live as a South Korean. While this is done to help North Koreans acculturate and understand their new environment, it also causes them to lose a part of their cultural identity or feel ashamed of their North Korean heritage.

⁵⁶ McBrien, J. L., "Educational Needs and Barriers," 12.

⁵⁷ Sujoldžić, A., "Adjustment of Adolescent Refugees in Croatia," 151-152.

⁵⁸ McBrien, J. L., "Educational Needs and Barriers," 2.

⁵⁹ Sujoldžić, A., "Adjustment of Adolescent Refugees in Croatia," 152.

SIGNIFICANCE

Literature looking at schools and how they aid adolescent refugees has explored many policies and programs including mental health counseling and parental involvement. This study will focus on a number of these as well as other possible influential policies and programs, such as requiring a set number of teachers to live in dormitories with the students and mentoring programs. Since the government controls the removal of national identity and academic segregation at the national-level, they will not be focused on in this study. No other refugee population shares such a close cultural, historical and linguistic relationship with their host country, opening a new set of factors that can affect why their academic and acculturative success may be easier or more difficult in relation to other refugee groups. The South Korean government's website regarding North Korean resettlement focuses on the four areas of (1) Settlement Support, (2) Residence, (3) Employment, and (4) Welfare; no specifics on education are mentioned outside of scholarships for adult refugees who wish to return to school⁶⁰. Even though policy makers have emphasized refugee education, it appears adolescent refugees' education is not the highest priority for the government. Thus, adolescent refugees depend on their alternative schools for academic and acculturative support. What policies and programs in these South Korean alternative high schools aid the academic and acculturative success of North Korean adolescent refugees?

METHODS

For the purpose of this study, "academically successful" means being academically competitive in relation to South Korean students. An indicator of being academically competitive would include taking the *suneung*, the South Korean equivalent of the SAT. Since North Korean

⁶⁰ "Ministry of Unification."

refugees can attend many middle-tier universities and vocational schools without having to take the *suneung*, many opt out of taking the highly stressful and competitive test. North Korean refugees who choose to take this test are attempting to gain admission into top-level universities, ready for the challenge to study and compete alongside the brightest South Korean students.

In relation to acculturative success, not all North Korean refugee students want to acculturate into South Korean society. Many adolescent refugees merely followed their parents or other adults and thus have differing opinions about South Korea and their label as a refugee or defector. The majority of students attempt to acculturate but a handful of students have difficulty accepting their new society, often due to previous trauma or extreme longing for their homeland and previous community. With this in mind, “acculturatively successful” means feeling safe and accepted by their local South Korean community. A student feeling comfortable and confident about introducing himself or herself as a North Korean would be an indicator of acculturative success.

Little research focuses on North Korean adolescent refugees in South Korean schools, and even less information is available in English. The South Korean government restricts the public from accessing data related to North Korean refugees apart from what appears in their own reports. Interviews with refugees, teachers and administrators at alternative schools provided insight, especially in relation to the question of individual impact.

Interview & Observation Protocols

After identifying and contacting North Korean refugee alternative schools with the help of domestic listings and newspapers, four schools allowed for interviews with students, teachers and school administrators. Schools chose student interviewees based on the student’s comfort and schedule flexibility. In addition, one refugee who currently attends college provided a

retrospective perspective regarding the policies and programs that prepared him/her for further education. In order to gain as many perspectives as possible, a random sample was not deemed necessary and the focus lied on maximizing the number of interviews.

Interviews occurred one-on-one in a location decided by the student or the school with a set list of questions⁶¹. One-on-one interviews were the most effective given that many interviewees might not have felt comfortable revealing personal information or criticisms in front of a group. Interviews followed several protocols to help protect the identities of the student refugees and the schools: oral consent was taken instead of written consent, refugee and school names were not kept on file, and interviews were not recorded. A translator attended half of the student interviews and all of the teacher/school administration interviews to provide additional insight.

At identified schools, observational notes were taken in the classroom to gain insight on North Korean students' moods, participation in class, and interactions amongst each other. Based on these observations, interviews focused on certain questions.

After completing all of the interviews, policies and programs were compared to analyze which policies and programs show consistent positive results, which show mixed results, and which show no positive results in aiding refugee students academically and acculturatively.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Overall, 16 interviews were conducted with students and six interviews were conducted with teachers and school administrators. Due to the small number of interviews with teachers and administrators, their interview answers will not be focused on but will be added as support to

⁶¹ See Appendix A for list of questions in English and Appendix B for list of questions in Korean.

students' responses. **Table 3** below briefly describes each participating institution and the number of student interviews conducted at each school.

Table 3: School Breakdown

School	# of Female Interviews	# of Male Interviews	Location	Size of School	Religious (Yes/No)
A	2	1	Seoul	Large	Yes
B	1	1	Seoul	Large	Yes
C	1	1	Gyeonggi Province	Small	Yes
D	3	6	Gyeonggi Province	Large	No

While school size varied heavily, to avoid others from recognizing specific schools from this study, “large” schools describe schools that have over 50 students. Two schools are in metropolitan Seoul while two are in more rural areas of Gyeonggi Province. On the map to the right, Gyeonggi Province is named “Gyeonggi-do⁶²” and colored blue with Seoul highlighted in a lighter blue. Also, religious churches manage three of the four schools. According to



administrators at School A and C, 90% of alternative schools for North Korean refugees are Christian but none of these schools require their students to be Christian. Alternative schools tend to be Christian because churches found them and provide a large portion of their funds each year while non-religious schools tend to struggle financially and eventually shut down.

There was also a wide variation in the students who were interviewed. Age ranged from 18 to 26 with eight coming from urban cities, three from rural towns and five from the countryside. Students had taken, on average, five years off from school while escaping to South

⁶² In Korean, province names are marked by “-do” so Gyeonggi-do is the same as Gyeonggi Province.

Korea but five never attended school in North Korea. Number of years in South Korea ranged from less than one year to six years, averaging out to three years. Interviews represented all high school grades but three interviewees had graduated and were attending college preparatory courses while one interviewee was a second year college student who had graduated from one of the four schools. All interviewees except for the college student live at their respective schools in school-provided dormitories.

Family & Personal Characteristics

When interpreting students' responses regarding their school, it is necessary to consider that students have differing family backgrounds and desires, which affects their motivation to study and/or acculturate into South Korean society. In particular, interviewed students have varying levels of parental involvement and desire to meet and befriend local South Koreans.

Parental Involvement

According to the Ministry of Unification, around 60% of all North Korean adolescent refugees do not have parents living with them in South Korea⁶³. Out of the 16 interviewed students, five do not have any parents and only two student interviewees had both parents in South Korea. For those who do have parents in South Korea, level of parental involvement was almost evenly split between high and low. **Table 4** below outlines the number of responses per level of involvement.

Table 4: Parental Involvement in their Children's Education

Level of Involvement	# of Responses
High	5
Low/None	6
No parents in South Korea	5

⁶³ "Ministry of Unification."

Students and teacher interviews matched the conflicting results presented in previous studies. Parental involvement can increase a student's chance of academic success, but many barriers, such as lack of knowledge and time, keep parents from being involved in their children's education. Like their children, parents also have difficulties acculturating and acquiring stable employment, especially in the case where the parent has little or no prior education. Some parents also remarry, adding the factor of stepchildren or new children. While additional children can help the parent learn about the South Korean education system, they may also take attention away from the already existing child or children. Interviewed teachers believe that these stressors, in addition to long work hours, keep parents from being involved in their children's lives in general. As a result, teachers and school administrations from interviewed schools do not encourage parental involvement. In fact, all four schools stated that they only contact parents around once a year unless the child is particularly troublesome. Two student interviewees also mentioned that they prefer no parental involvement because their parents would not understand the South Korean education system even if he/she tried explaining it to them. On the other hand, interviewed students who have involved parents appreciated their parents' interest and effort. These students often noted their parent(s)' involvement as a large motivator for studying more and being an active member of the community.

Desire to Meet and Befriend South Koreans

North Korean refugees' desire to meet and befriend South Koreans appears to depend on the age that they arrived in South Korea, the amount of time they have lived in South Korea and their prior experiences with South Koreans. **Table 5** below outlines interviewed students' desire to meet and befriend South Koreans.

Table 5: Desire to Meet and Befriend South Koreans

Desire	# of Responses
Yes	2
No	6
Indifferent	8

The majority of interviewed students had little to no interest in meeting and befriending South Koreans; only two of the 16 students expressed a desire to befriend local South Koreans. Those with no interest at all answered that they enjoy their North Korean school community and, from past experiences, do not believe they can connect with South Koreans who have lived a completely different life from them. Half of the interviewed students who answered “no” also mentioned negative experiences with or fear of bullies. Teachers at Schools A and D noted bullying as the number one difficulty North Korean students face in South Korean public schools. Students who answered “indifferent” have no negative opinions of South Koreans but want to focus on their schoolwork and community. They also expressed that they did not know how to begin meeting locals or had difficulties developing friendships.

The number of years refugee students have lived in South Korea may also affect North Korean students’ desire to meet and befriend South Koreans. Interviewed students who have lived in South Korea for two years or less consistently stated that they have difficulty speaking with locals because of South Koreans’ heavy use of English words in their daily vocabulary. Those who have lived in South Korea over two years, on the other hand, consistently stated that South Koreans harbor negative assumptions about them and thus feel less motivated to develop friendships. Based on interviewees’ responses, it appears that interest in **getting to know** locals often comes after at least a year, when he/she has a better understanding of their new society and are excited to become an active member of their community. In the long run, however, it seems

that this excitement usually decreases into indifference. Overall, interaction between North Korean and South Korean students is sparse and riddled with negative impressions.

School Preference

Given that each student has different needs or desires in relation to school, it is important to consider that all refugee students have a choice as to which school they attend.

Reasoning Behind School Choice

Unless an adolescent refugee is of the proper age and educational background, he/she will be encouraged to attend an alternative school specifically geared towards North Korean refugees. *Hanawon* hosts an alternative school fair once a month so that refugees can learn about each school and pick one that meets their personal needs. If a student does not choose, *Hanawon* will recommend a school or randomly place him/her. **Table 6** below shows a breakdown of the differing reasons students interviewees chose to attend the school they are currently attending.

Table 6: Reasoning Behind School Choice

Reason	# of Responses
<i>Hanawon</i> recommendation	7
Following an older sibling/friends	4
Randomly assigned	3
<i>Hanawon</i> fair	2

For interviewed students, the *Hanawon* fair didn't provide much assistance in choosing a school. The two refugee students who did choose from the fair remember location and class diversity playing an important role in their decision. In most cases, students followed older siblings to keep the family together or relied on *Hanawon's* recommendation. Several religious interviewees who received a recommendation recalled that *Hanawaon* supported their thoughts to attend a religious school. Many refugees in general meet missionaries on their journey to

South Korea or choose a religion while at *Hanawon* and thus become curious about religious schools. Religious schools' administrators emphasized that being a religious school has never been an issue with their students because refugee students like their school for that very reason.

Table 7 below expands on why students like the high school they attend(ed).

Table 7: Why They Like Their Schools

Reason	# of Responses
Academic Environment	6
Sense of Community/Kindness	4
Religion	3
Resources/Opportunities	3

For those who attend a religious school, religion plays a large role in their school experience. Three interviewed students named religion as the number one reason they like their school. The majority of interviewees mentioned that they like their school's academic environment where they can focus on their studies. Many also noted that their school provides a strong and accepting community in addition to resources that specifically aid North Koreans. In fact, three interviewed students had initially attended South Korean public schools but transferred to an alternative school in search of a community and to use alternative schools' resources. Teacher interviews supported this point, stating that students transferred voluntarily because, while academically competitive with their peers, they felt ostracized and paranoid of bullies.

POLICIES & PROGRAMS

Alternative schools create policies and programs to aid their North Korean refugee students academically and acculturatively. While interviewed students believe that some

academic and acculturative programs are highly effective, they also recognize that there is room for improvement.

Alternative Schools' Approach to Academic Policies & Programs

Before analyzing students' favorite or most desired academic policies and programs, it must be noted that each school has a different academic approach. All schools agree, to an extent, that their North Korean refugee students need to be realistic about their future; instead of aiming for a top-tier college, dropping out and depending on welfare, they should aim for a track that leads to stable employment. North Korean refugee students often cannot keep up with the academic workload in college due to various reasons such as discrimination and/or a lack of funds. They also feel overwhelmed competing with South Korean students for the first time. To encourage a path that leads to stable employment, all interviewed schools emphasize vocational training in addition to academics. Schools A & D, in particular, had very strong vocational programs with state-of-the-art kitchens and barista counters inside their school facilities. In addition to vocational training, schools might also have their students attend additional skills-based classes at South Korean cram schools, called *hagwons*⁶⁴, to improve future job skills. Six interviewed students attend a *hagwon* but only one attends an academic *hagwon*. Non-academic *hagwons* include hairstyling and computer processing.

While alternative schools may have vocational programs or encourage students to transfer to a vocational school, they also have a variety of academic policies and programs to help their students succeed academically, such as requiring a set number teachers to live in the dormitories with the students and English programs with native speakers.

⁶⁴ *Hagwons* are for-profit cram schools that teach both academic and non-academic subjects to students of all ages. A typical South Korean student attends multiple classes or *hagwons* after normal school hours.

Favorite Academic Policy or Program

When asked what policy or program is the most helpful to them academically, 100% of students answered with their teachers. All interviewed alternative schools provide dormitories and require a number of teachers to live there with the students, serving not only as a teacher but also as a pseudo parent. At these schools, students are not required to live in the dormitories but the majority chooses to because of their families' financial difficulties. Outside of class hours, students can ask their pseudo parent for additional help on their schoolwork. As a result, all interviewed alternative schools except School D try to keep the teacher to student ratio under one to ten.

The close relationship between teachers and students is highly noticeable inside alternative schools' teachers' lounges. Graduated students visit their alternative school regularly as if they are coming home. When visiting each school for interviews, graduated students often crowded the lounges, happily informing their teacher-parents about their lives away from school.

There are no specific policies determining who can be a teacher at an alternative school. The only exception is at religious schools where teachers must be of that particular religion. Also, teachers at these alternative schools are all South Korean except School D who has one North Korean refugee teacher. According to other teachers at School D, the North Korean teacher serves as an inspiration to refugee students who aspire to be teachers at their respective alternative schools as a way of giving back. The same interviewed teachers at School D noted that many of their students are studying to be teachers and believes that teaching is a very possible future career path for them.

Desired Academic Policies and Programs

Unlike the unanimous answer to the most effective academic policy or program, student recommendations for academic policies or programs varied significantly. **Table 12** below outlines student responses to what academic policies or programs they want to see at their school.

Table 12: Desired Academic Policies & Programs

Program	# of Responses
None	5
English assistance	5
Course offerings	3
Career services	1
Mentorship by South Koreans	1

While five said they have no recommendations, five also desire more English language assistance programs. Although each interviewed school has an English language program already set up at their school, many students want more help. This desire for more assistance may stem from South Korea's obsession with learning English, but it may also be a result of the lack of resources available at these schools. Compared to South Korean public schools, alternative schools tend to struggle more financially and cannot hire the most experienced English teachers or purchase a wide array of English teaching books. For example, School D hired a native speaking English teacher but could not continue to pay her. Native speaking tutors, generally U.S. high school and college students, are helpful in terms of developing conversational skills but they only come during school vacations. Having a new set of native speaking tutors each year makes it very difficult for them to make a significant impact on refugee students' English skills.

Three students also answered that they would like more course offerings in subjects such as computer and graphic design. While courses outside of the generic academic subjects may not help students on the *suneung*, the South Korean SAT, courses related to the interests of the students can help motivate students to focus more on their schoolwork by giving them a creative

outlet. Finding an interest or skill outside of the typical academic courses may also give students an edge on their college application essays.

One student mentioned career services to better understand post-graduate options as well as the pros and cons of transferring to a vocational school. Regardless of age or the number of years living in South Korea, the majority of interviewed students appeared unsure about the future and their career aspirations. Career services could address these uncertainties as well as students' qualms with attending vocational school in the case where they feel like school is not the right place for him/her.

Another student mentioned mentorship by South Koreans but this program in particular could produce varying results. While this student appreciates the studying and cultural tips he learned from a South Korean student, most appear disappointed with their mentors. Often, South Korean tutors volunteer as a community service requirement and not out of sincerity. Many student interviewees shared stories of tutors who did not fulfill their promises or ignored them. As a whole, North Korean refugee students said they would like mentorship by South Korean students, but in a more natural setting outside of school.

Interviewed Schools' Approach to Acculturative Policies/Programs

While school location is not a policy or program, it heavily affects the impact of each alternative school's acculturative policies and programs. Out of the four interviewed schools, two are located in metropolitan Seoul while two are located in more rural areas of Gyeonggi Province. According to interviewees' responses, students who attend alternative schools in Seoul are less likely to want to interact with South Koreans and are more likely to attend non-academic *hagwons*. This could be due to the fact that these students have more opportunities to interact with South Koreans than those who live in the countryside. The city also has a greater selection

of *hagwons* that are accessible by foot or bus. Administrators from Schools A and B argue that by attending school in Seoul, their students adapt to their new environment by interacting with locals everyday. For example, these alternative school students enjoy the same after-school activities as South Korean students such as studying at cafes and singing in karaoke rooms. Students who attend school outside of Seoul do not leave their school campuses often since it can be unsafe or there is merely nothing to do in the surrounding rural area. These students all answered that they have no recommendations for acculturative programs. In this case, it is possible that refugee students have not interacted enough with the locals to have an idea of what would make them feel more accepted by their local South Korean society. On the other hand, the administrators of Schools C and D feel that by having their school outside of the city, their students are protected from juvenile judgments and discrimination that often occur among South Korean high school students. North Korean refugees feel more confident about their North Korean identity and heritage when they have lived in South Korea for a few years and have a strong community. School location will play a large role in what policies and programs each school decides to implement.

Favorite Acculturative Policy or Program

Acculturative policies and programs are harder to analyze compared to academic programs because it is more difficult to identify the causes of acculturation. **Table 13** below outlines students' responses to what policy or program helped them the most in feeling safe and comfortable in their local South Korean community.

Table 13: Favorite Acculturative Policy or Program

Program	# of Responses
Religious Programming	8
Arts	4
Leadership Camps	4

At Christian schools, religious programming significantly aids refugee students. Christian alternative schools require students to attend church every week, which means that students must attend service at a local church where they are forced to socialize with members of the community. Christian church in South Korea is often comprised of a service and then a free meal. According to students, refugees feel a sense of healing during service, learning that God loves them unconditionally, while at mealtime, they interact with South Koreans, developing connections over a shared love of God. Six out of the seven students who attend these Christian alternative schools said that religion has been a very positive factor in their resettlement. Many teachers believe that religion is a very successful coping method for adolescent refugees who have suffered from trauma and insecurity. One South Korean scholar who prefers to be unnamed, however, notes that religion may also be popular among North Korean refugees because the religious paradigm of a holy Father and Son parallels the God-like Great Leader, Kim Il-Sung and his son, the Dear Leader, Kim Jong-Il. Religious schools also have the benefit of bringing foreign missionaries to teach English. According to School A, the same missionaries consistently return and volunteer their time creating a lasting friendship.

Two other acculturative programs noted by students are arts programs and leadership camps. Students enjoy arts programs because they give refugee students an opportunity to take a break from academic courses as well as teach them about South Korean culture. These arts programs usually teach calligraphy and other forms of art appreciated in South Korean society.

Leadership camps strive to assist students in their public speaking and leadership skills. While the majority of students enjoy bonding with their peers at these camps, others feel that it does not help them understand how to interact with South Koreans.

Surprisingly, no students mentioned counseling even though every teacher and administrator claimed that counseling is a very important acculturative program at their school. One hundred percent of interviewed students said they know that counseling exists at their school but none of them know anyone who uses it or finds it effective. When asked about other health-related policies, students instead focused on their schools' policies that require them to attend medical check ups over the course of the year. Schools created this policy, however, to fight against the aftereffects of malnutrition, not psychiatric conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder.

Desired Acculturative Policies and Programs

One hundred percent of interviewed students had no suggestions or recommendations related to acculturative policies or programs. While in some cases this may be due to a lack of interaction with South Koreans, it is more likely due to a lack of ideas of what can be done about the situation. While some North Korean students feel accepted by their local community, they do not feel as safe or confident when moving to a different neighborhood. Compared to other foreigners, it takes North Korean refugees a longer time to build their credibility as a safe and beneficial addition to that community. Among interviewed students, they felt satisfied with their school community and having teachers who support and love them.

When further questioned about what could be done to make them feel safe or accepted, few students suggested more joint programming with local public schools but appeared reluctant; students did not think it would make a significant change in the way South Koreans view North

Korean refugees. In other words, it appears that alternative schools and their students believe that interventions beyond the school level are needed to increase acculturative success.

CONCLUSION

To determine if a policy or program aids North Korean refugee students in being academically or acculturatively successful, the policy or program needs to be implemented by multiple schools and show similar results at each school.

All alternative schools generally have the same mission to help North Korean adolescent refugees be successful in South Korea. If multiple alternative schools implement the same policy or program, there is an overall consensus that this policy or program should benefit North Korean refugee students. Also, if a policy or program exists at multiple alternative schools, the results from each school can be compared to see if there is a consistent level of aid. For example, if the same policy exists at two schools but at one school it is highly successful while at the other it is not, it would be unreasonable to claim that the policy aids refugee students. Thus, policies and programs implemented at multiple schools have been placed into one of three categories: (1) policies/programs that show consistent positive results, (2) policies/programs that show mixed results, and (3) policies/programs that show no positive results. Students' opinions determine the category since all school administrators and teachers believe that their policies and programs positively aid their students. **Table 14** below shows the categorized policies and programs.

Table 14: Policies/Programs' Level of Aid to North Korean Refugee Students

Policy/Program	Primary Reasoning
<i>Shows Consistent Positive Results</i>	
Teachers who live with students	Act as parents and provide additional tutoring
Emphasis on math/English	Consistently regarded as two most difficult subjects
Foreign volunteers/mentors	Give exposure to foreigners and make English fun
Religion	Aids emotional trauma and provides community
<i>Shows Mixed Results</i>	
Parental involvement	Depends on parents motivation
Emphasis on vocational training	Usually for their benefit but forced at times
<i>Shows No Positive Results</i>	
South Korean volunteers/mentors	Volunteers tend to lack genuine motivation
Counseling	Difficult to see results/effects

Policies/Programs that Show Consistent Positive Results

All interviewed students agreed that they benefit from living with their **teachers**. In addition to helping students with their schoolwork after normal school hours, these teachers manage extracurricular clubs, plan fun outings and supervise volunteers. Due to the close relationship between teachers and students, teachers who live at their respective alternative schools understand the specific academic and acculturative needs of each student. Alternative school teachers also serve as a positive motivation to their students. Two interviewed students specifically stated that study more because they do not want to disappoint their teachers who have worked so hard for them. A third of the interviewed students also expressed desires to become teachers as a result of their school experiences.

Close relationships between teachers and students, however, make parting particularly difficult when a school has to reduce the number of teachers due to financial reasons. An administrator at School A stated that students feel as if they are losing a parent all over again given that in South Korea, their teacher was the first person to love and accept them. Even though one may think that that these teachers sacrifice a lot by living in the school and receiving a relatively low wage, but many teachers agree that they enjoy living amongst their students who

are like children to them. Compared to teachers voluntarily leaving, it is more common for schools to ask a teacher to leave because they do not have the funds to pay them.

Interviewed students also agreed with their schools' **emphasis on math and English** since they consider these two subjects to be the most difficult as well as the most important in their new society. Like many other countries, South Korea highly values math and English, stressing these subjects on several aptitude tests, such as the South Korean SAT. Moreover, South Korea developed its own English aptitude test called the TOEIC, which tests speaking skills in addition to reading and writing. Interviewed teachers expressed concern over their students' proficiency in English since almost all major South Korean companies require applicants to submit TOEIC scores. English is particularly difficult because while some refugee students had learned math in North Korea, it is very rare for them to be exposed to English. All interviewed students who came from rural towns or the countryside in North Korea listed English as their hardest subject. To aid their students, schools often lengthen class times and/or provide additional remedial classes in these two subjects. For example, refugee students who stay at their respective schools over summer vacation attend math and English courses every weekday.

It is possible that without the additional focus on these two vital subjects, students would not feel confident enough to take the South Korean SAT and the TOEIC exam. They may also feel a stronger language barrier in relation to South Koreans. Even though the North Korean dialect and the South Korean dialect do not differ significantly in terms of grammar, 45% of refugees state that they "largely" or "completely" cannot understand South Korean speech⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ Lankov, Andrei. "Bitter Taste of Paradise," 64.

South Koreans have integrated many English words and Chinese characters over time, resulting in a language and cultural barrier not expected by North Korean refugees.

It also seems that North Korean adolescent refugees are adapting to South Koreans' perspective of an academic curriculum. South Korean students believe that the most important classes are English and quantitative courses, such as math and science. Both North Korean refugee students and their school administrations seem to be following this approach in terms of how they are designing their academic programs so that their students can be successful in the way South Koreans perceive academic success. However, alternative schools often lack the adequate resources and funding to hire the most qualified or native speaking teachers. As a result, alternative schools consider **foreign volunteers** a vital resource in helping their refugee students improve their English. Not only are foreign volunteers confident in their knowledge of English, they make learning English fun by teaching through games and dialogue. Foreign volunteers also seek out these schools due to a genuine interest in North Korea and/or refugees, making them more likely to reach out and spend time with their students outside of the classroom. Aside from their teachers, refugee students named foreign volunteers their favorite mentors.

While refugee students enjoy having foreign volunteers at their school, none of the interviewed schools appeared to have any volunteering curriculum or guidelines, which may be limiting the effectiveness of volunteers' work. For example, at School D, teachers match volunteers with students who want a foreign mentor. While these students have more initiative to learn from their foreign mentor, it also means that the foreign volunteers have a group of students with a variety of backgrounds in the English language; some students may already be able to converse while some have just finished learning the ABCs. Since it is preferable to have

students with a desire to learn, alternative schools should provide a curriculum so that volunteers know what to expect and can adjust lesson plans to meet their students' demands accordingly.

Finally, in relation to religious schools, **religion** has greatly benefited students in terms of their acculturation. Not only does religion help students come to terms with their past trauma, it also helps them find a community outside of their school and other North Koreans. Religious schools, however, also face criticism for helping refugees as a means to enlarge their religious following. Regardless of churches' motives, it is difficult to argue against the large positive effects of religion in relation to refugee students' acculturation.

Policies/Programs that Show Mixed Results

After conducting interviews with refugee students and teachers, it appears that **parental involvement** motivates some students academically, but it can also burden parents who are also in the process of adjusting to their new lives. To include parents more in their child's education, school may want to consider developing informational pamphlets that include basic information on South Korean's educational system and career options as well as small ways parents can support and motivate their child. Pamphlets would also be more convenient than parent teacher conferences since conferences take a large amount of time and refugee students' families live in a variety of provinces.

Alternative schools may also want to consider designing pamphlets related to **vocational training** to inform students about vocational school. According to interviewed teachers, alternative schools recommend that students transfer when that is the most logical course of action for the student. Some students opt for this path as well if they particularly enjoy a field outside of education, such as cooking. Interviewed students, however, mentioned that some of their friends did not want to leave but were forced to transfer to a vocational school. While

teachers would not comment on this, it appears that there is no standard or set of factors that determine if a student should transfer to a vocational school. A formal policy could help students understand why they should attend a vocational school as well as what they need to do to stay at their current school.

Policies/Programs that Show No Positive Results

Two programs in particular were more difficult to analyze but, overall, showed little to no positive results in relation to North Korean refugee students' academic and acculturative success. For example, **South Korean volunteers** tend to make North Korean refugee students pessimistic about interacting with other locals instead of increasing mutual understanding. The main problem could be that, in the school setting, South Koreans believe they are more knowledgeable and superior compared to their northern brethren. This power dynamic can be unsettling to North Korean students who already know that they are behind and thus want help. Instead, alternative schools may want to engage South Koreans through programs that encourage friendly and casual interactions, such as joint school fairs or arts-related productions.

Interview responses also showed a lack of positive results in relation to **counseling**. School use a large portion of their funds to hire a professional South Korean psychiatrist, but this service is not relevant to all refugee students. All interviewed students claimed that they have never used their school's counseling service nor know anyone who uses it or finds it effective. This school program, however, is the hardest to analyze because many students may not want others to know that they or their friends are receiving counseling. It is also very difficult to see the results of counseling in general. According to school administrators and teachers from all schools, though, this is the most fundamental program for a school of their nature.

In addition to a South Korean psychiatrist, North Korean refugee students may want to meet with older North Korean refugee or alumnus of their alternative school. In this case, they may feel more comfortable talking about their past experiences as well as their current struggles in South Korea. Counselors may also be more effective if they worked in conjunction with a cultural broker, a third party that does not identify him/herself with either party. Cultural brokers attempt to bridge and mediate groups of differing backgrounds and cultures. However, it is just as important to note that North Korean students may feel that the cultural broker lacks just as much empathy as a South Korean psychiatrist.

National Policy – Public Relations & Government Authorization

According to students, teachers and school administrators, the South Korean government can aid North Korean adolescent refugees by increasing subsidies to alternative schools, initiating change in the way South Koreans perceive North Koreans as well as reducing government authorized school regulations.

If the government increases subsidies to alternative schools, schools would have more funds to keep teachers and/or hire more qualified teachers. With a better-educated and successful North Korean youth, they may be able to provide a better link and insight into the future of Korean unification. It is difficult for the government, however, to allocate more money towards alternative schools because of public dissent towards North Korea. Thus, it is equally, if not more, important for the government to focus on changing the South Korean people's mindset towards North Korea and North Korean refugees. As long as the South Korean public feels that North Korean refugees are a lost investment, alternative schools and other institutions that assist North Korean refugees will suffer.

Another way alternative schools can acquire more funds from the government is to become government authorized. Government authorized alternative schools receive extra benefits such as increased funding and media coverage as a “representative school,” but they also follow more regulations. So far two alternative schools for North Korean refugees have been authorized and they are better known in both the local and foreign arenas, having more students and nicer facilities. Schools that are not authorized, however, believe that these regulations outweigh the benefits. All interviewed schools, whether they were authorized or not, agreed that policies and programs developed and implemented at the school-level are much more efficient and helpful to their students. Alternative schools tend to apply for authorization due to financial need.

Weaknesses

Overall, this study has a small sample with only 16 interviews with students and six interviews with teachers and school administrators. Given the small number of interviews and participating schools, the results are highly sensitive and are not the best representation of the North Korean adolescent refugee population. In addition, since schools chose the interviewed students and teachers, interviews represented model students and teachers. This could explain abnormalities in interview responses as well as why none of the interviewed students were familiar with their school’s counseling services. Plus, to assure the confidentiality of the schools and the students, contact information was disposed of after each interview making it impossible to contact interviewees for clarification or further information.

The presence of a translator also could have affected interview responses. It is possible that students withheld information assuming that their audience would not understand or did not

have the necessary background information. According to an unnamed reporter, North Korean refugees tend to trust outsiders more if they can speak fluent Korean or Chinese.

Further Study

Most importantly, future studies should investigate how to increase mutual understanding between North Koreans and South Koreans. When looking at adolescent refugees, many North Korean students choose to transfer out of public school even though they can compete with their South Korean peers academically. While these students excel at their respective alternative schools, the academic curriculum at their alternative school is often too easy or slow for them, limiting their academic potential. Increasing mutual understanding can only lead to less discrimination, which would help all North Korean refugees.

Other studies could look at policies or programs that public schools can implement to aid their North Korean students. Administrators at public schools could design anti-discrimination policies and North Korea education programs to raise awareness regarding assumptions South Koreans make about North Koreans. It would also be interesting to see if public schools and other non-alternative schools can redesign religious programming to obtain those programs' acculturative benefits.

The South Korean government can also evaluate what they are offering to adolescent refugees. While the government subsidizes college tuition, they do not consider the hardships refugees face before entering college. More attention should be given to funds for teachers since they appear to be the most vital aspect of a North Korean adolescent refugee's experience at their alternative school. Hopefully with increasing awareness, South Korean society will allow this shift in resources.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

Refugee Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from in North Korea? Rural or Urban
3. What were your parents' occupations? What do they do now?
4. When did you arrive in South Korea?
5. Who do you live with at home?
6. What grade are you in?
7. Why do you attend this school?
 - a. If they don't attend a school specifically for North Koreans, do they want to?
8. Do you like your school?
 - a. Why or why not?
9. How many years were you absent from school since you were travelling to South Korea?
10. Which class is the easiest?
11. Which class is the hardest?
12. What's your favorite class?
 - a. Why?
13. What's your least favorite class?
 - a. Why?
14. How have your teachers been helping you?
 - a. Did you ask for them to help you?
15. Do you go to *hagwon* (cram school) or get additional help?
 - a. If yes, in which subjects do you receive additional help?
16. Is your school religious?
 - a. If yes, are you now a member of that religious community?
 - i. Why/why not?
 - ii. If yes, how has that religion helped you with adjusting to life in South Korea in terms of academics and fitting in?
17. Do you spend more time with other North Koreans or South Koreans?
 - a. Why?
18. Do you want to spend more time with South Koreans?
 - a. If yes, how do you go about that?
19. Do you have a mentor at your school?
 - a. How have they helped you?
20. What are your plans after high school?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Is that what you want?
 - c. What would be your plans after high school if you could anything?
 - i. If not the same as the initial plan, why do you think this is not possible?

21. How involved are your parents in your school life?
 - a. Do you wish they were more/less involved? Why or why not?
 - b. What do they think about South Korea?
22. Do you feel like you're doing as well as South Korean students?
 - a. Why or why not?
23. Are there programs in your school specifically to help North Koreans?
 - a. Have they helped you? Why or why not?
24. Do mental health programs exist in your school?
25. What is the hardest thing to accept about South Korean culture?
26. What has helped you feel more accepted in South Korean society?
27. What programs (that don't exist currently) do you think would help you be academically successful?
28. What programs (that don't exist currently) do you think would help you feel more accepted?

School Teachers/Administration Questions

1. How many North Korean refugees attend this school?
 - a. How do North Korean refugees find this school/Why were they placed here?
 - b. Is there a limit as to how many North Korean refugees can attend this school?
 - c. Are there any classes or programs where they are separated from the South Korean students?
2. Have you met their families?
 - a. Why/why not?
 - b. How involved are they when it comes to their children's academics?
3. Do you think the North Korean students would do better at a school specifically for North Koreans/a South Korean public school?
4. Is this school religious?
 - a. If yes, are all students required to practice this religion?
 - i. Why?
 - ii. If yes, how do you think this affects North Korean students?
5. Are there any national requirements/standards you have to follow?
 - a. Do you think these requirements/standards are legitimate?
 - b. Would you prefer that policies/programs regarding North Korean refugees be solely managed at the school-level?
6. In what subject areas do you think refugees are doing well and not doing well?
 - a. Why?
7. Have you noticed any discrimination among students?
 - a. If yes, why do you think this happens?
8. Does this school have programs to help North Koreans academically?
 - a. How effective do you think these programs are?
 - b. Do you have any ideas as to how to improve these programs?

9. Does this school have programs to help North Koreans feel more accepted?
 - a. How effective do you think these programs are?
 - b. Do you have any ideas as to how to improve these programs?
10. Do mental health programs exist at this school?
 - a. If yes, how has it helped North Koreans?
 - b. If no, do you think one should exist? Why or why not?
11. Do you know if your students receive help academically or emotionally from sources outside your school?
 - a. If yes, from who or what?
12. Do you believe that your students have the same opportunities as South Korean students when they graduate?
 - a. What is your advice to North Korean refugee students regarding post-graduation?
 - b. If no, what do you think can be done to improve the situation?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (KOREAN)

Refugee Questions

1. 몇 살 이예요?
2. 시골에서 왔어요? 도시에서 왔어요?
3. 북한에서 부모님이 뭐하셨어요?
4. 한국에 언제 왔어요? 지금 뭐 하세요?
5. 집에서 누구랑 살아요?
6. 몇 학년 이예요?
7. 이 학교에 왜 다녀요?
 - a. 북한 학생들만 다니는 학교에만 다니고 싶어요? 정규 학교에 다니고 싶어요?
8. 지금 다니는 학교가 좋아요?
 - a. 왜요? 안 좋다면 왜 안좋아요?
9. 남한으로 오는 동안 학교를 몇 년 쉬었어요?
10. 어떤 과목이 제일 쉬워요?
11. 어떤 과목이 제일 어려워요?
12. 어떤 과목이 제일 좋아요?
13. 어떤 과목이 제일 싫어요?
14. 선생님들은 어떻게 도와줘요?
 - a. 선생님에게 도움을 요청해 봤나요?
15. 학원이나 다른 곳으로부터 도움을 봤나요?
 - a. 어떤 과목을 받나요?
16. 종교학교 인가요?
 - a. 당신은 그 종교학교에 가입되어 있나요? 왜요?
 - b. 종교가 남한에서의 학교생활과 적응에 어떻게 도움이 됩니까?
17. 남한 학생과 북한 학생 중 누구와 시간을 많이 보냅니까?
 - a. 왜요?

18. 남한학생과 더 많은 시간을 보내고 싶어요?
a. 어떻게요?
19. 학교에서 지도하는 선생님이 계세요?
a. 어떻게 도와줘요?
20. 고등학교 졸업 후 어떤 계획이 있나요? 뭘 할거예요?
a. 왜요?
b. 그것이 당신이 원하는 겁니까?
c. 모든 것이 가능하다면 졸업 후 뭘을 하고 싶어요?
d. 그 계획이 처음 계획과 다르다면 왜 그 계획이 가능하지 않다고 생각하나요?
21. 당신의 부모님은 학교생활에 어떻게 관여하나요?
a. 당신은 부모님이 더 많이 관여하길 원하나요? 적게 관여하길 원하나요?
b. 부모님은 한국에 대해서 어떻게 생각하세요?
22. 당신은 한국 한생들만큼 잘하고 있다고 느끼세요?
a. 왜요?
23. 학교 프로그램이 특히 북한 학생들에게 도움이 되나요?
a. 당신에게는 도움이 되나요?
24. 학교에 정신적인 건강 프로그램이 있나요?
25. 한국의 문화에 대하여 가장 받아들이기 어려운 점은 뭐예요?
26. 어떤 점이 한국사회에서 당신을 잘 받아주었다고 느끼니까?
27. 학교에서 성공하는데 어떤 프로그램들이 도움을 줘니까?
28. 어떤 프로그램이 한국에서 받아들여지는데 도움이 됩니까?

School Teachers/Administration Questions

1. 북한 학생이 이 학교에 몇 명이나 되나요?
 - a. 어떻게 북한학생이 이 학교를 찾아요? 왜 그들이 여기에 오게 되었나요?
 - b. 이 학교에 북한학생 정원이 있나요?
 - c. 남한 학생과 따로 공부하는 과목이 있나요?
2. 당신은 북한 학생 가족들을 만납니까?
 - a. 왜요?
 - b. 그들은 어떻게 자녀들의 교육에 관여합니까?
 - c. 당신은 부모님들이 더 관여해야 된다고 봅니까?
3. 당신은 북한학생들이 ‘북한학생들만을 위한 학교’에서 더 잘하리라고 생각합니까?
4. 이 학교는 종교적입니까?
 - a. 모든 학생이 이 종교를 받아들여야 합니까? 왜요?
 - b. 그렇다면 이것이 북한학생들에게 어떠한 영향을 끼칩니까?
5. 학교가 지켜야 할 국가적인 기준이 있습니까?
 - a. 당신이 생각하기에는 이런 기준들이 합법적이라고 생각합니까?
 - b. 당신은 북한학생들에 관한 정책이나 프로그램들이 전적으로 한교당국에 의해서 관리되는 것을 선호 합니까?
6. 당신은 북한 학생들이 어떤 과목에서 ‘잘한다고’ 봅니까? ‘잘못한다고’ 봅니까?
 - a. 왜요?
7. 이 학교는 북한학생들의 학업을 도우기 위해 어떤 프로그램이 있습니까?
 - a. 그런 프로그램이 얼마나 효과적이라고 봅니까?
 - b. 이런 프로그램을 향상시키기 위해서 어떤 아이디어가 있습니까?
8. 이 학교는 북한 학생들이 (남한사람으로 부터) 잘 받아들여지도록 느낄 수 있는 어떤 프로그램들이 있습니까?
 - a. 있다면 어떻게 북한학생들을 도왔나요?
 - b. 없다면 그런 프로그램이 있어야 한다고 생각합니까?

9. 학교에 정신적인 건강 프로그램이 있나요?
- a. 있다면, 어떻게 북한학생들은 도왔나요?
10. 북한 학생들이 학교외부로부터 공부나 정서적으로 도움을 받는 것을 아나요?
- a. 그렇다면 누구로부터 혹은 무엇으로?
11. 북한학생들이 졸업 후, 남한학생들과 똑 같은 기회를 갖는다고 봅니까?
- a. 졸업 후 북한학생들에게 어떤 충고를 주니까?
- b. 그렇지 않다면 이 상황을 어떻게 개선 시킵니까?