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Sources of Influence on Perceptions of South Korean Youths about Unification of North and South Korea

Item Type	openaccess;article
Authors	Kim, Surl Hee
Download date	2025-06-09 08:00:20
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/7614

Sources of Influence on Perceptions of South Korean Youths
about Unification of North and South Korea

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May, 2016

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore what information sources are influencing the perception of South Korean youths about unification between North and South Korea. The research examined the sources and the tone of messages which the youths receive from non-school sources such as family, peers, teachers, religious institutions and media.

The research methodology combined a survey with interviews. Questionnaires were collected from a total of 273 students in 3 high schools located in metropolitan areas of Seoul in South Korea. Interviews with a student and a unification education lecturer who is a North Korean defector were also conducted. SPSS was used to analyze questionnaires with descriptive analysis, correlation, and multiple regression. Interviews were analyzed for emerging themes.

The findings showed that the media and teachers were the primary sources of information about unification. In terms of feeling about messages, students feel that their peers provide mostly negative messages whereas teachers and religious institutions are more positive. Both media and family were judged to provide about equally positive and negative messages. The students feel that the overall tone of messages from all sources is about equally balanced between positive and negative messages. Lastly, 56% of students have negative feelings about North Korea and unification, which reflects the messages from peer groups. Teachers' positive messages are not very related to students' perceptions on unification and North Korea. Among media, movies are a strong influential source in the formation of perceptions toward North Korea. All the information sources such as family, teachers, peers and media equally affect students' feelings about North Korea and unification. Media that students heavily rely on for information are not the exclusive factor contributing to most the personal feelings.

My findings suggest that high school students need unification education in formal school curriculum since teachers' messages are not through official curriculum but through informal communications. Without formal education about unification, students tend to rely on other information sources. Also, to positively influence the narrative of unification, unification education needs to expand to adults through civic education. This research supports the necessity of unification education for South Korean youths and adults as a way of achieving unification.

Key words: Unification education; the Republic of Korea; South Korean youth; Sources of youth perception about unification

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Introduction

The Republic of Korea has been facing the challenging issue of unification between North and South Korea since they were separated in the 1950s. Narratives of unification are linked to preparation for unification through education targeting the young generation. There has been unification education in formal and non-formal educational settings in the ROK although the name for this education has been changing. In addition, the foci of unification education have been changing through the years reflecting the continually changing stances of the ROK government toward North Korea.

In the 70 years that have passed since division into the two Koreas, the younger generations who must lead unification have shown shifting opinions about unification. South Korean youths have decreasing concerns about unification. Especially, the extent of agreement about unification has noticeably declined among high school students. In addition, though South Korean youths agree on unification to some degree, they show dual attitudes toward North Korea combining a superficial sense of kinship with a sense of political enmity, which undermine youths' mindset about unification.

Unification Education (UE) is one of the efforts to achieve unification in formal education settings because youth represents a key factor in the quest for forming a united Korea. However, in contrast to elementary and middle school curricula, UE is not sufficiently implemented in high schools so that high school students disagree with unification or become indifferent about unification and North Korea. In light of missing UE in their formal curriculum, high school students' opinions on unification can be easily impacted by diverse information sources. Therefore, it is important to determine what kinds of tone of information sources they are exposed to outside of any formal curriculum and how daily sources of

information around them affect their perceptions both toward North Korea and unification.

To do so, three research questions were raised:

- What is the tone of messages which South Korean youth receive from non-school curriculum such as family, peers, teachers, religious institutions and media?
- How are these sources related?
- What sources are influential for shaping youths' perceptions toward unification?

Context

At the end of World War II, the colonial era of Japan's rule in Korea ended. However, the Soviet Union and the United States carved up Korea into the North and South at the 38th parallel after the disarmament of Japan. The Soviets forced North Korea to separate from South Korea and only agreed to reunification if a united Korea were led by a communist-based government. The U.S. strongly disagreed with the emergence of a communist state, hostile to the West. Thus, unification of Korea became non-negotiable. The Soviet and Chinese communist armies actively coordinated preparations for war in North Korea. Eventually, on June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, beginning the Korean War (Doopedia, n.d.). This war was concluded by a truce treaty in 1953 between the U.N. commander and the North Korean army allied with the Chinese communist army.

Since the treaty, there have been continual military confrontations between North and South Korea. There have been high-level discussions several times between North and South Korea since the 1970s in an attempt to bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. However, North Korea's nuclear program and their intermittent threats to bomb the Republic of Korea (ROK)

have reinforced an icy relationship not only with the ROK but also with the ROK's allies such as the United States and Japan. Moreover, as the ROK government changes its stance toward North Korea depending on the existing President's political notions, the relationship between the two Koreas has fluctuated back and forth.

Currently, the two countries eye each other warily resulting in a negative and tense status quo. Ironically, the current ROK government has recently argued that unification through a trust-oriented process would be the means to a future combined Korea. In 2014, President Park gave a speech in Dresden, Germany, titled "An initiative for peaceful unification on the Korean Peninsula." However, there has been no thawing in the relationship with North Korea since then. Thus, South Koreans have been criticizing the Park government, claiming it has taken no action but just talks about unification. In the meantime, due to North Korea's ongoing nuclear experiments and missile tests, the Gaesung industrial complex ended up being shut down, symbolizing the severe disruption between the two states.

Why does the Republic of Korea pursue unification?

In the Republic of Korea, a dialogue of unification has prevailed since the two Koreas became separated. Although the current government declared unification to be the future for the two Koreas, still, some people stick to the negative aspects of unification for several reasons.

First, the distrust between North and South Korea is long-standing and very deeply embedded so that building trust seems difficult (Ministry of Unification, 2014). The ROK has been actively raising the rationale for unification; nevertheless, unification cannot take place through only one-side's determination. Politically, although there have been many attempts to discuss reconciliation, these inevitably result in a vicious cycle of deteriorating relations

between in the two Koreas. Since unification requires an agreement by both sides, creating trust is key to moving forward to unification through cultural and economic cooperation. However, as North Korea's current threatening actions and the reaction by the ROK government continue to deteriorate relations, breaking this constant vicious cycle seems impossible.

Second, discourse about unification always involves references to the unification of Germany which is considered to be a successful model in the ROK. It can be inferred that learning about the German example would guide the Koreas' unification. However, a professor suggested that we should be careful about optimistically pursuing the approaches and processes of unification, adding that unification in Germany did not bring happiness to all Germans (Shin, 2014). As a matter of fact, Germany still struggles to overcome the vast economic discrepancies between the old East and West Germanys. Thus, Germany does not provide an ideal example for the two Koreas' unification. Until the Koreas discover their own path to reunification, people think that achieving unification will be very difficult.

Third, many young generation of South Koreans do not desire unification. A public opinion poll conducted by a Chosun newspaper indicated that 66.3% of respondents with ages 20s stated that unification would not be beneficial to their lives (Chosun, Jan. 2014). Many were concerned that the tremendous costs of would far outweigh any potential advantages of unification. They assume that the expenditure for unification would require a huge tax burden for South Koreans because of the enormous economical gap between the two Koreas. At present, the ROK is experiencing tough economic times so that its citizens fear the added financial difficulties imposed by unification. In addition, the respondents pointed out that the political framework and socio-economic workings of the two Koreas have been very different for such a long time. Consequently, the culture, language and diverse aspects of life styles have diverged so much since the split that it has simply become too difficult to

live together in harmony. This rationale reflects a sense of fear, negativity and resistance toward unification.

Nevertheless, unification would be beneficial to the two Koreas' future over the long run. Initially, every aspect of society would confront immediate difficulties, a reality conceded by even strong advocates for unification. However, they maintain that a peaceful, united Korean peninsula would eventually give rise to mutual prosperity and successful national development. As a matter of fact, the rationale of unification has been historically changing from an initial stance of ideological superiority to one of peaceful co-existence. Also, there are ongoing arguments such as the best way and timing for unification and how South Koreans can best prepare for unification. Here, I present some advantages of unification.

First, unification would bring vast economic benefits. A research paper titled "Economic Effect by Unification of the Korean Peninsula" reported by the National Assembly Budget Office (NABO) in 2015 analyzed cost estimates for a period of 45 years from 2016 to 2060, supposing unification occurred in 2015-2016. As a result, the economic benefits by unification would be 3.1 times higher than its expense over the next 45 years. Not only that, but also many new investment and job opportunities would expand the entire economic structure of one Korea, thereby leading to tremendous economic benefits. Lee (2010), a faculty member at the Institute of Unification Education, contends that the expense for unification is exaggerated because it shows only the net cost of unification rather than indicating its gains, benefits and returns of cost. Focusing only on the net cost distorts the entire benefits of post-unification. In addition, if the two Koreas' national defense expenditures were spent creating economic infrastructures and a welfare system after unification, the cost would not only cumulatively offset a large amount of the net cost of unification but also engender many opportunities for economic development. Plus, North

Korea's huge amount of natural resources such as magnesite, tungsten, gold, and anthracite would be a boon for manufacturing industries.

Second, unification will provide people a sense of security. The Korean peninsula is politically unstable. This is because the Korean War ended in a truce, which failed to recognize that the two Koreans technically never terminated the war. Thus, people fear another war which would be just a continuation of the Korean War. North Korea's intermittent bombing attacks and its nuclear weapon program threaten the security of people's lives with the possibility of war. North Korea's threat is politically an enemy's military action, however, it is complicated because North Korea is considered as one ethnicity. This complex issue makes South Koreans' viewpoints a dichotomy toward North Korea. Even so, a majority of South Koreans desires no war, only peace. Officially ending the Korean War through reconciliation, active interchanges of culture and economy between Koreans, and attempts at wide integration would generate peaceful conditions, conducive to one united Korea and pave the way to sustainable development.

Third, separated families matter. The issue of separated family members has been a long-term issue. This problem began with the national tragedy of Japan's colonization and was exacerbated by the Korean War. No national survey has ever been performed to identify the extent of family separation in the ROK (The Republic of Korea National Red Cross, 2005). Meanwhile, approximately 130,838 people living in the ROK have applied to the family reunion program, according to the Integrated Information System for Separated Families (IIS) in 2016. Family reunion is fundamentally a humanistic value surpassing ideology. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) claimed that "Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family (Article 16)." The National Red Cross of the two Koreas, as well as cabinet minister-level talks, has been meeting to negotiate this issue. In 1985, reunions

actually took place but soon ceased. From 2000 to 2015, both in person reunions and cyber-reunions were held twenty times. Nevertheless, only 1.7 percent of all applicants were given the chance to reunite with family in North Korea (Lee, 2015). Most applicants for reunion search for the immediate nuclear family members, not extended family. Reunion events indicate the status of the two Koreas' current relationship. Fluctuating political tensions have not approved the many requests by South Koreans for reunions. As time passed, old applicants have died with more than half of all applicants reported dead on a report of IISS in 2016. This is a tragedy for many families in North and South Korea. Forbidding family reunions is a violation of human rights. Koreans want to unify with family through the larger process of unification of the two Koreas.

Fourth, North Koreans' hardships imposed by its government are not only a humanistic disaster but also an ongoing family tragedy. Life in North Korea is inhumane in many cases.

For the three years from 2003 to 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights Council, which expanded and reorganized the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2006, has set forth a North Korean human rights resolution every year since 2008...In March 2013, the UN Human Rights Council, through its resolution on North Korean human rights, expressed deep concerns about the persistent, systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in North Korea, and resolved to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate human rights there at the UN level...The 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in November 2013 stated that it is deeply concerned "at the significant persistent deterioration of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2014, p.144).

Several international humanitarian agencies and advocacy groups request that the North Korea government to improve North Korean human rights; however, the regime refuses to change its way of governing. North Korean defectors and experts on North Korea anticipate the future collapse of the Kim regime. If the collapse were to occur, this would create the opportunity to achieve unification with the help of international society. Unification could bring freedom and human dignity to North Koreans dissolving a long and brutal dictatorship.

The separation of the Koreas was caused by the powers during the Cold War. This division and the different ideologies hamper sustainable peace in the Korea Peninsula. The Constitution of the ROK clearly claims that it seeks unification. “Article 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea prescribes that the Republic of Korea shall seek national unification and shall formulate and carry out a policy of peaceful unification on the principles of freedom and democracy (Ministry of Unification, chapter 5, p.173).” The author feels Koreans should reunite together. Dialogue about unification has recently become very active in governmental agencies and education sectors.

Why is unification education important?

To advance unification, many levels of society are discussing pre-unification and post-unification in the ROK. Yun (2014), the president of the Institute of Unification Education under the Ministry of Unification, claimed that unification is not about returning Korea to circumstances existing before division but about proceeding to the creation of a better future in Korea.

Political unification has to do not only with internal efforts but also the cooperation of the international community (Cho, 2007). Political unification, indeed, is only the beginning because Koreans would have huge challenges to overcome before becoming genuinely unified. Who would be the actors to birth a unified nation? The question of who leads the unification process is a starting point of UE. Unification is future-oriented. Thus, surely, the young generation is a key actor in forming a unified Korea. Responsibility for success in preparing for unification and creating a new Korean society falls on today’s young people. Thus, it is necessary for the young to become educated in the overall issue of unification such as becoming familiar with the history of the two Koreas’ separation, awareness of the necessity for unification and the value of co-existence in harmony.

To achieve unification, it is necessary that unification proceed step-by-step, first seeking reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas through active economic and cultural interchanges. Needless to say, peace comes first in all aspects of society. The rationale for UE is related to building a peaceful way to unification.

The foundational direction of UE is to stimulate a sense of democracy, a sense of community for social integration, respect for human rights, and the value of peace. With hope and appreciation for the value of unification, youth needs to become capable of taking initiatives in achieving unification (KEDI, p.19).

To do so, both government and non-government organizations have been employing UE in various ways, targeting the youth.

History of unification education in the ROK government

The Korean government established the Unification Education Support Act in February, 1999 and later revised the act to legalize the implementation of unification education (UE). The Act consists of multiple articles to actively support the introduction of UE nationwide (Woo, 2011).

According to the Act, “UE refers to fostering values and attitudes that are needed to fulfill unification based on the principle of democracy, a sense of community of one ethnicity and sound awareness of security” (Unification Education Support Act, p.9). In other words, UE aims at fostering peace in the Korean Peninsula and establishing one ethnic community.

UE began at the Unification Training Institute in 1972 which changed its name to the Institute for Unification Education (IUE) in 1996. Based on the UE Support Act of 1999, the IUE has become strategically positioned by launching an official website promoting UE through a variety of UE materials using both on-line and off-line materials in education fields. The main objectives of the IUE are to build proper security awareness, a balanced perspective on North Korea and future-oriented vision toward unification (IUE, 2015). The government also provides grass-roots UE through UE officials, regional unification education

centers, the UE Council and unification exhibition halls nationwide (The Ministry of Unification, 2014).

UE has been changing its foci following the Republic of Korea's government's changed attitude toward North Korea. According to Cho (2007), before the nineties, UE was taught as an ethics or morality subject mainly promoting anticommunism, national security issues and criticisms of North Korea. Its aim was to spread information about North Korea, while promulgating the superiority of democracy rather than understanding North Korea. UE's direction noticeably changed in the nineties beginning with the use of the term 'unification education'. However, its contents remained still hostile towards North Korea. After an historic event in 2000, the first summit since separation, the relationship between the two Koreas turned positive, ushering in a fresh chapter to UE. However, Sim (2005) observed that "the ethics subject course poorly presented those changes when revised within the 7th national curriculum by the Ministry of Education after the first Summit".

President Lee's government in 2008 strongly criticized the previous government's deferential attitudes toward North Korea with their reconciliation, peace-oriented viewpoints and tried to redirect UE (Oh, 2012). Sporadic attacks from North Korea worsened the relationship between the two states. Also, the amount of time devoted to UE in schools decreased in accordance with the revised curriculum in 2011. Thus, the objective of UE has favored national security rather than unification (Oh, 2012).

Due to the current government's declaration for unification, public opinion has demanded UE. Moreover, the revised act in 2013 has added the last week of May as Unification Education Week to activate students' interest in unification at schools (Lee and Song, 2014; KEDI, 2014). In addition, to overcome the younger generation's negative attitudes toward unification, the Ministry of Unification (MoU) is making efforts to publicize the benefits of unification with diverse perspectives in cooperation with the MoE (KEDI,

2014). The MoE also claims that they will develop and provide UE class materials to establish the foundation for post-unification. In doing so, the MoE states that it will widen a teacher exchange program with Germany (KEDI, 2014).

The MoU also works to expand empathy for unification in public. Thus, they have held expos about North and South Korea's unification to raise awareness. By 2015, this expo had been held three times in central Seoul led by the Ministry of Unification and the presidential body, the Unification Preparatory Committee.

Despite these efforts, the relationship between the two Koreas continues to deteriorate. Moreover, UE has a limited position in formal education. On-going tension between the two Koreas can influence youth's attitudes toward unification.

Unification education from non-government organizations

UE programs in civil society are being implemented in the ROK. Approximately 70 NGOs/NPOs are engaged in UE (UE Association, 2010). NGOs' goals for UE vary with each organization's mission. Some NGOs focus on peace; others, on security. Recently, some UE programs have tried to integrate UE into new educational paradigms such as multi-culturalism, civic education and conflict resolution (Lee, 2011). Here, it is noteworthy to become familiar with 5 institutes implementing UE among many NGOs/NPOs.

The Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice's Korea Reunification Society strives for reconciliation and peace to achieve unification. They have held a bi-annual academy about UE for citizens consisting of a lecture, seminar and field trip since 1996 and have published books and articles about North Korea and unification to suggest policy and strategy (KINU, 2011).

Since 1999, Okedongmu Children has trained college and graduate school students to educate elementary school children about peaceful UE by visiting schools. Their themes of

peaceful UE are an understanding and tolerance of differences, of living together with North Korean friends, and unification. Also, there used to be an exchange program of paintings between North and South Korean children. Interestingly, South Korean children have visited the capital of North Korea to meet North Korean children 4 times during 2004 – 2008, which were unusual events in terms of NGOs' North Korea related-activities.

The Headquarters of National Unification Movement of Young Korean Academy (HNUMYKA) that has been working in civil movements implements UE programs for youth and open forums for citizens throughout the year but also conducts an annual survey regarding awareness of unification. HNUMYKA also runs training workshops for UE lecturers to send them to schools.

The North Korea Strategy Center, founded by a North Korean defector, sends North Korean defectors to universities to present UE from the North Korean perspective (Noh and Jo, MoU blog, 2013).

The Unification Education Research Center at Seoul National University was established in 2014. It aims at researching integrated education which a future, unified Korea could adopt and aims at developing policy for UE. It conducts the Unification Lab School in which North Koreans who used to be former North Korean teachers and current South Korean teachers teach both North Korean students living in South Korea and South Korean students together in the milieu of preliminary unification.

Literature Review

The two Koreas' unification-related literature is rare in English. However, unification is a hot-button issue in the ROK, thereby providing ample literature written in the Korean language. I reviewed the majority of this Korean language literature for this research.

Korean youths' characteristics

The Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) and National Youth Policy Institute (NYPI) researched the key competency of Korean middle school and high school students in 2010. This research used the Youth Key Competency Index that KEDI and NYPI developed for Korean youth referring to international comparative data such as PISA, ALL, ICCS 2009 (NYPI, 2010). The Competency Index is related to the Competence Model called DeSeCo created by OECD. DeSeCo refers to the three core competencies required of individuals over their lifetime: use tools interactively, interact in heterogeneous groups and act autonomously. In this research, Korean youths demonstrated an excellent capacity to use tools interactively. Among 22 countries, Korean youths placed second. However, their other competencies were very poor (Sin, 2016). Their capacity to interact in heterogeneous groups ranked the lowest among 22 OECD states. Interaction competency refers to the capacity to cooperate with those who are different socio-culturally and socio-economically as well as active participation in a community. OECD claims that this competency is essential for a successful life in globalization and a multi-cultural society (OECD, 2005). Korean youths, according to this research, demonstrate strong intellectual capacity but weak social interaction capacity (NYPI, 2010). Furthermore, answers to a question about how much youths trust the government, political parties, schools and the media showed that Korean youths' reliance on the government, and political parties and schools is significantly lower than the average among other nations. These results connote that Korean youths do not trust public institutions.

Also, NYPI (2010) reported that Korean youths have a comparatively high level of civic knowledge. The International Education Association conducted comparative research targeting middle school students for international civic and citizenship education study in 2009. Of a total of 38 states participating in this survey, Korean youths placed third.

In sum, Korean youths have excellent intellectual competency and civic knowledge but lack, intercultural social competency. An additional question is what are the attitudes of representative Korean youths toward possible future unification between North and South Korea?

Youths' attitudes toward unification

Over the years, South Korea's youth have become less and less interested in unification with North Korea. According to Lee (2010), a survey on youths' perceptions about unification in 1997 revealed that 71% of respondents expected unification in the future. However, by 2010, a similar survey showed that only 57.3% of youth expected unification. In 2014, the Ministry of Unification and the Ministry of Education conducted a national survey about youths' awareness of unification which showed an even lower level of expectation, 53.5%.

Although there may be limitations in the survey's methodology including the number of respondents and agencies responsible for conducting the survey, experts in UE trust that the results of the surveys do, in fact, accurately represent youths' general opinions. Regarding the justification for unification, youths responded in 2004 that unification is worthy because North and South Koreans are of the same ethnicity (Kang, et al 2009). Just ten years later in 2014, however, youths answered, that the top reason for unification between the two Koreas is that people could be free of a sense of insecurity and the threat of imminent war, and secondly, that the united Koreas would constitute a strong national power.

In the meantime, youth's indifference to unification has become another issue. Youth is not concerned about North Korea or unification. A professor interpreted this phenomenon to be that the impetus for leading unification is becoming progressively weaker (Park, 2015). In addition, a school teacher mentioned that schools now emphasize those major subjects

most relevant for academic achievement so that there is no time for UE (Park, 2015). The MoE recommend that K-12 schools teach UE programs 8 hours annually; however, this is not compulsory (Park, 2015).

Korean youth's indifference and negative opinions about unification are attributed to complex factors. Youth's characteristics represent a partial explanation for these factors. In terms of their low level of intercultural competency, living with North Koreans is not seen as desirable because they think it would damage the quality of their lives. Also, a student reporter commented that youth has never experienced war so that they have no first-hand knowledge of the hardships created by the division of the two Koreas (the Ministry of Unification Blog, 2016). In a larger picture, current youth is called the digital generation, which features individual cyber use in daily life. Thus, they are influenced by individualism and pragmatism rather than meta-discourse perpetuating a national identity or a sense of belonging to community (Choi, 2014). Not only these factors, but also the daily information about North Korea and unification can affect youth's perceptions. How does youth obtain information about unification and North Korea? I need to identify these information sources to answer this question.

Information sources about unification for youth

First, Jung (2015) stated that the values of parents can still influence the formation of youths' viewpoints toward North Korea. In the past,, adults were strongly educated to be anti-communist and were expected to convey their belief to their children, thereby reinforcing youth's negative attitudes toward both North Korea and the concept of unification.

Second, youth is constantly exposed to society's opinions of North Korea through their immersion in social media such as television and the Internet. For example, exposure to the media's presentation of North Korea's bombing attacks of military areas in the Republic

of Korea hugely impacted youths' attitudes. A 2014 survey reflected this showing that 58.7% of youth perceived North Korea as highly likely to start a war. This result demonstrates that youth recognizes North Korea as a dangerous threat to the Republic of Korea despite sharing the same ethnic background. North Korea government's military attacks are a major issue making South Koreans feel apprehensive.

Third, schools play a role in transmitting UE. Since the dialogue about unification is a very complex issue politically, socially and culturally, the public education system needs to take on the major role in UE for youth (Sim, 2005; Park, 2009; and Jung, 2015). According to the 2014 survey, 76.7% of youth responded that they have learned relevant education about unification in class or in a special activity class at school. In the same survey, 81% of teachers responded that they have taught UE. However, Lee and Song (2014) argued that in terms of teaching methods and students' satisfaction of UE, presenting UE in schools is not very effective in changing youths' perceptions. In addition, competing dual views of North Korea have created confusion with UE itself, thereby misleading youths (Oh, 2012; Woo, 2011). Students receive two contradictory messages: one is that the two Koreas should be ultimately united; the other, that North Korea is a political enemy because each state's goal is to maintain its sovereignty. Then the question necessarily follows: how much does UE at schools contribute to youths' attitudes toward unification? I will next examine UE in schools.

School Curriculum

The Ministry of Unification suggested unification education content and its delivery system as below. For schools' curriculum, the Institute for Unification Education plays a central role.

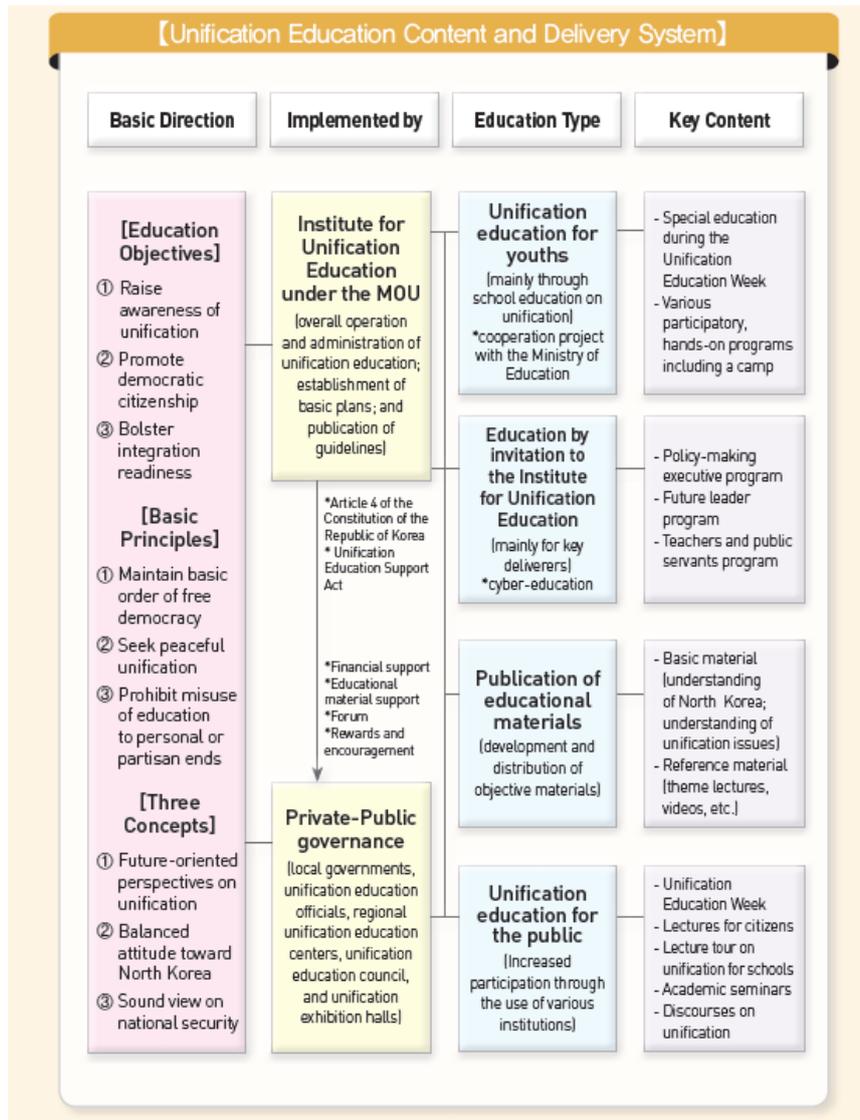


Figure 1. UE Curriculum Outline

Source: White Paper on Korean Unification, 2014, p.226

Direction of Unification Education by the Institute for Unification Education (IUE)

The IUE annually develops and distributes an UE guidebook for schools ranging from elementary to high schools. The goal of the guidebook is to provide the major lesson points to be covered in UE in several subjects at each grade. The 2014 UE guidebook presented five main themes; first, a general understanding of unification; second, a unification policy; third, knowledge about North Korea; fourth, learning international relations for unification; and fifth, tasks to achieve unification. To support teachers and

students with these major themes of its guidelines, the IUE website offers extensive learning resources such as collections of UE case studies, video clips, books, etc. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education website also provides cyber UE.

However, the 2014 survey shows that 57.4% of the responding teachers do not use either the IUE website or cyber UE, raising the question of why more teachers aren't interested in obtaining resources through those governmental websites. Regarding this matter, one teacher suggested it is necessary to establish a neutral institution responsible for UE because the IUE directions rely heavily on the government's unification policy which is necessarily inconsistent as political leaders change (Kang, 2014; Kim, 2014). The direction of UE needs to be consistent regardless of the government's position over the long run (KINU, 2015; Jung, 2015; Kang, 2014; Kang, Park and Jeong, 2009; Woo, 2011; Oh, 2012; Sim, 2005).

Contents of Textbooks

In the Republic of Korea's public schools' formal curriculum, ethics, social studies and history partly cover unification and North Korea. The contents and depth of these topics vary from elementary to high school. The ethics curriculum of middle schools takes a critical viewpoint, presenting North Korea's features as a despotic state and non-democratic political system, describing collectivism, inferior basic human rights and food shortages (Kang, 2014). On the other hand, cultural knowledge such as daily life in North Korea that would interest students is quite limited (Kang, 2014). Moreover, Lee (2010) argued that the rationale for unification in textbooks is limited to win youths' sympathy. This is because the contents of textbook are broad or abstract, urging youth to adopt unification as ethically and historically justified. This approach, given youths' current characteristics of individualism and pragmatism is ineffective (Lee, 2010).

In addition, Park, et al (2009) argues that “in general, textbooks do not provide a vision in detail on unification so that it leads students to have a vague blueprint of a united Korea” (p.24). Teaching information about North Korea at all levels of formal education should present the rationale for unification grounded in societal agreement and relevant research (Cho, 2015).

The hours devoted to UE in the three subjects in the formal curriculum have been cut back as a result of curriculum revision from 2007-2011(Oh, 2012; Lee, 2010). In Oh (2012)’s analysis, 24 units of relevant content of unification from elementary to high school reduced 12 units in ethics. The ethics textbook at the middle school level was cut from 96 to 36 pages (Kang, 2014). Jung (2015) emphasized that the upper grade students are more pessimistic about unification than the younger students. Jung (2015) speculated that this is caused by lesser hours of UE in textbooks as the grade level rises. Currently, the MoU is willing to continue to increase the hours of UE through special activity classes and an annual UE week in schools. However, it is debatable that simply increasing the number of UE hours by occasional events can increase students’ optimism towards unification.

Units related to unification in ethics and social studies textbooks are assigned near the end of one semester or one year. This means students and teachers do not concentrate on these textbook lessons at these specific times. At the same time, their inclusion in the tail end of the academic calendar causes the units to be excluded from final examinations. Thus, teachers quickly and superficially teach these final units (Kim, 2014; Jung, 2015). The timing of inclusion of UE in textbooks in the school year calendar shows that UE is not valued compared to the other contents of the formal curriculum (Kim, 2014).

Pedagogy of UE

Most youth who have experienced UE have not been satisfied with the current, old-fashioned methods of instruction (Park, et al 2009; Oh, 2012). This is because teachers have mainly lectured instead of using audiovisual methods in class. Given the learning habits of current youth, a lecture-centered way is not an effective way to grab and hold their attention (Shin, 2015). Youths' most preferred way to learn UE is via site visits or participatory lessons (Shin, 2015). Beyond the classroom, a teacher or principal can invite North Korean defectors to school to give their students first-hand knowledge about North Korea. However, one single event or a site visit that is not well integrated into UE could be perceived as an isolated event, thus creating fragmentary knowledge (Park, 2015; Oh, 2012).

Jeong (2015) mentioned that students' interests in unification vary from elementary to high school. Those who are most interested participated in club activities on unification in schools, belonged to model schools of UE or have attended special research schools alongside North Korean youth defectors. In other words, students are influenced not only by learning in a classroom but also by the overall activities in schools.

So far, UE's implementation in schools has been reviewed in the Republic of Korea. Although the historical context of the two Germanys was different from that of the two Koreas, the separations of Germany and Korea occurred around the Cold War. Because unification was achieved first in Germany, it is worthwhile reviewing West Germany's UE implementation before actual unification. In order for the ROK to attain better perspectives, West Germany's case should first be considered.

Unification Education in West Germany

West Germany did not use the title 'unification education' but, rather, presented political science courses (Politische Bildung) comprehensively covering unification and education about civics and peace (Kim, 2003; Lee and Song, 2014). In 1952, the West

German government established the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, BPB), which aimed at urgently developing democratic people still fresh from the horrors of fascism and the national guilt of the Holocaust (Lee and Song, 2014; Park, 2012). Also, political science courses were needed to educate people to resist communism in an era of ideological conflicts not only in the two Germany but also in the world. To instill democratic values, the institution was nationally responsible for directing and implementing political science courses to all the West Germans (Park, 2012). The Federal Agency for Civic Education periodically changed its major themes of education following socio-political changes (Park, 2012). In its political science courses, West Germany's political education did not address any concrete preparations for future unification. However, "it educated students to clearly realize two separated Germanys and continually to develop overall competencies for unification" (Kim, 2003, p.36). There were four main goals for unification: first, to arouse awareness and willingness; second, to encourage responsibility for unification based on the principles of a democratic and peaceful self-determination of Germany; third, to foster an objective understanding about East Germany; and fourth, to build solidarity with East Germans by appreciating their common German' historical consciousness (Kim, 2003). After a new Eastern policy (Neue Ostpolitik) was put forth in 1969 by Willy Brandt, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974, contents of the civics textbook for high school students evolved in terms of the depth and number of topics covered. Kim (2003) concluded that Brandt's approach was quite positive to East Germany. And, since the two Germanys unified in 1991, the Federal Agency for Civic Education emphasized educating East Germans about democracy and the free market economy (Park, 2012).

On the other hand, Lee and Song (2014) concluded that civics education of West Germany students stems from a different background than Korea's UE. This is because West

Germany advocated democracy as opposed to the fascism Germans experienced in the 1930s and 1940s. In West Germany, studies about peace originated from various viewpoints and influenced ‘critical peace education’ emphasizing and overcoming fear and hostility in Germany (Lee and Song, 2014). Lee and Song (2014) argued that peace education played a significant role in changing people’s points of view regarding unification.

To identify what aspects of BPB worked, I will introduce a brief description of its history during 1981-89. In 1980, the BPB started publishing an annotated bibliography of civic education for instructors working with youth and adult education on a regular basis. The BPB’s primary duty was to provide education institutions with audiovisual materials. Thus, they obtained non-commercial rights to TV and film productions that targeted civic education and distributed them nationally. Since the mid 1980s, the BPB began to publish teaching and learning materials for instructors in non-formal education. The first set of materials dealt with equality and equity, ecology in adult education, and human rights. They also produced *Neue Medien und familiärer Alltag* (new media in daily family life) which consisted of teaching and learning materials for teachers and parents. As the cultural inclusion issue was demanding in civic education, the BPB and the State Agency for Civic Education held the first *Politik im freien Theater* (Politics in Independent Drama) festival in 1988. Since 1988, the festival has been held every 3 years in Germany.

Interestingly, Park (2012) emphasized that the execution of the budget of the BPB was independent of the federal government although it belonged to the federal government organizationally. Independence of budget control is important because the institution could perform its job neutrally shielding it from the government’s biased ideology or any attempt at subjugation. The institution had institutional supports freeing it from partisan ideology (Park, 2012). The failure of a similar firewall in South Korea contributes to the failure of the ROK’s

performance of unification education because the direction of the Institution for Unification Education (IUE) is strongly connected to the government's political ideology.

Two Germanys' unification cannot be attributable to BPB's works such as political science courses. However, after sudden unification, BPB's works would have contributed to establishing a new united Germany with democratic values.

Other critiques of unification education

Teachers avoid teaching UE because it not only sometimes is strongly ideological and anti-communistic but is politically controversial (Kim, 2014; Park, et al 2009). Moreover, teachers are not interested in teaching UE unless the principal, home teachers or their fellow teachers responsible for teaching ethics are enthusiastic to teach UE (Kang, 2014).

Perceptions of teachers about UE are important in school settings. If they are indifferent to UE, UE in school becomes a superficial experience for students. Thus, Shin (2015) suggested that training teachers and principals is a priority to change their beliefs. According to the 2014 national survey, 69.3% of teachers have never received training in UE. Providing class materials produced by IUE is not sufficient for school UE. Professional development for teachers is also an essential part of UE.

Also, it is vital to discuss with students in class the value of internalizing the necessity of unification (Kim, 2014). However, discussing North Korea and unification involve controversial issues, potentially infringing on the Republic of Korea's National Security Law. Lee (2014) presented that UE methodology is confined by traditional pedagogy discouraging discussion among students. She argued that this pedagogy deprives youth of an opportunity to digest and debate a complicated issue such as unification (KEDI, 2014). At this point, UE needs the guidance of a comprehensive principle such as the consensus Beutelsbacher (Beutelsbacher Konsens) in West Germany which is comprised of 3

principles: first, forbidding implanting a certain ideology; second, transparency of argument; third, possession of your own ideas and a way of thinking (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2005).

Furthermore, Choi, a chair of Okedongmu Children in the ROK, pointed out that some schools still emphasize national security within UE allowing children to shoot a fake-gun in a tank. She said it is contradictory to present North Koreans as our political friends. In other words, in practice, UE implements an unbalanced viewpoint toward North Korea. Educators responsible for UE need to consider how the upcoming generation's perception toward North Korea can help prepare for the integration of the two Koreas (Hong, 2015).

On a macro level, the Republic of Korea's formal education system focuses mainly on the college entrance exam in the upper grades. High school students fail to learn about UE because they must master the major subjects covered on the entrance exam. There is clearly no room for UE in high schools (Jung, 2015; Na, 2015; Oh, 2012; Sim, 2005). Thus, high school students do not become interested in unification. In this highly competitive educational environment, accomplishing the goal of incorporating UE in schools demands new strategies. Cho (2015) recommended that UE's long term goal and policies toward North Korea need to be clarified.

Summary

In sum, UE is not an established curriculum but includes the contents of UE in formal education in schools. Although the government views UE as an important educational issue in the Republic of Korea, its implementation in schools has encountered various hurdles. Therefore, UE has had a weak impact on changing youths' perceptions towards North Korea and unification. This point invites me to explore what other sources affect youths outside the classroom and what kind of messages they receive.

Framework

Here is a conceptual framework that shows what information sources could potentially influence youths' perceptions about unification. As a matter of fact, perception formation reflects the complexity and intersectionality of various factors. An assumption of this research is that informational milieu surrounding youths can affect their perceptions of North Korea and unification.

According to a literature review, media such as the Internet news and social media are the main routes by which youths receive information about North Korea and unification. The literature also mentions that parents' views and supervision also similarly influence youth. This framework contains not only the nuclear family but also the extended family whose dialogue can affect youths.

Manzoni and Ricijas (2015) quoted Dishon and Dodge (2005) that peer influence during adolescence results from interactions among peers whom youths identify with. In other words, the peer group is important for youths' developmental stages. Thus, peers can represent one source influencing the perceptions by youth.

Teachers' perspectives directly or indirectly affect students while in class or during social interactions. Even though high school curricula rarely contains the issue of unification or North Korea, some teachers interested in those issues can informally discuss them in class. For example, when special occasions happen between the two Koreas or when the North Korea government tests nuclear weapons, teachers may tell students about relevant news coverage from the teachers' point of view.

Regardless of any particular religion, religious institutions are seen as actors of the local community. Geographically, churches are ubiquitous in the metropolitan cities of the ROK. Religion practitioners are exposed to messages from religious authorities. Thus, religious institutions are one of the influential factors in determining attitudes or values.

Finally, there are other unknown factors in perception formation which I have designated ‘others’ in the conceptual framework. In this research, I have arbitrarily assigned feelings about North Korean defectors living in the ROK as ‘others’.

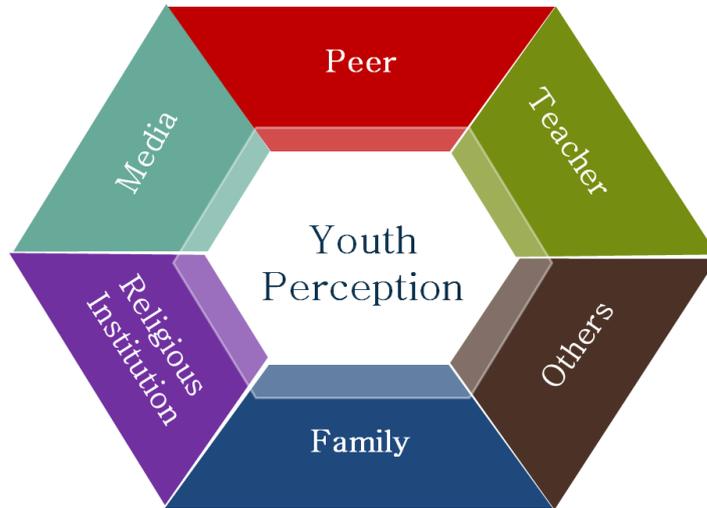


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Methodology

To understand what kind of messages South Korean youths receive and how much this affects their perceptions about unification, this research approach combines a survey with interviews.

Background of participants

A survey with a questionnaire was conducted in a total of nine classes in three public high schools in three cities: Seoul, Incheon and Goyang. Seoul, the capital of the ROK, is a metropolitan city. Incheon and Goyang are located adjacent to Seoul in what is characterized as an urban (suburban) area. Within the ROK, the quality of education in metropolitan cities varies depending on specific areas in the cities. In other words, the character of an entire city

or its districts cannot represent a specific school's status. Nevertheless, compared to rural areas, urban areas have richer educational resources in terms of number of opportunities and quality. A ROK high school education is received at 6 types of high schools such as standard high schools, vocational high schools, special schools, et al. More than 66% of the schools are standard high schools offering a pre-college curriculum. This research focused on three such high schools in the ROK.

It was difficult clarifying the socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds of these three high schools. Since the research questions are not related to students' social background, the survey did not ask their parents' occupations or family income. Moreover, current policy does not allow schools to collect data about students' economic backgrounds nor their parents' jobs. Thus, teachers who conducted the survey were unable to clearly inform me of students' general socioeconomic status.

However, there is a special index that reflects the ROK education system. A hot issue concerning a majority of high schools is how many graduates enter a top university like Seoul National University (SNU). Thus, a top university annually reports an index of freshmen students' high school information to the public. The index plays an important role in determining a high school's reputation. According to the 2016 index, the high school that conducted the research survey in Seoul had no student who registered at SNU. A girls' high school in Incheon had two students admitted to SNU. Lastly, no students in the high school in Goyang were granted admission to SNU.

Sampling strategies

Teacher contact

Personal social networking enabled me to connect with three teachers working in high schools. Through e-mail and phone calls, I explained the goal, rationale and methods of my research. Teachers agreed to the methodology of the survey such as the number of classrooms at one school and the way of preparing the questionnaire.

Class size and grade

Class size averaged between 30 and 35 students at the three schools. Participants covered all three grades to avoid certain characteristics of a students’ grade. This is because each grade features a high school curriculum and a unique level of stress. Senior level students feel stressed because of the college entrance examination; on the other hand, freshmen do not feel such intense pressure. For example, seniors prefer not responding to surveys unrelated to academics. Thus, a mixed combination of all three grades represents high school students overall. The table below indicates participants’ information.

Table 1. Information of Survey Participants

City	Classes	Grade	Gender	Number of students
Incheon	3	1	Girls	94
Seoul	3	2	Boys & girls	103
Goyang	3	3	Boys & girls	76

Survey implementation

Two school surveys were conducted in July after final examinations and right before summer vacation. One school performed its survey during the last week of August following summer vacation.

Three teachers received the questionnaire by e-mail and printed it. Before distributing the questionnaire to their classes, teachers were required to briefly demonstrate to

their students the rationale behind the survey. Two teachers additionally required students to respond to one open question in detail. The entire procedure took 15-20 minutes. After collecting the questionnaire, teachers sent them to me through international express mail service.

Interviewee contact and procedure

To supplement the survey results, a high school student and a North Korean defector who works as a UE lecturer were interviewed through an on-line communication tool and an internet phone call. One of the teachers also arranged for one student to be interviewed. I was able to gain access to the North Korean defector through a personal contact who worked for North Korean youth defectors. Each of these interviews took approximately 40 minutes. The Internet phone call could not be recorded so that I took notes. Interviewing through the on-line communication tool made it possible to record and take notes.

Data collection

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was intended to determine certain circumstances such as family, peers, religious institutions and social network system which can impact youths' attitudes towards unification (See appendix 1). The questionnaire consisted of 15 closed questions and 1 open question. Closed questions asked respondents to check the Likert Scale which offered 6 options ranging very negative, negative, little negative, little positive, positive to very positive. Intentionally, I did not provide an option for a neutral position on the scale. This is because some students might cynically check 'neutral' just to finish the survey quickly.

A total of 273 questionnaires were collected, comprising 200 females and 72 males and 1 middle-gender. All questionnaires were filled out. Some questions required answering with two options but some students answered choosing only one. Also, question number 3

that required ranking from given options resulted in various ranking orders. A girls' high school's students responded well to their one open question.

Interview

Each interview took approximately 40 minutes through the Internet phone call and on-line communication tool. The interviewed student were asked the following questions:

- What is the major information source about North Korea and unification?
- What do you think about how media such as TV programs, movies, and Internet news depict North Korea and unification directly and indirectly?
- How do media play a role in forming perceptions about North Korea and unification?
- What kind of messages about North Korea or unification do you receive around you?
- If you did not have the opportunity to learn about unification education (UE) in high school, do you think UE needs to be presented at school or not?
- What do you think about the fact that youths' agreement with unification continues to decrease? What is the reason for this?
- Have you heard or read stories from North Korean defectors living in the ROK? If so, what stories have you heard? What do you think/feel about them?
- Do you think perceptions towards North Korea and perceptions towards unification have a linear relationship? Can you tell me your opinion about this relationship?
- Tell me your personal opinion on North Korea and unification.

I asked the unification education lecturer these questions:

- What do you think about the fact that youths' agreement about unification continues to decline? What is behind this?
- How do you feel that the South Korea media depict North Korea? How much does the media impact youths' perceptions toward North Korea and unification?

- As a result of educating students about UE, can you explain differences among students' reactions towards North Korea and unification to be the result of different locations of schools and the subsequent different socio-economic status?
- What do you teach when lecturing about UE?
- Do you think perceptions towards North Korea and perceptions towards unification have a linear relationship?
- What do you think about North Koreans are considered the first wave of unification in South Korea?

Data analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the questionnaire. I ran descriptive analysis, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Particularly, multiple regression analysis requires satisfying several assumptions about data which the data reasonably satisfied. I used Excel to analyze one question independently from other questions. To accurately interpret the data, I used a statistic consulting service provided by the Department of Research, Educational Measurement and Psychometrics (REMP) at the College of Education at UMass Amherst. For the one open question, I categorized the answers according to emerging themes.

Limitations

This research has limited external validity for generalization due to the small sampling size. In addition, the researcher was physically absent during the school survey. Thus, appropriate guidance before the survey could have been limited.

The questionnaire's questions might have caused confusion for students since some questions inquire about feelings towards unification and North Korea at the same time. Although both information on North Korea and unification usually occur together in UE, North Korea and unification are technically different topics. Therefore, the students' answers

to the questionnaire could reflect ideas mixing perceptions about North Korea and unification.

Findings

In this chapter, I present results of the questionnaires. I will first look at frequencies via descriptive analysis according to each question.

Closed questions

In the question asking when students received most their unification education in school, respondents answered that unification education decreases as their grade increases from elementary school to high school.

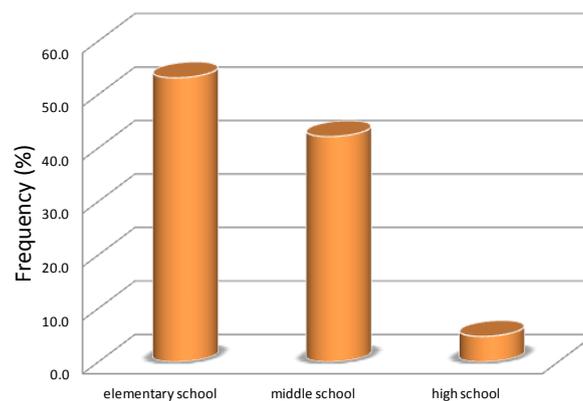


Figure 3. Unification Education in Schooling

The formal high school curriculum does not sufficiently cover unification education according to the literature review cited earlier. Also, beyond the official curriculum, high school has a class called ‘a creative activity class or a discretionary class’ in which teachers alone or both teachers and students can decide the class theme and activities. Some teachers teach the unification issue through this discretionary class. Thus, a question was asked whether respondents had ever experienced any activity in high school to acquire knowledge

about North Korea or a possible unification of the two Koreas. The answers are shown in the following table:

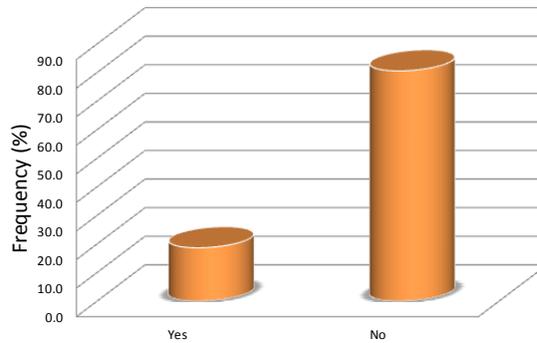


Figure 4. Experience of Unification Education in Discretionary Class

Only 18.7% of students responded that they had experienced learning about unification or North Korea in the discretionary class activity at high school. As a result, respondents have few educational opportunities to learn about North Korea and unification in either formal or informal ways in their current schooling.

To a question inquiring where they receive information about North Korea and unification, respondents were required to rank 6 options such as family, teachers, peers, media, religious institutions and others. The media ranked first; teachers, second.

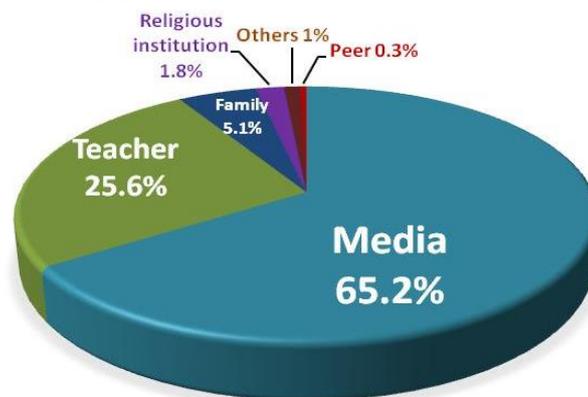


Figure 5. The First Information Source

When I sorted out the first and second rankings, the top three of the first and second rankings are listed at table 2:

Table 2. First and Second Information Sources

Media →Teachers	117
Teachers →Media	55
Media →Family	33

Table 2 shows that teachers and the media are key sources about information on North Korea and unification. Table 3 lists the top three orders of four rankings:

Table 3. First to Fourth Information Sources

Media →Teachers→ Peers →Family	43
Media →Teachers →Family →Peers	42
Teachers →Media →Peers → Family	20

Those rankings are analyzed among responses that checked more than four rankings. As the literature indicated, media far outweighs other sources. Teachers placed second. Peers and family share almost similar importance. Interestingly, although most respondents reported rarely learning about unification and North Korea in the formal curriculum in high school, they cited teachers as their second most important source of information. Also, two respondents responded that they receive information ‘in the street’ among responses being checked as ‘other’ sources. It can be concluded that students have seen leaflets or flyers that are randomly distributed to people for certain purposes about North Korea from either a negative or positive bias.

In a question of what channel is used to gain information about North Korea and unification, respondents were asked to select two answers. Thus, the number of answers is twice the number of respondents.

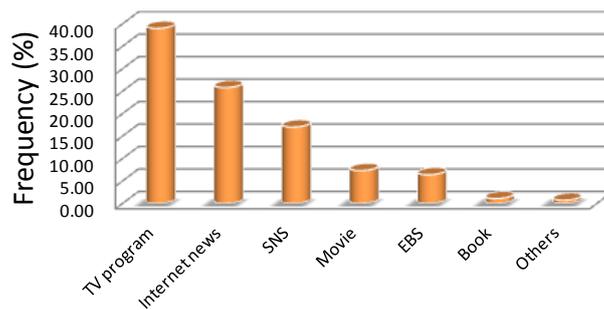


Figure 6. Message Channels

Students responded that TV programs and the Internet news are major sources of information about North Korea and unification. Social Network Service (SNS) achieved third ranking. In a question about what SNS is used, most students responded ‘Facebook’. Yet, Facebook generally shows Internet news or video clips connecting to other websites so that SNS often actually represents repackaged Internet news. Next, movies about North Korea represent another source. Although movies rank fourth, their degree of influence is strong. For example, answers to the one open question of the questionnaire as well as interviewees mentioned that youths’ perceptions of North Korea were impacted by a movie they had seen. A North Korean defector interviewee working as a lecturer of unification education mentioned at the interview that media strongly impacts youth’s perceptions of North Korea. She emphasized that students see North Korea through the lens of a movie camera. While lecturing about North Korea and unification, some students asked whether a particular movie story set in North Korea was, in fact, real. She mentioned that non-fiction movie storylines affect feelings about North Korea.

“I feel negative about North Korea since I recently watched ‘Northern Limit Line’. I didn’t feel positive before. But as I am getting to know what North Korea did to us, I have become to think about them even more negatively...”

A response to an open question

Lastly, the Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) creates a wide range of educational resources for students. Teachers and students can easily access this resource through the EBS website and publications. Here, students can view video clips of documentaries and books about North Korea and unification produced by the EBS.

Let’s look at what kind of message they receive from the media. ‘Little negative’ and ‘little positive’ messages make up 31.5 percent equally in figure 7. The accumulated percentage of the three negatives is 49.1%; for the three positives, 50.9%. Thus, messages received from media are viewed almost equally positives and negative by students.

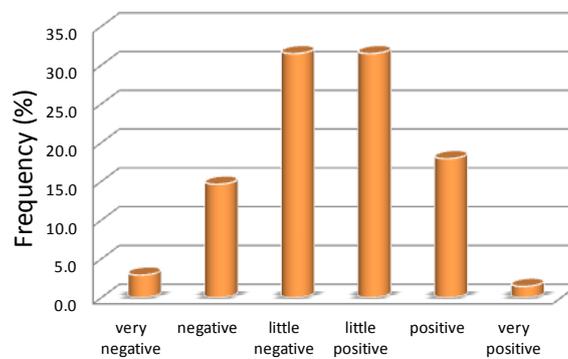


Figure 7. Message from Media

“I feel negative about North Korea. This is because I am more interested in negative stories about them from the news in than positive aspects I learned at school...”

“I have been strongly feeling that the Internet news and TV news always represent North Korea negatively...”

“I feel a bit comfortable with unification because recent news talks about it a lot, but...”

“I think unification is necessary, and the media says we should be unified, however...”

Responses to an open question

Figure 8 shows what kind of messages students receive from family (including parents, siblings and relatives), peers, teachers and religious institutions about North Korea and unification.

40.7% of students responded that they receive ‘little positive’ messages from teachers. Totaling the ‘little positive’ to ‘very positive’ responses, 77.7% of students feel that teachers give positive messages about North Korea and unification. High school curriculum rarely teaches students unification education. Nevertheless, most students feel that teachers give positive messages, which is an intriguing observation. This survey cannot distinguish whether “teachers” represent only their high school teachers or all the teachers whom students previously encountered. Even so, students’ accumulated impression of teachers’ words are primarily positive.

In contrast, negative messages outweigh the positives among peers. Moreover, nobody responded that peers give very positive messages. 68.1% of students feel that they receive ‘little negative’, ‘negative’ and ‘very negative’ messages from their peers.

“I think we need unification, and media says unification is necessary. However, South Korea is not prepared for unification yet. So, my peers feel unification negatively.”

A response to an open question

From family, ‘little negative’ and ‘little positive’ are dominant. Nevertheless, all the positive messages total 51.3% so that the positives slightly outweigh the negatives. A question about messages from religious institutions asked students to answer only if they practice religion. 31.5% of all respondents responded to this question. Most students who practice religion feel they receive positive messages from these institutions.

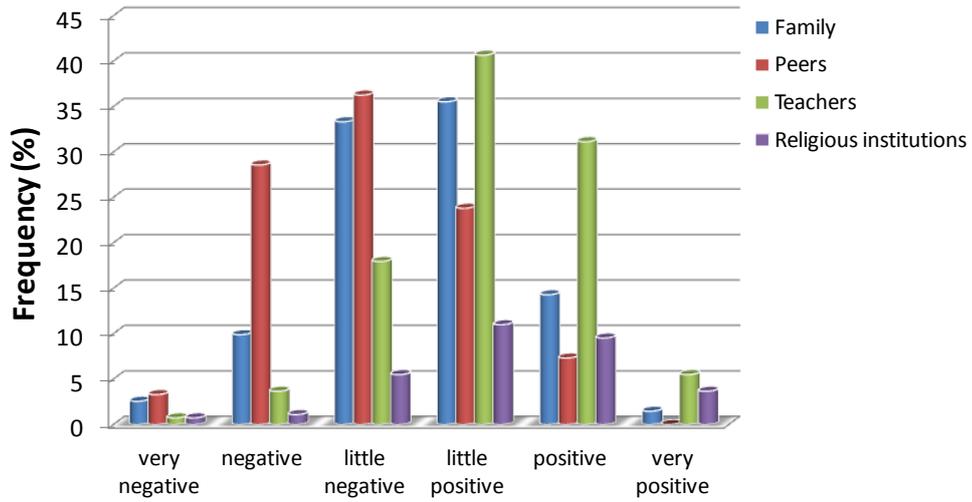


Figure 8. Message from Four Sources

One question asked the students their feelings about the overall tone of information on North Korea and unification.

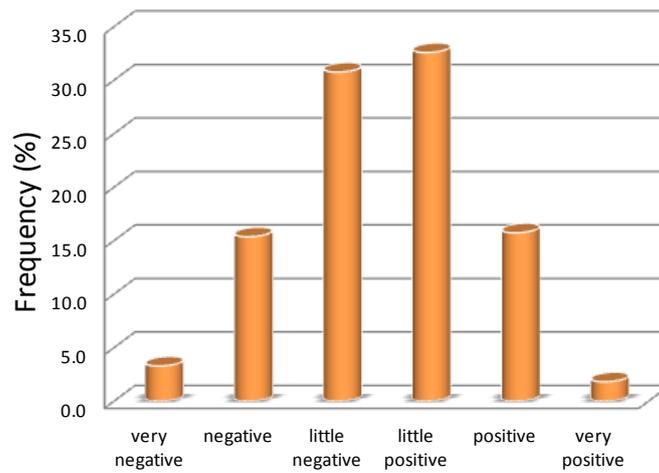


Figure 9. Overall Tone of Information

‘Little positive’ is the most frequent answer with 32.6% responding. Cumulatively, the three gradations of positives totaled 50.2%; the negatives, 49.5%. The shape of this graph is similar to the two graphs about messages from the media and from family.

One question asked how students feel about North Korean defectors living in South Korea.

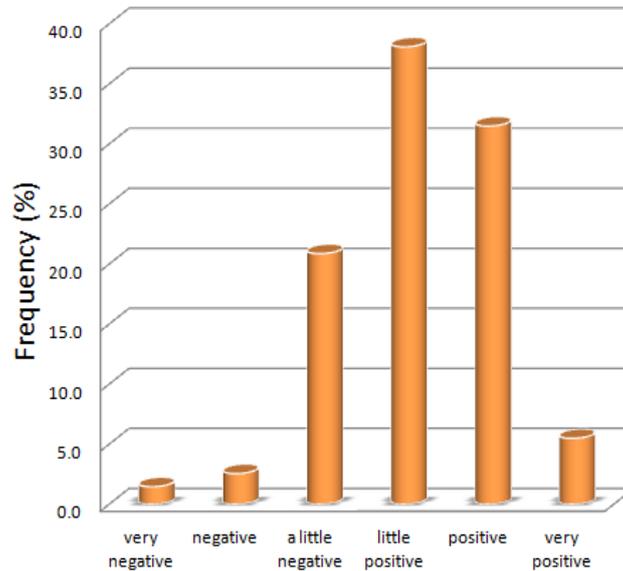


Figure 10. Feelings about North Korean Defectors Living in the ROK

As you see in figure 10, 75.1% of the three ‘positives’ are dominant responses. A majority of respondents have positive feelings about North Korean defectors. Just 24.9% of students responded with the three ‘negatives’.

“...I had a friend fled from North Korea at middle school. The friend was not open where she/he is from. Maybe that is why she/he made friends easily. I really got along with her/him, though I was a little surprised her/his birth area later.”

“...I had a North Korean defector friend at middle school. I used to seeing her/him with prejudiced eyes. However, while having conversation with her/him and exercising together, I thought that she/he is just same as others...”

Responses to an open question

Lastly, a question asked students their personal feelings about North Korea and unification: 27.8% of ‘little negative’ was the most frequent answer; ‘little positive’, 23.4%.

A total of 56.0% of students responded to the three negative options so that more than half the students have negative feelings.

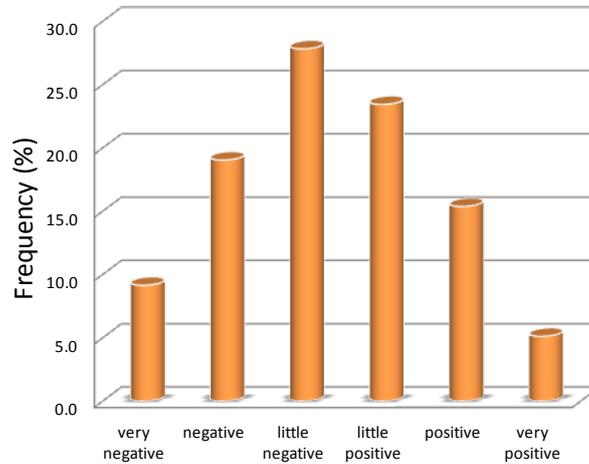


Figure 11. Personal Feelings on Unification and North Korea

Open question

The one open question asked students to feel free to describe their personal opinions about North Korea or unification. Answers reveal multiple themes about either North Korea or unification.

Students have two very different perceptions towards North Korea. Their perceptions toward the government are strongly negative; to the contrary, they have great sympathy toward people living in North Korea due to the poverty, violations of human rights, brainwashing and living under the North Korean brutal dictatorship.

There are a variety of viewpoints towards unification. First, the timing of unification matters. Before simply determining that unification is good or bad, when unification would occur is quite relevant for students.

“It would be good to reunify gradually. We should reunify someday, but not right now.”

Many students responded that it is inappropriate for unification to take place either in the present or in the future since it would result in tremendous chaos. They mostly agree that unification is essential in the long run; however, sufficient preparations must first be made. They feel negative about unification unless attempts at integration of the two Koreas precede unification.

“Unification should come after financial, cultural and economic preparations.”

“At this moment, both Koreas are incapable of being reunified peacefully.”

“I wish unification could be achieved when South Korea’s economy becomes stable.”

“Unification would cause economical difficulties, but, it definitely should happen for a better future, later on.”

“The Republic of Korea is not prepared yet for unification so that my peers are negative about unification”

Interestingly, some students show dual perspectives on unification. Some agree with the rationale for unification; on the other hand, they do not want to take on the burdens incurred by the unification process.

“I wish unification could take place in 50 years when I am not obligated to pay taxes...unification is still a long way off.”

“I am anxious about what would happen. I do not wish unification is achieved while I am alive.”

“Unification of the Korean Peninsula must happen, however, I hope it does not happen in my generation. If it happened my generation, I could not avoid financial loss.”

Those who agree with unification mentioned that unification should take place soon.

“We should make unification happen as soon as possible before developing even a larger gap between the two Koreas.”

“Unification must happen someday. The sooner the better...”

Second, the manner of unification matters. Students strongly indicated that unification should be achieved peacefully.

“Though I have a hostile feeling about North Korea, I think unification of the two Koreas is necessary. Its method must be peaceful no matter what.”

“Unification needs a new way of being able to fit the two Koreas not through absorbing unification or a war.”

“Unification should be fulfilled not by force but by conversation.”

Third, some students stated indifference towards unification.

“It does not matter whether North and South Korea reunified or not. I have not a big concern that South Korea is a nation in truce since I didn’t experience a war...”

“I am not interested in unification.”

“Honestly, unification would make us live harder than before. I like status quo though it may be selfish.”

Fourth, several male students wished unification would occur before their military service. Every man born in the Republic of Korea is obligated to enlist in the military for 18 months once they turn 18 years old, one of the national obligations stated in the Constitution. Most men want to avoid this service due its negative impact on a career, the intensity of training and the inevitable verbal and physical violence.

How are sources correlated?

In order to know how the information sources around youth are related to each other, see the table below:

Table 4. Correlation of Information Sources and Personal Feelings about North Korea and Unification

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Media	1						
2 Family	.395**	1					
3 Peers	.449**	.488**	1				
4 Teachers	.445**	.413**	.366**	1			
5 Religious institutions	.372**	.421**	.207	.600**	1		
6 Overall tone	.558**	.438**	.481**	.475**	.518**	1	
7 Personal feelings	.406**	.436**	.443**	.393**	.328**	.548**	1

** $p < 0.01$

This table shows the correlations between each information source, overall tone of information and personal feelings about North Korea and unification. Except for the lack of a correlation between peers and religious institutions, all factors are correlated in positive relationships. We should be cautious about the interpretation of correlations. This is because correlation does not imply a causal relationship between the factors: correlation is not causality.

To determine the strength of a relationship, I followed the guidelines of Cohen (1988). Any number is larger than 0.5 indicates a strong relationship. Thus, the largest correlation is between teachers and religious institutions. Also, the overall tone of information and the media show large correlation. Considering that the media ranks as the top among information sources, the strong correlation with the overall tone of information is seen as a natural consequence. In other words, this result is taken for granted because persons are affected more or less by communication with people and the news on a daily basis.

Also, personal feelings about North Korea and unification and the overall tone of information indicate a high correlation as well. Interestingly, the media and teachers, the first and the second sources of information, resulted in just a medium degree of correlation with personal feelings, a strong degree.

Those who responded to a question about religious institutions represent only 30 percent of all respondents. Thus, any correlation between teachers and religious institutions does not represent all the students in this research. Nevertheless, it raises the question why messages from religious institutions have a strong relationship with the messages of teachers. Teachers and religious institutions are considered as authoritative groups from students' perspectives in the Confucius-based culture of the ROK. Would students who practice religion have a certain predisposition to accepting authoritative groups' messages? Korea's embedded culture of Confucianism may still urge youths to respect authoritative adults. Answering this question would entail further research. Because the questionnaire did not ask the specific religions of students, I was unable to identify which religion they practiced.

To more easily identify the correlations between each information source and personal feelings about North Korea and unification, a part of table 4 presents a graph, Figure 12:

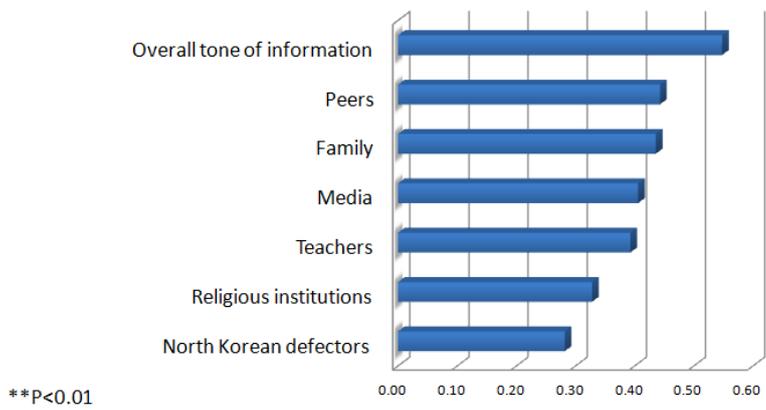


Figure 12. Correlation between Information Sources and the Personal Feelings

The largest correlation with personal feelings is with the overall tone of information. Peers ranked second.

What source would be influential for youth's perception toward unification?

To determine which source has the largest impact on personal feelings toward unification and North Korea, I used multiple regressions analysis. Since the number of answers about religious institutions is substantially less than the answers about other information sources, I made a model using only four information sources. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5. Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Media	.194	.076	.159	2.559	.011
Family	.259	.084	.192	3.080	.002
Peers	.300	.086	.221	3.510	.001
Teachers	.230	.084	.164	2.725	.007

a. Dependent Variable: What is your personal feeling about North Korea and unification?

Simultaneously, Table 5 is presented as a graph below, calculated from multiple regression equation:

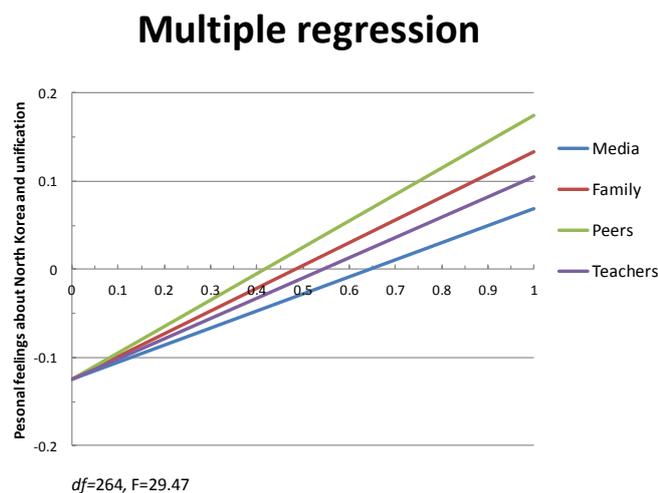


Figure 13. Multiple regression between Four Information Sources and Personal Feelings

The regression model indicated that all four factors are significant in forming personal feelings. Any single source does not disproportionately contribute to personal feelings because each B value of unstandardized coefficients has a very narrow range. In a different way but using the same data analysis, Figure 13 graph's numbers on the X-axis and Y-axis show a very narrow interval, too, demonstrating all four sources reside in an equal range.

Given that the media is the main information source for youth about unification and North Korea, it is noteworthy that the media is not a core source affecting youths' feelings about unification.

Conclusion

Students feel that their peers give negative messages whereas teachers and religious institutions give positive ones. Both media and family provide students with almost equally positive and negative messages. Also, students feel that the overall tone of messages they receive is almost equally positive and negative.

Students receive information about North Korea and unification mostly from the media. Although they gain information primarily from TV programs and the Internet news, movies can play an important role in their concept of North Korea.

Teachers delivering positive messages as a second-ranked information source have a medium degree of correlation with students' personal feelings toward unification and North Korea. Why did teachers' messages not influence students' feelings? I suppose that teachers give information on unification, through not formal education but informal ways. This reflects the lack of unification education in the formal curriculum in high school as confirmed by the literature review. UE must be included in the formal curriculum, rather than being left to haphazard, informal remarks by teachers, in order to impact students' perceptions.

Noticeably, among correlations between individual information sources and personal feelings about North Korea and unification, the overall tone of information shows the strongest relationship with personal feelings rather than any direct information source. Additionally, all other factors such as family, teachers, peers and the media equivalently affect students' feelings about North Korea and unification. The media that students heavily rely on for obtaining information is not an exclusive factor. Therefore, the four information sources such as family, teachers, peers and the media are reasonably significant to form the personal feelings about unification, rather than any one source being primarily responsible.

Recommendations

This research provides evidence to support unification education at the high school level. To inform high school students about the issue of unification and North Korea, the high school curriculum needs to contain unification education. If UE is not dealt with in the formal curriculum despite persuasive reasons for its inclusion, the South Korean younger generations will be unprepared to help bring about a unified Korea. Being unprepared for this potential, seismic national change will delay and even prevent the benefits of unification. Unification must be included in the formal curriculum, rather than being left to haphazard informal remarks by teachers, in order to impact students' perceptions.

Also, I would recommend that the Institute of Unification for Education (IUE) produce and distribute good quality movies and video clips for both youths and adults. The current IUE website provides a variety of video clips for educational purposes. However, if the contents of the clips oversimplify the complicated aspects of unification, or if the quality of the video clips is low, they are useless in appealing to and educating today's media-savvy

students. A high quality movie endorsing future unification or portraying North Korea sympathetically could play a decisive role in changing the current negative dialogue about unification.

A change in the narrative about unification entails civic UE. Research findings show that high school students' feelings about North Korea and unification are easily impacted by the informational milieu and the people-their peers and authority figures-surrounding them. Parents' viewpoints remain important for youths. Thus, the old generation needs to become familiar unification education. As a matter of fact, several well-known NGOs provide unification education for the civil society; however, the older generation of adults who lived through the Korean War still harbors deep suspicions of North Korea and categorizes institutions and people as friendly or hostile to the ideals of democracy and freedom. They have a tendency to judge NGOs advocating UE as merely North Korea-friendly institutions. They call these institutions 'commie' before taking the time to understand their motivations and operational goals. UE can change these outdated attitudes allowing older adults in partnership with NGO's and the government to strategize building a secure and thriving future for a united Korean Peninsula.

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Appendix 1.

Questionnaire

This survey aims at researching high school students' formation of perceptions about North Korea and unification of the two Koreas. It consists of total 15 questions. Your response will be used for research purposes only, maintaining confidentiality. Also, there is no right answer so that you can answer frankly. Thank you for your time.

Researcher: SurlHeeKim

1. What is your gender? Check with circle.
1) male 2) female
2. If you have had any opportunities to learn about N.Korea and unification, when was the most?
1) elementary school 2) middle school 3) high school
3. Where do you receive information on N.Korea and unification? Please write down ranking from the box.
(→ → → → →)

A.media(TV programs/internet news) B.family(parents, siblings, relatives) C.peer group
D.teachers(home teachers/subject teachers) E.religious institutions (church,temple,etc)
F.etc _____(please write down if there is other resource)

4. When you have information on North Korea and unification from media, what kind of channel do you use? Choose **two** only please.
1)TV programs(news, entertainment, etc) 2)programs of Education Broadcasting System
3)Internet news 4)SNS 5)relevant movies 6)relevant books 7)etc
_____ (Please write down if there is another resource.)
5. What do you use when you use social network system? Choose two only please.
1) Facebook 2)Instagram 3)Twitter 4)Kakao Talk/story 5)Line 6)Metoday
7)etc_____

6. What kind of messages do you receive from media?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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7. What kind of messages does your family (parents, siblings and relatives) give you about N.Korea and unification?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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8. How do you think how your peer group perceives North Korea and unification?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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9. What have you learned about North Korea and unification from your teachers at school?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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10. (If you practice religion) What kind of messages do your religious institutions give you about North Korea and unification?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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11. How do you feel about the overall tone of information around you about North Korea and unification?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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12. What is your personal feeling about North Korea and unification?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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13. Have you ever experienced any activity about building knowledge about North Korea or the future unification of the two Koreas at the creative activity class at your high school?

1) Yes 2) No

14. How do you feel about North Korean youth/adult defectors living in South Korea?

Very positive 100-90	Positive 90-80	Little positive 80-70	Little negative 70-50	Negative 50-30	Very negative 30-0
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15. Have you ever heard about North Korean youth/adult defectors' stories?

1) Yes 2) No

16. Please write down your opinion about North Korea and unification if you want to add your thought.

-Thank you.-

Appendix 2.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
What message do you receive from media	273	1.00	6.00	959.00	3.5128	1.08161
What message do you receive from peer	271	1.00	5.00	822.00	3.0332	.97885
What message do you receive from religious institutions	86	1.00	6.00	363.00	4.2209	1.12094
What message do you receive from family	266	1.00	6.00	944.50	3.5508	.99729
What message do you receive from teachers	272	1.00	6.00	1128.00	4.1471	.95299
How do you feel overall tone of information of unification	273	1.00	6.00	949.50	3.4780	1.08781
What is your personal feeling	273	1.00	6.00	907.00	3.3223	1.33068
Have you experienced UE activity at high school	271	1.00	2.00	491.00	1.8118	.39159
How do you feel about N.Korean defectors in S.Korea	273	1.00	6.00	1125.00	4.1209	.98334
Have you ever heard about N.Korean defectors' story	271	1.00	2.00	334.00	1.2325	.42319
Valid N (listwise)	84					