Sustainable future and the general education

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Abstract

Education is an activity of helping people to live independently. The essential aspect of education lies in the fact that the man of today teaches the man of tomorrow. Although tomorrow will be made by the choices what we make today, the responsibility for tomorrow is not on our shoulders but on the shoulders of next generation. The fundamental dilemma of education reveals itself in the reality of that we who cannot take over the responsibility for the future have to educate the next generation who cannot avoid that responsibility for their own times, especially in the period of rapid changes occurring nowadays. We have to educate the next generation to be able to get over the crisis and threats of the future bravely facing to the changes and overcoming the challenges. The crisis are very: the crisis of peace and democracy and the one of rapid climate change; on the one hand, the other hand the threats comes from the unstable job markets. Education has to provide endless abilities with which the next generation will surmount the crisis and adjust themselves with the changes. The abilities are of critical thinking, humility, moral judgment, caring, inclusion, communication, and of self-learning that the next generation has to cultivate throughout their life. Only then will future sustainability be secured. The cultivation of these qualities is also the goal of both human formation education and civic education. General education at universities also aims the cultivation of these qualities. The times, therefore, demand that universities provide more elaborated general education. Global crises and changes affect dramatically East Asia. East Asia has unfortunate histories, sometimes summoned by politics. The ill-fated histories amplify these crises and cause regional tensions. In order to build a healthy foundation for life in East Asia, it is a urgent necessity to carry out collaborative research among general educators and the development of joint educational programs for the students in the region.

Key Words: Sustainability, peace, democracy, climate, civic education, general education
1. Introduction

1.1. What is a Sustainable Future?

Since the term sustainability was first used for economic growth and development, it has been used in various fields. Anxiety would lie at the base of repeated discussions on sustainability. This anxiety stems from the fact that the crises and changes we experience today are ontological and complex. At the same time, the term implies a will to make it sustainable by overcoming the anxiety. The will is meaningful only when it is put into action. Therefore, the term sustainability is also a word that calls for action.

What kind of future does the sustainable future refer to? As mentioned above, The term “sustainable future” also implies anxiety and will. But the point is stamped on the will to make the future sustainable. So what causes anxiety? Peace, democracy, the climate crisis, and changes in the world of work. In the end, the future will be sustainable only if we overcome the crises and actively adapt to change.

1.2. The Educational Dilemma

Education is an activity of helping people to live independently. The essential aspect of education lies in the fact that the man of today teaches the man of tomorrow. Although tomorrow will be made by the choices what we make today, the responsibility for tomorrow is not on our shoulders but on the shoulder of next generation. The fundamental dilemma of education reveals itself in the reality of that we, who cannot take over the responsibility for the future have to educate the next generation who cannot avoid that responsibility for their own tomorrows, especially in the period of rapid changes occurring nowadays. We have to educate the next generation to be able to get over the crises and threats of the future bravely facing to the changes and overcoming the challenges.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the nature of crises and changes and discuss what topics education should include for a sustainable future.

2. Humanity in Crisis

2.1. Peace Under Threat

Humanity has longed for peace throughout history, experiencing both large and small wars, but wars have continued unabated to the present day. Since World War II, there have been numerous wars and civil wars involving two or more countries, and almost all of them have been caused by the fragility of the world order established by the great powers after World War II.

Russia’s recent invasion of Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas are different from previous wars. Russia's invasion of Ukraine was carried out in the name of protection of its citizens and its historical heritage. But it is just a ruthless exercise of power that ignores Ukraine’s sovereignty. In exchange for giving up the former Soviet Union's nuclear weapons on its territory, Ukraine’s security was guaranteed by the United States, Russia, and other powers\(^1\), but those promises proved to be as hollow as the Munich Agreement between A. Hitler and N. Chamberlain. Russia invaded, and NATO members only provided arms and financial support for Ukraine, but the war is carried out entirely by Ukrainians on Ukrainian territory.

The war on Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas's attacks, is a manifestation of the ongoing instability in the Middle East and has the potential to escalate into an international war at any time, involving Islamic states and warlords in the Arab world, directly or indirectly (The Donga Ilbo, 2023, November 17).\(^2\) In addition, the war

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\(^1\) In 1994, the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia signed the Budapest Memorandum with Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which prohibits the threat or use of force or economic coercion against these three countries.
has sparked a culture war in the United States and Europe by ethnic groups and groups supporting Israel and Hamas, respectively (Zeit online, 2023. Nov. 19).³

In both wars, as well as in all previous wars except the Korean War, the United Nations, which was established to prevent war, maintain peace, and carry out international cooperation in all fields of politics, economics, society, and culture (UN charter chapter 1), proved to be powerless. It is because the permanent members of the Security Council, who have veto power, were either directly or indirectly involved in the wars or had different strategic interests that prevented them from reaching consensus.

While the Russo-Ukrainian war and the Israel-Gaza war may come to an end in the near future, it is clear that it will not mean lasting peace. In addition, there is always the possibility of wars or civil wars breaking out in regions where nation-states have not been established after World War II and where the desire to control so-called ancestral lands is dominant, and disputes over resources could develop into war at any time. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was virtually abolished and recently, the conventional arms disarmament agreement between NATO and Russia was also annulled. Mutual distrust is pointed out as one of the causes of this regression. The security crisis caused by the breakdown of the disarmament agreements has led to an arms buildup in Europe (The Chosun Ilbo, 2023, November 8).

No one can be sure what the result will be of the combination of military buildup and mutual distrust. It is impossible to predict whether it will lead to war, but history has shown that there are various reasons for the outbreak of war. These facts demonstrate that peace on Earth is under constant threat.

In the two wars mentioned above, new aspects have emerged that cannot be dismissed lightly: The use of artificial intelligence in strategic planning, the use of high-tech weapons such as drones, and the involvement of transnationalized private companies.⁵ Elon Musk's decisions to shut down or open his company's “Starlink” service in Ukraine and Gaza had affected the war (The Chosun Ilbo, 2023, Oct. 30). There is no guarantee that this intervention will be a one-off.

War is not the only threat to peace. Structured violence and terrorism perpetrated by states and various social groups against specific peoples across time and space, as well as violence perpetrated by individuals for any reason, also threaten stability and peace more broadly. While wars are fought between states, often between regular armed forces, violence is more threatening because it is more impulsive and ubiquitous than war. In the end, peace is threatened everywhere and all the time.

2.2. The Crisis of Democracy

The arguments of those who point to the degeneration of democracy are well known. Politicians are hell-bent on winning elections, the legitimate means of gaining power; they prefer confrontation to compromise, and are not afraid to use populism and sensationalism. Their supporters are just as confrontational. On the other hand, with the decline of globalization, each country's nationalism is strengthening. Under these conditions, the gap between rich and poor, the digital divide, religion, immigration issues, and hatred and discrimination are becoming hotbed of political extremism. As a result, the fundamental principles of democracy - dialogue, compromise, tolerance,
and consideration - are missing, and executive, legislative, and judicial checks and balances and an order of mutual respect are breaking down. The fact that judicial decisions, in particular, are not the final authority and are subject to attack, speaks volumes about the severity of the conflict. In the case of South Korea, the judiciary has recently been summoned into the middle of politics and attacked under suspicion of having made political decisions.

In addition, social media has become a space where individuals can present political opinions, or groups can strengthen solidarity and gather opinions. But within it, opinions were fragmented, and individuals became trapped within themselves. The biggest side effect is that it is being abused as a space to generate and spread fake news. In particular, provocative fake news spreads to multiple people in an instant. The Korean proverb, which says that words without feet go fast, hits the heart of the situation. Fake news not only hinders the formation of legitimate public opinion, but also distorts public opinion. The only principle that goes through here is clicks. Also, the Internet is always exposed to cyberattacks. Polls could be skewed, and in the worst case, election results might be affected. Because of the risks, some countries maintained the analog methods for counting votes, or even reverted to them.6)

Recent developments and advances in artificial intelligence have proven to be useful in a variety of ways. It is increasingly used as a personalized assistant in education, as a tool to bridge the digital divide through words, as a productivity enhancer in industry, and as a communication facilitator. Perhaps the greatest contribution of AI is that it has enabled the scaled reproduction of human brain labor. There is also the potential for these useful tools to be abused to help create fake news (The Chosun Ilbo, 2023, Nov. 4.,7) as seen in the recent profanity-laced video of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (The Chosun Ilbo, 2023, Nov. 4.). Fake videos using deepfake technology are still flooding social media. Sometimes fake news is quickly recognized as fake, but sometimes it can be so sophisticated that it is not easy to recognize it as fake, and the problem is that even when it is recognized as fake, it is usually after considerable harm has been done.

Recently, at the first-ever AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in the UK, 28 countries signed a declaration on the safe use and development of artificial intelligence.8) I am skeptical that such efforts will prevent future abuses of AI. Ultimately, extreme confrontation between political and social groups threatens democracy, and digital devices and AI can be used to deepen the crisis of democracy at any time.

In the case of South Korea, politics and citizens have failed to shake off the sweet lure of populism. And as political confrontation becomes more extreme, attempts to demonize political opponents and seek counter-profits through it are rampant. And fake news is being produced and disseminated on social media every day. Due to these circumstances, social tensions has been rising.

2.3. Climate Crisis

Due to the global warming that increases the average temperature every year, alpine ice caps, northern ice caps9), and Antarctic ice are melting. In addition, abnormal weather has become a new normal. Fossil fuels have been blamed for global warming, and international discussions to curb their use have come to fruition with the Paris Agreement. But advanced industrialized countries are

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6) Such as France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Taiwan. On the other hand, countries like Japan, the United States, and South Korea use electronic voting machines to verify election results early. In South Korea, manual inspections have recently been discussed.

7) The Responsible AI Collaborative reported that from this year to last month, damage caused by fake news-generating polls increased by 36% compared to last year.

8) This declaration is a bit late, considering that already in 2017, at the Asilomar Conference organized by the Future of Life Institute, the Principles of Artificial Intelligence with 23 points of guidance for the development of beneficial artificial intelligence were published.

9) According to Reuters, Anders Anker Bjork, assistant professor at the department of geosciences and natural resource management at the University of Copenhagen has found that the rate of melting of Greenland's glaciers has accelerated fivefold in 20 years.
more responsible for global warming. Because they have been the overwhelming energy consumers. From this point of view, the RE 100 movement led by The Climate group has the potential to act as a new trade barrier unintentionally and cause a backlash from countries and companies that are struggling to make the transition to green energy. The backlash can lead to a conflict similar to the conflict that resulted from the 1980s discussion on banning the use of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC), better known as Freon gas.

Along with global warming, waste plastics are another example of the environmental disaster. Warnings have long been issued that wasted plastics floating in the oceans are making their way up the food chain and onto our plates, but plastic production is not being curtailed, and humans, accustomed to the convenience of disposables, have no qualms about using them.

The environment is the foundation of life. A life with a broken foundation is not sustainable. So, it is an order of the times to make ceaseless efforts to restore the environment before it is too late.

2.4. Changes in the World of Work

Rapid advances in science and technology have led to an explosion in knowledge production and shortened the life cycle of knowledge. This has an profound impact on the world of work. So many professions are disappearing and others emerging, and the phenomenon will accelerate. At this point, no one can say for sure what kind of occupations will remain in the future, or how many times young people will change jobs in their lifetime. The link between college majors and jobs is already significantly low. In South Korea (Korea Youth Policy Institute, 2021), the United States (S. Kaplan, 2023), and Japan (Kaneko, 2020), studies have shown that the link between careers and university majors has weakened. This phenomenon will accelerate. This is a sign that the major-centered university education system has reached its end. The alarm bells have been ringing for some time. “In an era when most people have multiple jobs before middle age, and when so many jobs still need to be developed, how can a college student be trained in a major that doesn't exist yet?” (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). In the end, it means that self-innovation and lifelong learning are essential for today's young people to adapt to jobs.

2.5. East Asia in Turmoil

The ongoing crises and changes at the global level are more acute in East Asia. North Korea's development of weapons of mass destruction, the rivalry between the United States and China, and the cross-Strait issue between China and Taiwan pose serious and present threats to the security of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. In the face of these threats, countries in the region are significantly increasing their defense spending (The Chosun Ilbo, 2023, Nov. 8). It is no exaggeration to say that the front lines of the New Cold War have been formed in this region. And the unfortunate historical legacy of the imperialist era is still a political variable in the region. Although the generation that suffered the oppression of Japanese imperialism has largely passed away and it has become common for young people to travel to other countries (Yonhap News Agency 2023, October 28; Korea Tourism Organization, 2023), the unfortunate history is always
invoked politically and diplomatically, deepening political conflicts and raising tensions in the region. Military buildups and heightened tensions increase the likelihood of potential conflict. Managing tensions in East Asia is a matter of utmost importance. Moreover, East Asian countries occupy a critical position in global supply chains. Therefore, managing tensions in East Asia also crucial for the global economy.

In addition to global warming, the fine dust unique to this region seriously affects humans, animals and plants. And this phenomenon gets worse every year. Everyone knows the cause of the fine dust, but not much effort is made to eliminate the cause. While the solution remains sluggish. global warming and the misuse of water resources will accelerate desertification, resulting in more frequent occurrences of fine dust. As a result, there is an urgent need for cooperation between countries and efforts to eliminate the causes to improve the quality of life in East Asia.

3. Contributions of General Education

Changes and crises as described above will threaten humanity in the future. If so, it becomes obvious what education should do for a sustainable future. It has to help next generation develop the ability to cope with and adapt to changes and crises. Therefore, topics such as peace, environment, democracy, multiculturalism, and international relations should be added as the topics of education for the future. Through these topics, next generation must to develop the ability to perceive situations critically, as well as humility, righteousness, consideration, tolerance, and communication skills. These are virtues that citizens of a democratic society should possess. Therefore, the topics mentioned above are also topics for civic education. This argument is consistent with UNESCO's philosophy of global citizenship education, which is to “equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to contribute to building an inclusive, just and peaceful world”(UNESCO). However, it should not be overlooked that global citizenship education based on UNESCO's universal values may conflict with the interests of individual states in many countries due to the fact that nation-states are responsible for education. This will be discussed in more detail later.

General education in University is defined by Korea National Institute of General Education as “education that contributes to establishing one’s own worldview and values based on a comprehensive understanding of human, society nature, and art. [...] It fosters the qualities to lead the cultural life in a democratic community [...]” (KONIGE, 2022) Based on this definition, it can be said that the virtues that general education intends to cultivate are not different from those mentioned above. Therefore, the above topics should be prioritized in general education. Additionally, it is necessary to emphasize the concept of responsibility and action in the relation to the above topics. This is because today, the participation of critically thinking citizens is essential for maintaining peace, protecting the environment, and sustaining democracy. Learning without action is hollow. Implicit in this statement is the proposition that a university general education should have a lasting impact on life. Because action is the result of lasting impact.

In teaching the above topics, the student’s self-directed learning is required. They must be motivated to think and understand for themselves. Only then can students feel the need for action. At this time educators should be in the position of co-learning. This is a way to develop critical thinking. Critical thinking is the basis of most soft skills: it is the foundation of media literacy, which is considered an important skill today; It is also fundamental to problem-solving, because when you think critically, you can identify problems and find ways to solve them. This is also a way to develop a moral judgment
of what is right and wrong. Ultimately, students must overcome misunderstanding, prejudice, and distrust. From this perspective the delivery of knowledge should be a relic of the past at least in the general education.

While responding to the challenge of forming citizens, general education must strengthen the basic education for lifelong learning. It is a prerequisite for adapting to the future world of work. The basic education includes, among others, diverse literacy skills, the ability to receive and analyze information, and the ability to learn independently. Furthermore, as AI advances, humans will need to ask more sophisticated questions. In the end, universities have an obligation to provide more sophisticated general education.

In short, speaking only of Korean universities, it is necessary to maximize the inherent value of general education as an education in itself, not as a foundation for a specific major, as is often misunderstood in Korean universities.

4. Recommendations for the Academic Societies in East Asian Countries

After World War II, universities in Korea, Japan (Yoshida, 2020), and Taiwan (Huang, 2020), converted to an American-style university system and introduced general education. However, general education suffered a long period of stagnation. The causes are pointed out as a lack of awareness of general education, problems inherent in the reorganization, prioritization of major education in response to rapid economic development, and government education policies that come and go. However, as we have seen, strengthening general education is the need of the times.

As mentioned above, the security landscape in East Asia is very precarious. So, various frameworks for international cooperation are being created to maintain peace, but exclusive nationalism and arbitrary interpretations of history are current threats to that cooperation. Preventing nationalism and arbitrary interpretations of history is, therefore, crucial for peace. The recent increase of number in mutual visits among East Asian countries seems desirable for the development of friendly relations, but they can easily be undermined if they do not develop into genuine mutual trust based on historical insight and cultural understanding. Therefore, I propose to develop a joint course on the history and culture of East Asia. The goal is to bring students from different countries together to discuss objective material and manage differences in perception and the potential dangers that arise from them. It is expected that the course will develop critical thinking skills, improve communication skills, and foster consideration for others. This is just one example of the course topics.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we've become quite comfortable with on-line lectures and discussions. In addition, it is expected that the language barrier can be overcome by utilizing the communication and translation functions of artificial intelligence.

In order to promote general education for a sustainable East Asia, there is an urgent need for cooperation among academic societies in East Asian countries.

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지속가능한 미래와 교양교육

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초록

교육이란 인간이 주체적으로 설 수 있도록 돕는 일이다. 또한 교육은 본질적으로 오늘을 사는 인간이 내일을 살 인간을 양성하는 활동이다. 내일은 현재 우리가 선택한 바탕 위에서 만들어지지만, 미래에 대한 책임은 우리가 아닌 후대가 지게 된다. 미래에 대한 책임을 질 수 없으면서도 후대를 교육하여야 한다는 것은 오늘날처럼 급속한 변화가 일어나는 시대에 교육이 안고 있는 본질적 달레마다. 교육이 이 달레마를 극복하는 길은 후대가 직면할 위기와 변화를 극복하고 대처할 힘을 길러주는 데서 찾아볼 수 있다. 그 위기는 크게 보아 평화, 민주주의 및 기후 위기이며, 변화는 직업 세계의 변화다. 교육은 이 위기와 변화를 주제로 삼아, 이 위기를 극복하고 변화에 적응할 수 있는 자질 함양을 도모하여야 한다. 그 자질이란 비판적 사고, 경험, 도덕적 판단력, 배려, 포용, 소통력, 자기학습능력이며, 그것은 전 생애에 걸쳐 발휘되어야 한다. 그 때 비로소 미래의 지속가능성이 확보된다. 이 자질 함양은 인간 형성 교육과 시민 교육의 목표이기도 하다. 그리고 그 자질 함양은 대학 교양교육의 목표와도 맥을 같이 한다. 따라서 시대는 대학이 더 정교한 교양교육을 제공할 것을 요구한다. 세계적 위기와 변화는 동아시아에서 더욱 극적으로 나타난다. 때때로 정치, 외교적으로 소환되는 불행한 역사의 이 위기를 중폭시키기도 하며 역사적인 알림을 고조시키는 변수가 되기도 한다. 동아시아의 건강한 삶의 토대를 구축하기 위하여 역내 교양교육 종사자들의 공동연구와 각국의 학생의 대상으로 하는 공동 교육 프로그램의 개발이 절실하다.

주제어: 지속가능성, 평화, 민주주의, 기후, 시민교육, 교양교육