

Education for Deeper Democracy: A Proposal for Establishing an Education Autonomy System at municipal government levels in South-Korea

Yong-Lyun Kim, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Seoul Korea.
Email: kim0904@hufs.ac.kr

The purpose of this paper is to explore directions and strategies for transitioning from a centralized education system led by national and metropolitan governments to a municipal-level education autonomy system. This new system aims to connect diverse educational stakeholders within local communities and integrate learning with local life for the future of our education. For democracy to evolve qualitatively and progress further, there must be a shift toward smaller societal systems where civic sovereignty and local life are more closely intertwined. In the realm of educational autonomy, the transfer of power and redistribution of roles from broader administrative units to municipal units is essential. For education in South Korea to thrive, children and schools must be happy, and the educational capacity of local communities must be revitalized. When local communities are empowered to make decisions about local education and enhance civic-mindedness through their educational resources, the community itself can remain vibrant and resilient against decline. Achieving this requires reforming the current educational autonomy system. Every municipal and/or district unit, regardless of the number of students or schools, should have its own education support office, which must work with equal authority alongside local governments and communities to shape the education of the area. Education for children must transition from being competitive to being centered on well-being, connecting learning with the fabric of local life and fostering a way of life aimed at flourishing rather than merely winning in competition.

Key words: *Municipal-Level Education, Educational Autonomy, Localization, Ecological Democracy, Eco-centric Education*

Introduction: An Era of Transformation and Localization

The term “era of transition” does not merely suggest a gradual, step-by-step improvement to address existing problems; rather, it signifies the need to reassess our past trajectory, revise existing systems, and introduce comprehensive and qualitative changes. In this context, educational transformation also requires critical reflection on the goals and systems of the education we have maintained so far, alongside preparing for new challenges posed by the current era.

The education system of the industrial era, which aimed to drive economic development, was rooted in meritocracy through competition. This approach fostered (or evaluated) abilities via competition and allocated resources accordingly. This principle propelled quantitative growth in our society and became a standard for fairness. To sustain this meritocratic system, a centralized approach was adopted, designing the most universal and standardized national curriculum.

However, a pressing issue has emerged: the younger generations who have grown up under this system are now expressing dissatisfaction, experiencing unhappiness in the typical processes of education, college admission, employment, marriage, and childbirth, and voicing concerns over perceived unfairness.

The anxiety and dissatisfaction of South Korea's younger generation are direct contributors to the country's declining population. They do not want to pass down the competition in education, the stress of college admissions, career uncertainties, and employment struggles they experienced to their own children. If life were fulfilling and happy, there would be no reason to delay marriage or childbirth. The declining birthrate in South Korea is a direct result of the unhappiness experienced by the younger generation.

If asked whether South Korea's education system has made its people happy, we cannot confidently answer affirmatively. In an era where income inequality, social disparities, and class polarization are starkly pronounced, education can no longer serve as a ladder for upward mobility or guarantee its social function of enhancing civic-mindedness and individual well-being. The call for educational transformation is a demand of our times, urging us to dismantle the current meritocratic education system and explore alternative approaches.

Over the past decade, the education sector has made significant efforts to align with these changing times and societal demands by promoting educational innovation and strengthening connections with local communities. These efforts stemmed from the recognition that the goal of education cannot merely be test scores and college admissions, nor can learning remain disconnected from life. This transformative movement, advocating for education that is "of the community, by the community, and for the community," has given rise to concepts such as Local-Edu (Chu, 2017) and educational governance. To establish educational autonomy where

local communities become key stakeholders and local life integrates with learning, a social trend has emerged to foster collaboration among general administration, educational administration, and community governance, which have traditionally operated independently¹.

The discourse and practices of localization are not confined to the field of education. In various sectors such as society, politics, economy, and culture, emerging policies and initiatives—such as community building, regional ecosystems, social economy, urban regeneration, transition towns, resident autonomy, and ecological transition—ultimately aim to create sustainable, autonomous, and virtuous life structures at the community level.

This shift arises from the realization that the principles underpinning the capitalist democratic system, based on market economy and representative democracy, can no longer guarantee a sustainable world. Specifically, the centralized, large-scale state systems and meritocracy-based fairness, which have supported this system, are no longer viable. In response, this alternative approach seeks to empower local residents with communal authority to create sustainable living systems by establishing a self-sustaining and virtuous cycle in local politics, economy, society, culture, and education.

As Murray Bookchin (2012) noted, this involves "replacing the state-centered local governance structures with community (commune)-based local governance," and for this purpose, replacing the urban power structures and systems with municipal republican (direct democracy) assemblies.

For South Korea to move beyond the competitive system of the industrial era and transition into a deeper democracy and sustainable society, it is essential to establish civic, autonomous life structures at the municipal level. This transformation calls for restructuring local governance and societal frameworks to prioritize community-driven participation, sustainability, and self-reliance.

One of the key areas where the discourse and practices of localization are being emphasized is in the realm of "natural and social ecosystems," which is being triggered by the climate and environmental crises. Human-centered thinking (Anthropocentrism) has objectified and commodified nature, and, coupled with rapid industrialization, the destruction of nature has created a vicious cycle that undermines humanity's sustainability. In response, the restoration of the ecological integrity of local ecosystems, which are the foundation of both natural and social systems, is now set as the goal of this era's transformation toward sustainability.

From an educational perspective, this transformative shift reflects the direction of future education. It signals a transition from democracy to ecological democracy, from competitive education aimed at winning to collaborative education focused on well-being, and from a national-level education system to a localized educational framework at the city, county, or

district level. This social shift emphasizes a reorientation toward sustainable and community-centered education that aligns with ecological principles.

The purpose of this study is to explore directions and strategies for transitioning from a centralized education system led by national and regional educational institutions to a municipal-level education autonomy system. This new system aims to connect diverse educational stakeholders within local communities and integrate learning with local life for the future of our education.²

The Dissonance Between Educational Autonomy and Educational Governance Experienced at the Local Level in Korea

In an educational autonomy system that is separated from general administration, educational governance for cooperation can easily become merely a slogan. Based on the principle of independence for educational autonomy, maintaining a separate domain from general administration, requests for cooperation on certain projects from the education office, or schools emphasizing educational expertise while seeking local cooperation for community-based education may not always be met with goodwill from the local community or local government. From this perspective, to develop more advanced educational autonomy, it is necessary to redefine the meaning and scope of educational independence and expertise. At the same time, there is a need for a new vision regarding what kind of partnership with local communities or local governments is required to foster solidarity and cooperation.

The issues that can be experienced in the "local" field, where educational autonomy and cooperative governance coexist, can be broadly categorized into institutional, administrative, and policy-related areas.

First, institutional issues include the ongoing debates related to local elections, such as the need for reform in the method of electing education superintendents directly by residents, the positioning and authority of the education committee, and the restructuring of educational support offices. There have been calls for improvements in the method of electing education superintendents in local elections, and with the education committee being established as a standing committee of local assemblies, various proposals about its authority and role are emerging. Furthermore, given that the authority and roles of educational support offices are extremely limited compared to local governments at the municipal level, discussions are underway regarding the restructuring of these offices to foster cooperation and partnerships between the two autonomous bodies.

Second, administrative issues arise from the differences in the organizational structures and operational methods between general autonomy and educational autonomy. For example, sending teachers or professional civil servants to local governments for educational cooperation has faced challenges due to institutional shortcomings, and the reverse situation is

equally problematic. Additionally, in order to facilitate cooperation between the two bodies, there is a need for institutional improvements in the management of affiliated organizations when establishing intermediary support organizations.

Third, in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating projects or programs for educational cooperation, it is necessary for general autonomy, educational autonomy, and resident autonomy to participate and cooperate in a more realistic way. In order to realize educational governance based on cooperation, various councils and committees should not be operated ineffectively or in name only. Instead, policy measures should be sought to ensure that these bodies are operated more effectively. Additionally, there is a growing need to overcome the limitations of the previous Innovation Education District program, which focused primarily on the use of "education subsidies," and to create and manage integrated finances to expand and diversify cooperation projects between local governments and education offices.

Table 1. Issues of Autonomy and Governance for Local Education in Korea

Classification	Contents
Institutional Area	● Direct election of the education superintendent ● Role and status of the education committee ● Restructuring the authority and role of the educational support office
Administrative Area	● Dispatch of personnel between educational autonomy and general autonomy ● Operation of affiliated organizations for the establishment and operation of intermediary support organizations
Policy Area	● Expansion of participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of local education projects and programs ● Development and management of integrated finances for local education

Direction of Future Education

Localization

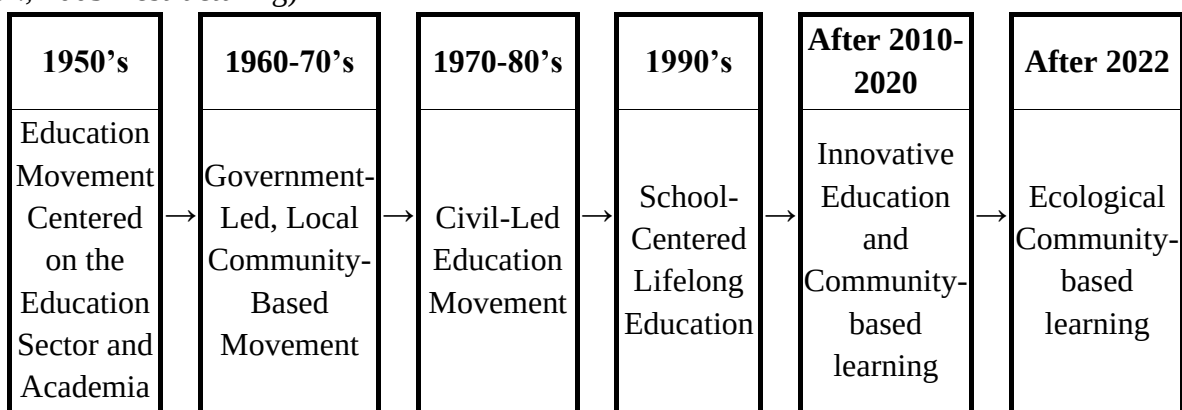
In schools across South Korea, teaching and learning are based on the national level of education. In these schools, education follows the national curriculum, using standardized textbooks and teaching methods. Regardless of the region in which a school is located, it is dedicated to realizing the educational system of South Korea. But what would happen if national education were localized (through the design and operation of curriculum at the municipal level)? How would entrance exam education, competitive education, general

education, basic education, career education, citizenship education, and after-school care be affected?

The concept of "community-based education" that has recently emerged suggests that public education is expanding beyond the confines of the school to become a space for diverse learning within the local community. After completing formal school education, learning would continue as part of lifelong learning. Traditional public education has been centered around selecting subjects and guiding learners through a school curriculum. However, for future education, it is necessary to transition to a community-based curriculum that extends school education into the local community. Since education is closely linked to the culture and social conditions of the place where learning occurs, the goal of community-based education should be to solve local issues and build civic skills to live together with members of the community (Kim et al., 2022).

Educational activities that explore and experience the local community hold the meaning of practical education where individual growth and community development are continuously interconnected (Yang et al., 2003). From this perspective, the participants in community-based education should not be limited to schools but must also include various local stakeholders. The connection between schools and communities that began in the 2010s differs from previous educational movements focused on enlightenment or lifelong education. Instead, it was largely a part of the innovative education trends. The focus of education shifted from academic achievement based on competition to holistic education and democratic school management, and this shift strengthened the connection between schools and communities, particularly through the village education community movement.

Table 2. Development Process of the Community School Movement in South Korea (Yang et al., 2003 Restructuring)



Since 2020, due to elections and political changes, several regions (education offices) have seen a reduction or modification of policies related to innovative education and village education communities. However, the trend toward future education that connects education with life and seeks to integrate learning with the community could not b

e altered simply by adjusting some policies. On the contrary, it is being strengthened with new directions, closely linked with practices such as sustainable development education and ecological transition education. The curriculum for community-based education incorporates the region's natural and ecological environment as well as political, cultural, historical, and humanistic aspects as content and subjects for learning. In a community-based education curriculum, the educational goals are not only the growth of learners but also the growth of the community. Achieving these educational goals requires planning and implementing educational activities that involve not only local schools and educational institutions but also the collaboration of various individuals and organizations that make up the local community.

Ecological Democracy

Now, education must embrace the social trend of ecological transformation and become an essential mechanism for changing the world. Transformative education is not merely about strengthening climate and environmental education; it should be education for sustainable living. Recently, global interest in and demand for sustainable development have amplified. The sustainability of the Earth's ecosystem, triggered by the climate crisis, is no longer limited to the resilience and regeneration of the natural environment but has expanded into an urgent challenge that requires humanity to transform the way of life it has maintained thus far.

The root cause of the current global crisis lies in 'Anthropocentrism.' The hierarchical relationship between humans and the natural environment has led to unilateral use, exploitation, and domination beyond the cyclical resilience of the natural ecosystem, ultimately bringing humanity to the brink of ecological destruction. In response, the emerging need for ecological democracy to restore an 'Eco-centric' ecosystem is gaining momentum, with the argument that breaking away from the one-sided class-based relationship between humanity and the environment is the only solution to ensuring the sustainability of humanity (Bookchin 2012).

The reason why sustainable development must be grounded in education lies in this very fact. Physical responses to environmental conservation are merely symptomatic remedies. For the co-evolution of the Earth's ecosystem, humanity must now fundamentally change both its way of thinking and its way of living. The role of education is increasingly emphasized in the process of making this epistemological and ontological shift that humanity has maintained—moving from the Ego to the Eco (Muller & Pusse 2018).

Concerns about the sustainability of natural and social ecosystems and the societal demands to ensure it are naturally connected to school curricula. Education must play a vital role in achieving sustainable development. Through education, we must foster sustainable and inclusive growth and development.

Ecology literally means "the way of living" or "the manner of maintaining life," and if expressed in one word, it can be referred to as "life." "Ecosystem" refers to a complex system or order in which various elements maintain the life of a collective through organic relationships. In this sense, the various elements constituting the Earth's ecosystem do not only refer to the current generation of humanity, but also include future generations and non-human entities. Therefore, eco-democracy is a community-based approach where humans, along with other ecological beings, create a system based on mutual rights and participation (Koo, 2018). It represents a politics that aims to create a world where "humans are not the only masters, but where humans too are part of the collective" and promotes the idea of shared responsibility. This era demands ecological citizenship, which is based on the responsibility and practical capacity to address the problems faced by the community.

From this perspective, we must ask ourselves whether our homes, schools, and communities are healthy ecosystems where children can breathe and live—a sustainable environment for their future. Eco-centric education is not just about environmental education; it goes beyond human-centeredness and must start by redefining humanity's role in realizing eco-democracy based on ecological citizenship. Ecology should not be merely a tool or method in education, but the very core of education itself. In other words, "education for all life" is what eco-centric education is all about.

This ecological transition in education cannot be achieved through the interest and participation of only a few. Just as the issue of education is not solely the responsibility of schools, a societal consensus and participation are essential for transitioning the educational system for the future. We must accept that meritocracy, based on competition, no longer makes our children happy. Under the education capitalism that treats teaching as a service and limits learning to the rights of consumers, we must recognize that trust in education will inevitably collapse. To shift the education system in South Korea from one focused on "winning" to one focused on "living well," there must be a societal agreement on eco-centric education. Therefore, we must empower schools to realize an education that fosters mutual growth, and create a platform for the participation of families and communities in sharing the responsibility for education.

Local Education Autonomy

Recently, there has been a rise in collaborative governance between general local autonomy (local governments) and educational autonomy (education offices) for community-based learning. Schools and local communities are making joint efforts for community cooperation, and educational communities are emerging to develop and connect local educational resources (Kim, 2015). Innovative educational practices based on cooperation between local areas and schools are being recognized as alternatives to overcome the existing neoliberal educational system (Merrian, Courtenay, & Cerverim, 2006). This trend has led to local governments and communities, which were once on the periphery of education, now taking a central role in

leading educational innovation and accelerating the realization of educational governance. The administration of this cooperation is not driven by one party's unilateral leadership but through a multi-lateral, decentralized solidarity.

In fact, in recent years, the innovative education district project has fostered organic cooperation between general local autonomy and educational autonomy, and now, through village education communities, these three forms of autonomy—general, educational, and community—are coming together organically to create a local community as a unified learning ecosystem. While participation from the local area still tends to be at a subsidiary or supportive level rather than autonomous, diverse village-based educational activities are gradually spreading beyond the confines of schools, moving away from one-sided and narrow educational participation, and expanding into the wider community depending on the region's characteristics and conditions.

For community-based education to be practiced autonomously and sustainably, based on the educational capacity of the local community, it is essential to create a decentralized solidarity that involves various local educational actors. In this context, decentralized solidarity refers to the establishment of a horizontal and collaborative relationship between general local autonomy, educational autonomy, and community educational autonomy (Kim, 2019; Yang et al., 2019). Collaborative governance for the educational ecosystem must go beyond the power-sharing achieved through the cooperative participation of government, civil society, and academia, and include democratic practices that share responsibility for education. In this sense, the basic principles of "decentralization and cooperation" in governance are crucial elements for building and operating the local educational ecosystem.

To promote localized education and nurture democratic citizens in the region, the powers that have been centralized so far must now be decentralized to the local and citizen domains. Furthermore, a pathway and foundation must be established for citizen participation and cooperation (Kwack, 2015; Shin, 2011).

To formalize and systematize the participation of residents in educational autonomy, it is necessary to establish and operate a "education council" or "village education council," similar to a residents' council (village meeting). An education council serves as a social mechanism to empower residents in local education, and it acts as a starting point for discussions on local educational issues, formalizing them as agendas and working towards solutions through official procedures and processes (Yang et al., 2019). For instance, issues like care services, after-school programs, and democratic citizenship education happening inside and outside of schools could be turned into agendas for local education, with proposals and collaboration in the public domain to address these challenges.

Similar to the "town-meeting government" for democratic local governance, the education council or village education autonomy council, which represents local educational interests, is

not only a decision-making body for educational issues but also a space for education that nurtures residents into active citizens through addressing complex issues in the educational community and the processes of solving them (Bookchin, 2012). Through village education autonomy, the community can participate in the educational discussions that have traditionally been led by local governments, education offices, and schools. When the participation of residents moves beyond a supplementary or auxiliary role to a leading one, a genuine educational governance system is established (Joo, 2021).

The structure of educational governance can be divided into central government, metropolitan, local, and community levels, with each level's governance entities and roles specified. At the government level, the main entities involved in collaborative educational governance include the National Education Commission, the Ministry of Education, and the Council of Provincial and Metropolitan Education Superintendents. This level is responsible for formulating national educational plans and providing policy direction. At the metropolitan level, the key governance entities are the Provincial and Metropolitan Offices of Education and local governments (metropolitan municipalities). A governance system is needed at this level to comprehensively plan and support regional education.

At the basic level, such as districts, towns, and counties, practical implementation of educational governance and supportive administration will take place. It is essential to design education tailored to the local area and ensure residents' participation in realizing it. Furthermore, practical administrative cooperation between educational administration and general administration is necessary to operate regional education. At the community level, such as neighborhoods or smaller regions, educational governance should focus on the practical implementation of educational programs and projects. If needed, intermediary support organizations should be established, and institutional mechanisms for active collaboration and participation with local self-government bodies should be put in place.

The current education autonomy system, which began in 1991, operates at the regional level. Under this system, the key powers responsible for designing education plans, formulating policies, securing resources, and executing them are the regional education administration agencies. However, the role and influence of the central government remain significant. To ensure democracy in the education system and secure local autonomy based on the community, it is now necessary to transfer educational power to the basic level.

Basic-level educational governance is the unit where a practical and effective autonomous educational governance system operates. This system must shift from the existing "government-driven, dependent educational governance" structure to a "collaborative autonomous educational governance" model where the local community, government, and schools work together to solve the education problems at hand. Education policies and projects should move away from fragmentation, duplication, and disconnected execution, focusing instead on addressing the unique characteristics of the region and its educational needs, thereby

improving their effectiveness and feasibility.

The existing downward, government-driven educational governance structure at the regional level (e.g., city halls and education offices) must now be transformed into an upward educational governance system led by local communities, based on collaboration among government, schools, and the community. Education policies and projects from the regional level, which often lack practical applicability, have been repeatedly transmitted to individual schools, resulting in burdens for teachers and a lack of tangible benefits for local communities. Moving forward, it is essential to design and implement educational projects that are grounded in the educational demands and needs of local communities, as well as the unique characteristics of each school, to enhance the effectiveness of educational policies. To achieve this, the educational governance system between local governments, education support offices, schools, and communities at the basic level must be strengthened, and the establishment of education support offices at all basic levels must be implemented to foster horizontal cooperation.

The basic unit serves as a platform to activate collaboration between government, schools, and communities, enabling them to jointly identify educational agendas, plan and execute projects, and realize more mature educational autonomy. For this collaborative governance to function effectively, it is necessary to establish a statutory committee based on ordinances. The Local Education Council is the highest governance body for the basic unit's educational collaboration. In addition, to foster cooperation between general administration, educational administration, and community autonomy, an Education Autonomy Support Center can be jointly operated as a practical body. Through these intermediary support organizations, local governments and education support offices can collaborate with the village education autonomy council to enhance the educational capacity of the community.

To establish an educational autonomy system at the basic unit level, it is essential to secure an education support office in every basic unit. Additionally, it is necessary to adjust the authority and roles of the education support office so that it can collaborate with local governments on an equal and independent footing. Currently, the education support office does not have its own legal personality and is limited to performing duties delegated by the superintendent of education. As a result, it lacks the structure to make independent and autonomous decisions in partnership with the local governments. There is a need for institutional reform related to the education support office to grant it the autonomy required for effective collaboration.

According to Article 34 of the "Local Education Autonomy Act," the education support office holds a subordinate position within the educational administrative structure under the provincial or metropolitan office of education. In other words, unlike general local government units, the education support office does not have the authority to establish ordinances, exercise personnel rights, or manage budgets. Instead, it is limited to handling duties delegated by the superintendent of education, without its own decision-making power. Moreover, the education

support office is primarily defined as having a supervisory role rather than a support role for individual schools. Its authority is mainly exercised in elementary, middle, and early education schools rather than high schools (Baek et al., 2019: 42).

On the other hand, the position of the superintendent of education is not an elected role but one appointed by the superintendent of education. According to Article 34, Section 3 of the "Local Education Autonomy Act," it is stipulated that "an education support office must have a superintendent, who is assigned the duties of a superintendent, and the necessary matters regarding their appointment shall be determined by presidential decree." In other words, the superintendent of the education support office is appointed by the superintendent of education from among the "education officers" (usually referring to senior education administrators) under their jurisdiction.

One of the most critical issues in establishing a local-level educational autonomy system is the introduction of an elected superintendent. This can be pursued through amending the provisions of Article 34 of the "Local Education Autonomy Act."

Due to the mismatch in status and authority between the heads of institutions at the local government level, it is currently difficult for the education support office or the superintendent of education to exercise equal authority or cooperate effectively. To establish a new educational autonomy structure, it is necessary to gradually introduce institutional measures that allow citizens at the city, county, or district level to elect their own superintendents, along with administrative and financial authority provisions.

To enhance the status and functions of the education support office, the "Local Education Autonomy Act" should be amended to grant substantial and exclusive powers regarding the duties and scope of the superintendent. If the proposed system for electing superintendents is to be implemented in stages, an initial step could involve a superintendent selection process through open recruitment, aligning with the educational characteristics and needs of the local community. Over the long term, it would be necessary to establish a direct election or selection system for the superintendent, thus building a system of educational autonomy at the basic local government level.

Community-Based Curriculum Implementation

In order for community-based education to be activated, a shift in both awareness and practice must occur. First, in the industrial society paradigm, students were made passive participants in a competitive, memorization-based entrance exam education. However, now, students should be recognized as active learners who explore their own career paths and contribute to building a future society based on knowledge and culture. While competition in the industrial-era education system used to be an individual responsibility for students, now it should serve as the foundation for improving the educational capacity of both the education office and the

local community. Instead of educating children to send them to large cities, the education system should transition to one that fosters the strength to root and settle in their local communities. To promote community-based education, three directions for its operation can be proposed as follows:

First, more than 20% of the regular school curriculum should be operated as community-based education. While community-linked education has been recognized as an extracurricular activity, serving as a supplementary and supportive educational activity to regular education, for community-based education, at least 20% of the school's curriculum and total hours (credits) should be designed and operated in collaboration with the community as part of the regular curriculum, with flexibility for school discretion and monthly or yearly autonomous activities.

Second, public education centered on school education should be expanded to community-based education. Public education, which has been primarily focused on school education, should be extended to community public education, aligning life and learning to establish an ecological future education system. To achieve this, creative experience activities, integrated learning through curriculum connections, the free semester system, and even the high school credit system should be operated in conjunction with local education. Furthermore, areas such as sustainable development education, climate and environmental education, peace and unification education, gender equality education, labor education, and communication education, which are emphasized in school education, should actively integrate and utilize local educational resources, institutionalizing this process.

Third, education should be based on a regional education cooperation system. One of the key features of initiatives like the Innovation Education District and the Village Education Community project is that they were not carried out solely by the education office, but were operated based on cooperation with local governments and communities. Through the collaboration of educational autonomy, local autonomy, and community autonomy, a regional governance system for education was established, providing a foundation for village education (Kim et al., 2020). To ensure the sustainability and activation of community-based education, it is essential to establish a solid education governance system between local education offices and local governments and to strengthen the educational roles and capabilities of local communities.

Systematization of cooperation with general administration

To establish the educational autonomy system at the local level, various legal frameworks need to be reorganized. It is necessary to amend existing related laws, such as the "Local Government Act" and the "Local Education Autonomy Act," to explicitly specify the cooperation between general autonomy and educational autonomy. The current "Local Education Autonomy Act" was enacted to regulate the establishment, organization, and operation of institutions responsible for education, science, technology, sports, and other

academic affairs in local governments, based on Article 121 of the "Local Government Act." For institutionalizing the cooperation (governance) between general autonomy and educational autonomy in the related laws, explicit provisions are required.

To ensure the effective operation of the mandatory council system for consultation between general administrative bodies (such as city and provincial governments) and educational administrative bodies (such as city and provincial education offices), institutional improvements are necessary. Additionally, this system should be expanded to the local level to realize inter-agency cooperation and community participation. Article 41 of the "Local Education Autonomy Act" states, "In order to efficiently handle the education and academic affairs of local governments, a local education administrative council shall be established," with matters regarding its composition and operation to be determined by agreement between the superintendent of education and the mayor or governor through ordinances. This system, which currently applies to the regional level, must be complemented and strengthened. It is necessary to improve ordinances to activate the horizontal connection and consultation between general autonomy and educational autonomy at the local level. Through this, the overall consultation function between the two executive bodies can be enhanced, and the activation and strengthening of the local education administrative council, tailored to regional characteristics, can be pursued (Jang et al., 2010).

For public-private-academic governance, an independent organization or body responsible for the practical implementation of collaborative governance is essential. As seen through innovation education districts and village education community projects, the establishment and institutionalization of intermediate support organizations (e.g., foundation corporations) that connect the public and private sectors and coordinate general autonomy and educational autonomy is necessary. Currently, there are restrictions on joint funding by local governments and education offices for the establishment of such organizations, so improvements in this regard are required.

Conclusion

In the process of democratization in our society, the decentralization or localization of central power is a key principle driving the era of local autonomy. In the realm of general autonomy, the division between metropolitan and basic units allows each to perform autonomous roles and duties in various areas such as legislation (ordinances), personnel, and finances, contributing to the development of democratic systems. The strengthening of local autonomy and independence is not merely a political move but can also be understood as part of the current trend and demand for ecological transition and the creation of a sustainable society by specifying the community as the unit of practice. The term "glocal" represents a trend that unites global (worldwide) and local (regional) aspects to create a platform for coexistence (ecosystem).



For democracy to advance through qualitative change, it must transition from large societal or national systems to smaller social structures where civic sovereignty and local life are closely connected. In order for the politics, economy, society, culture, and education of a region to achieve their own self-sufficiency, an autonomous local ecosystem must be established. Only then can both large societies and nations become sustainable.

In this context, the education autonomy domain also needs a shift of power and role distribution from the regional level to the local level. For education in South Korea to thrive, the well-being of children and schools must be prioritized, and the local educational capacity must be restored. The local community must have the authority to make decisions about local education and enhance civic identity through its educational strength in order for that region to remain healthy and avoid extinction. A virtuous cycle must be created where children are born, educated, grow, become citizens, and then contribute to revitalizing the region.

To achieve this, reforms in the current educational autonomy system are necessary. Even if the number of students or schools is small, each local unit should have an educational support office, and should be empowered to shape its own education alongside local governments and communities. Education for children should no longer be confined to the national curriculum framework but should be connected to local life. It should shift from an education aimed at competing to an education aimed at thriving.

Notes

1. In Korea, local educational autonomy system (educational district office) is administratively separated from local government and operates independently.
2. The system of local governance in South Korea is divided into two levels: the higher level includes metropolitan cities and provinces, while the lower level includes cities, counties, and districts.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies fund.



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