



## 22 The school day

In South Korea, some children study for ten hours a day, six days a week. They have their regular lessons during the day and then, after a short break, they go to special evening schools called *hagwons* for another three or four hours of classes.

### 1 Before you read, discuss the following.

How would you feel if you had to go to two different schools every day?

Would you like to study this hard?

### Glossary

- 1 spawned: produced, created
- 2 cult-like: like a small religious group
- 3 Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): an international organisation set up to promote trade
- 4 rounded individuals: well educated people with a wide range of interests

### 2 As you read, answer the questions to find the meaning of these words.

- a Does *drifts* mean moves slowly or moves quickly?
- b Does *drooping* mean falling slowly or falling quickly?
- c Does *scribbles* mean writes slowly and clearly or writes quickly and not very neatly?
- d Does *outlaw* mean forbid or encourage?
- e Does *catch up with* mean be jealous of or reach the same standard as?
- f Does *go without* mean sacrifice or insist on?
- g Does *entrenched* mean unimportant or deep-rooted?
- h Does *skip* mean concentrate on or forget about?
- i Does *fanatical* mean too casual or too serious?
- j Does *prosperity* mean poverty or wealth?

### 3 Now complete these sentences with words or information from the article.

- a About \_\_\_\_\_ % of Korean students go to *hagwons*.
- b Yang Dong-myung studies \_\_\_\_\_ hours a night, \_\_\_\_\_ nights a week.
- c A new law will force *hagwons* to finish teaching by \_\_\_\_\_ pm.
- d South Korea has the \_\_\_\_\_ largest economy in Asia.

- e The country has few \_\_\_\_\_ resources such as minerals, oil and gas.
- f International studies place 15-year-old Koreans first in science and \_\_\_\_\_ in mathematics.
- g It costs about \$ \_\_\_\_\_ a week to send your child to night school.
- h Lee Sook is willing to go without \_\_\_\_\_ if it means her children can go to a *hagwon*.
- i On the day of the annual university entrance exam, offices start work an \_\_\_\_\_ late and airports restrict \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to help students concentrate.
- j Lee Nan-young wants her children to do more \_\_\_\_\_ and have more \_\_\_\_\_.

### 4 Now discuss the following.

- a Are there similar schools to *hagwons* in your country? Would you like to go to one? Why/Why not?
- b Why do we go to school? What is education for?
- c Are there things you should not learn at school, but should learn from your family and friends? For example, who should teach you about politics/sex education/how to deal with money/religion/the risks from smoking or taking drugs?
- d What makes a good school?

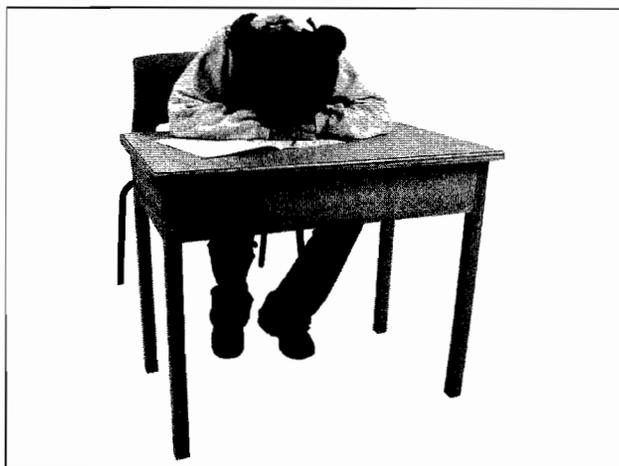
### 5 Your group have been asked to plan a new school for 200 children aged seven to 11. Give your new school a name and then decide the following.

- class size?
- mixed or single-sex?
- school uniform?
- what subjects will be taught?
- balance of fun and study?
- how long will the lessons be?
- starting and finishing time of school?
- how many breaks?
- school rules?

**Now present your new school to the rest of the class.**

# Lessons leave no time for play in Seoul

**Andrew Ward** on the South Korean education system where fierce competition has spawned an \$11bn-a-year private evening school industry.



A 17-year-old boy drifts into sleep, his head drooping into the textbook open in front of him. It is 9pm and Yang Dong-myung has two more hours of study to complete before going home. Around him sit other teenage South Koreans struggling to stay awake as a tutor scribbles English vocabulary on a blackboard.

Mr Yang and his classmates are among the roughly 80 per cent of South Koreans who attend private evening schools, known as *hagwon*, to improve their chances of reaching university.

An almost cult-like devotion to learning has been among the driving forces behind South Korea's rapid economic development over the past half century, creating one of the world's most highly educated workforces.

But concern is growing that the obsession with education has spun out of control, putting children under too much stress and families under pressure to pay expensive tuition fees.

The government signalled its alarm last month by announcing plans to outlaw evening classes after 10pm as part of tougher regulation of the \$11bn (€8.6bn, £5.8bn) *hagwon* industry.

Mr Yang attends his *hagwon* in Seoul four evenings a week from 6pm to 11pm after a full day at school. "I get tired and fall asleep in class," he says. "But in Korea education is important so my parents force me to study."

South Korea spends 6.8 per cent of gross domestic product on education, more than any other member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. However, the country's public spending on

education is below the OECD average at 4.1 per cent, highlighting the role played by private tuition in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

The teachings of Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher who stressed the importance of scholarship, influence many east Asian societies.

In South Korea, the zeal for learning is reinforced by a belief that knowledge is crucial to the bid to catch up with richer nations such as Japan and stay ahead of China.

"Korea is a country with few natural resources so to better ourselves individually and as a nation we have to use our brains," say Lee Nan-young, mother of two teenage students.

Commitment to education is reflected by research showing South Korea's 15-year-olds have the highest scientific literacy and second-highest mathematics standards among OECD members.

A slogan on the classroom wall in Mr Yang's English lesson reads: "Accomplish your dreams". But dreams come at a price: in his *hagwon*, fees of \$280 a week.

"Half of our family's income is spent on education," says Lee Sook, mother of two *hagwon* students. "We go without holidays to afford it. In every area of life we make sacrifices for our children's education."

Lee Hang-soo, vice-president of Mr Yang's *hagwon*, says the school grants bursaries to children from poor families. But he admits South Korea's education system is divisive: "The 20 per cent of children that don't attend *hagwon* are split between those that can't afford it and those clever enough not to need it."

Private tuition has become so entrenched that public schools skip parts of the curriculum on the assumption it will be taught in evening classes.

"Public education teaches students to be rounded individuals; *hagwon* exist to get them through the university entrance exam," says Mr Lee.

Getting into a good university is considered a ticket to success in status-conscious South Korea, where people are judged according to educational background.

The annual entrance exam is so important that people start work an hour late on test day to keep roads clear for candidates, while airports restrict take-offs and landings during the exam to avoid disturbing students.

However, there is growing awareness of the negative consequence of such a fanatical approach to education.

"I worry about my children having no time to exercise and have fun," says Lee Nan-young. "Children are getting fat because they are always studying."

Jung Bong-sup, head of school policy at the ministry of education, says the *hagwon* style of teaching fails to provide the skills needed in the modern global economy.

"Students memorise facts but they don't learn the ideas behind them," he says. "In the 21st century people need to think creatively and that requires more interactive education."

However as long as university remains the path to prosperity in South Korea, parents will send their children to *hagwon*. "If other kids go then so must yours," says Mrs Lee.