

# Effective Education for Refugees: A Case Study on North Korean Educational Perspectives

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# The Study

- This presentation is based on the following publication in *Current Psychology*.
- Aims:
  - to investigate how changes in the educational environment impact North Korean refugees' educational perspectives and behaviour.
  - To explore what major factors played a role in such changes.

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Exploring the impacts of a South Korean alternative school on North Korean refugees' educational attitudes, satisfaction, and behavior

Aaron G. Jones , George E. K. Whitehead & Hyeyoung Bang

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## Abstract

This exploratory phenomenological study sought to investigate North Korean refugees' lived experiences in the North Korean education system through the conceptual framework of Bandura's (1986) triarchic reciprocal determination model to investigate the potential impacts that transitioning to a South Korean alternative school has had on their attitudes toward education, educational satisfaction, and educational behavior. Data were gathered through a survey, followed by semi-structured interviews from 21 secondary school students studying at an alternative school specifically designed for North Korean refugees in the Seoul-metropolitan area to explore their experiences in North Korea and the alternative school, and about their perspectives on how this new educational environment has affected their educational attitudes, satisfaction, and behavior. The students reported that the changes they experienced in educational objectives and focus at the South Korean alternative school positively impacted their educational attitudes, led to feelings of greater satisfaction with their education, and led to increases in their work ethic and focus on study. The results of the study suggest that an educational system that provides North Korean refugees with freedom and support to develop personal skills and knowledge to pursue their aspirations or goals can have positive impacts on the way they view education and the satisfaction they feel from it, which can lead to positive changes in their educational behavior.

Jones, A. G., Whitehead, G. E., & Bang, H. (2022). Exploring the impacts of a South Korean alternative school on North Korean refugees' educational attitudes, satisfaction, and behavior. *Current Psychology*, 1-19.

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

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# Background of the Study

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Literature Review and Background

### North Koreans in South Korea

- In 2020, there were approximately 5,095 North Koreans between the ages of 0-19 in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2020).
- Adjusting to the South Korean educational system is a significant source of stress and anxiety for refugees (Bae, 2018; Park, 2019).
- North Koreans also often face social pressure (Kim, 2018), isolation from society (Kim, 2017), and discrimination (Park, 2016).

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## Literature Review and Background

### Education in North Korea

- North Korean education focuses on two main objectives – provide technical training for the working-class and ideological training based on *Kimilsungism* or *Juche* (Kim, 1992a, 1992b).
- Loyalty is prized, sometimes over academics (Adams, 2017).
- The rise of the *jangmadang* generation changed the perception of education in North Korea (Choi, 2018).
  - Irrelevant (Kim, 2018)
  - Limited usefulness (Kang & Chae, 2015)
  - Many students drop out (Kim, 2016; Kim 2018)

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## Literature Review and Background

### Education for North Koreans in South Korea

- North Korean educational experiences carry over into their South Korean educational reality (Kim, 2016; Kim, 2018).
- South Korean public schools differ greatly from North Korea:
  - Language barriers and discrimination (Park, 2019)
  - Unfamiliar pedagogical practices and focus on high-stakes testing (Byun et al., 2012; Yeon & Kim, 2012).
- Teachers at public schools are often unable to address differences experienced by North Korean students (Kanno & Varghese, 2010).

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Literature Review and Background

### **Alternative Schools for North Koreans**

- 45% of North Koreans enrolled in South Korean schools attend public elementary schools, 30% attend public middle schools, 16% attend public high schools, and 9% attend alternative schools (Korean Education Development Institute, 2015).
  - Unique and tailored educational environment (Yoon, 2018)
  - Financial aid and accommodations (Chang, 2017)
  - Older students due to age (Bae, 2018)
- Alternative schools are designed to help North Koreans succeed.



# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Literature Review and Background

### Alternative Schools for North Koreans

- Standard curriculum is combined with personalized instruction to help North Koreans succeed educationally (Yoon, 2018).
  - Mentoring
  - Job training
  - Culture exposure
  - Special class offerings – religion, psychology, arts
  - Internships
- Teachers are better able to address the cultural differences between North and South (Yoon, 2018).

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## Research Gap and Questions

### Research Gap

- Literature on North Koreans in alternative schools is scarce (Yoon, 2018).
- The literature that does exist focuses on mental health (Seong & Park, 2021), acculturation/adaptation (Kim et al., 2016), and citizenship education (Cho et al., 2016).
- No studies have examined the educational perspectives of North Koreans at an alternative school relative to prior experiences.

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

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## Research Gap and Questions

### Research Questions

1. Compared to their experience in the North Korean educational system, what key differences do North Korean refugee students experience studying at an alternative school?
2. How do these experienced differences affect their attitude toward education, sense of educational satisfaction, and behavior toward education?

# Methodology

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

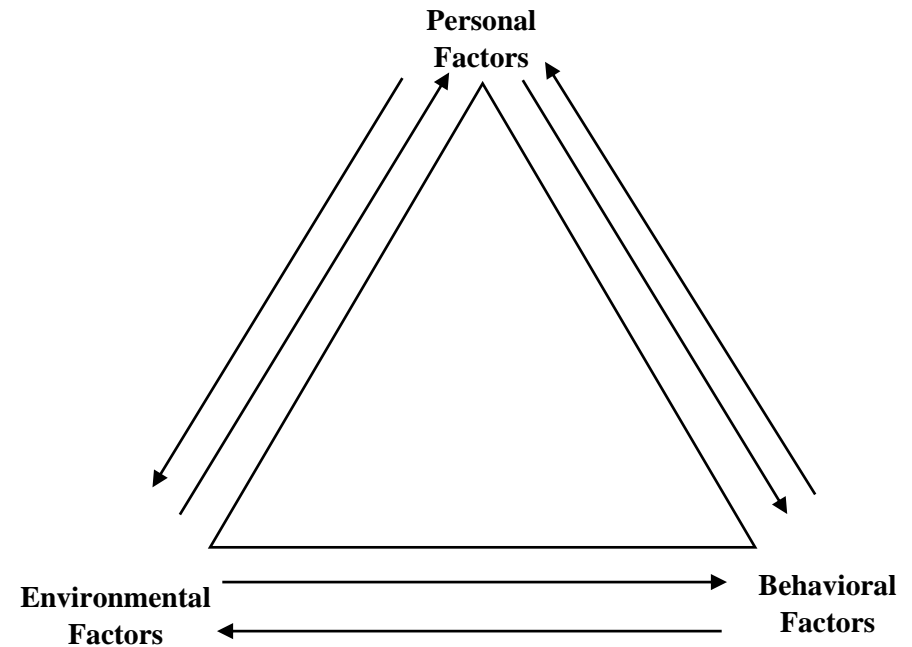
## Methodology

### Theoretical Framework

- The study followed a phenomenological approach (Welman & Kruger, 1999).
- The study used Bandura's (1986) triarchic reciprocal determination model as a conceptual framework.

Figure 1

*Bandura's Triarchic Reciprocal Determination*



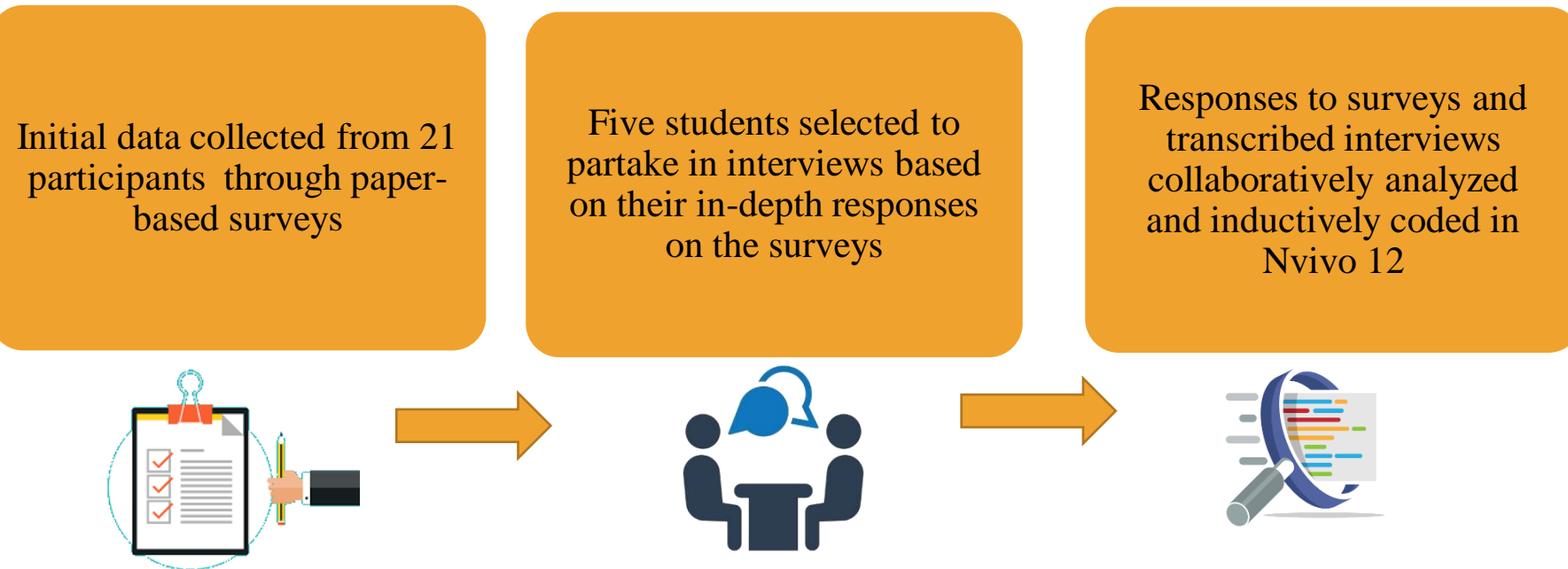
### Participants

- The participants included a purposive criterion sample of 21 North Korean refugees.
- All students met the following criteria:
  1. the student must have been born in North Korea
  2. the student must have studied in elementary school in the North before coming to South Korea
  3. the student must have studied in the alternative school for more than two semesters before partaking in the study

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Methodology

### Data Collection and Analysis



# Findings & Implications



What key differences do North Korean refugee students experience studying at an alternative school?

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Findings and Implications

### Key Educational Differences Experienced by North Koreans at an Alternative School – Educational Objectives

- Loyalty to the State/Kim Family versus Personal Goals ( $n = 12$ )
  - *In North Korea, our education is only for the benefit of the state. Only a few can go to university if you are not from a good family. But here [at the alternative school], I have enjoyed getting to study things other than just basic subjects like math and Korean.*
- Unrelated versus Related Objectives to Personal Life ( $n = 13$ )
  - *Since I came [to this school], I have had the chance to study and develop myself. I can focus on that as a goal.*

# Effective Education for Refugees: N. Korean Educational Perspectives

## Findings and Implications

### Key Educational Differences Experienced by North Koreans at an Alternative School – Educational Focus

- Training for Military/Revolution versus Training for Aspirations ( $n = 14$ )
  - *Students in North Korea focus on military with only a handful going to college after high school. Students typically go to military directly after school... From the point that students enter high school, students focus on military preparation and revolutionary study.*
- Irrelevant Focus of Content versus Catered Focus toward Personal Goals ( $n = 13$ )
  - *In the North, we study about revolutionary history and the lives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. But in life outside of school, we never needed this information. All I needed to know was how to survive and sell things at the market.*

How do these experienced differences affect these students' attitude toward education, sense of educational satisfaction, and behavior toward education?

### How Differences Experienced at the Alternative School have Impacted Refugees – Educational Attitudes

- Positive shift in attitudes towards educational endeavors ( $n = 5$ )
  - *Because of my family history [of relatives living outside of North Korea], the government put surveillance on my family constantly. Study could bring me no gain because of my family background. I couldn't get any jobs besides the low jobs. I always wanted to be a teacher but could not because of the government.*
- Positive shift in educational outlook ( $n = 7$ )
  - *I see now why learning is so important because education gives me a key for my future.*

### How Differences Experienced at the Alternative School have Impacted Refugees – Educational Satisfaction

- Positive shifts in happiness ( $n = 5$ )
  - *Because I can have a dream in South Korea and can pursue it [through education], I feel that I am happier in South Korea than North Korea, despite the increase in pressure and competitiveness.*
- Decrease in happiness due to competitiveness and pressure ( $n = 2$ )
  - *In North Korea, studying is not that important. But in South Korea, you have to study to be successful. I like that I can study for my dream, but I feel like I have to study harder because everyone else studies hard. At times, it gives me a lot of stress and takes away my happiness to study.*

### How Differences Experienced at the Alternative School have Impacted Refugees – Behavioral Changes

- Began to take education more seriously ( $n = 8$ )
  - *I think studying is very important now [in the alternative school]. If you study well, you can do everything you want, therefore I think studying is important.*
- Pressure to study harder ( $n = 5$ )
  - *I study harder here in South Korea. In North Korea, you don't need to study. Although I don't like studying, I have to study harder if I want to do well. I can see myself growing but I also get more stress.*

# Concluding Remarks



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## Concluding Thoughts

### Synthesis

- Environmental changes seemed to affect personal and behavioral trends of students.
- Environmental factor change (North Korean education with *Kimilsungism* and ideological posturing -> education at alternative school focused on personal aspirations) led to positive personal factor changes (improved agency and satisfaction)
- Environmental factor change (customized educational opportunities and tools at the alternative school) led to positive behavioral factor changes (increased competence in studying and perceived learning and self-efficacy)

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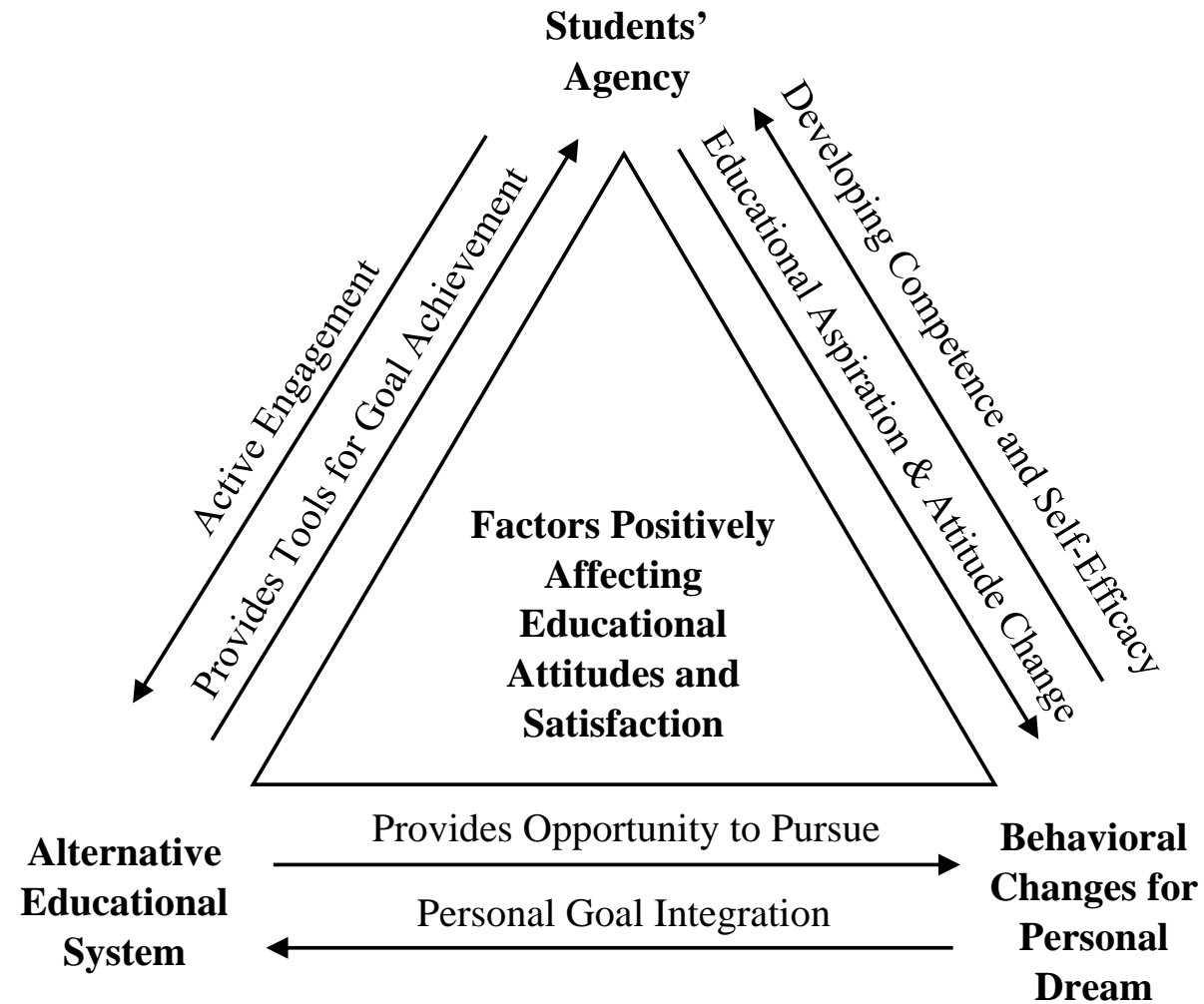
## Concluding Thoughts

### Implications and Final Thoughts

- The study points to dynamic interactions between environmental factors and personal and behavioral factors in North Koreans.
- The study sheds light on ways to combat issues that often plague Korean refugees such as academic and mental struggles (Park et al., 2017; Seong & Park, 2021).
- Successful education for North Korean refugees should include:
  - Job-related development aligned with personal aspirations (Jeong & Yoon, 2016)
  - Teaching resources catered to refugees specifically (Noh, 2008)
  - Supportive environment for exploring post-school options (Matthews, 2008)

**Figure 2**

*Dynamics Affecting Educational Attitudes and Satisfaction of North Korean Refugees in a South Korean Alternative School*



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## Concluding Thoughts

### Future Research

- More research is needed which includes North Koreans who come to South Korea from other regions of North Korea/China.
- It would be valuable to compare these findings to findings from other alternative schools as well as public schools.
- Further research should be conducted to explore the correlation between educational satisfaction in an alternative school and any subsequent academic achievement.

# Thank you!

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## Findings and Implications

### Key Educational Differences Experienced by North Koreans at an Alternative School – Educational Focus

- Training for Military/Revolution versus Training for Aspirations ( $n = 14$ )
  - *Students in North Korea focus on military with only a handful going to college after high school. Students typically go to military directly after school... From the point that students enter high school, students focus on military preparation and revolutionary study.*
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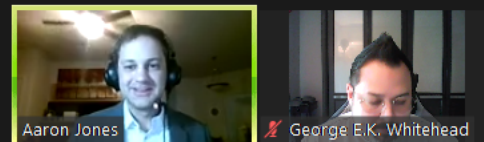
A Zoom meeting grid with 13 participants. The participants are arranged in a grid with some empty spaces. The participants shown are: Aaron Jones, George E.K. Whitehead, Andy, Liu Jiahao, Manami Sato, Elle Couvillon, staceysmith, Shannon Rosol, Susan Truitt, Hillary Russo, Tim Edwards, Joshua Jimenez, Asoko Nguyen, and Alissa. A timer in the top left of the grid shows 00:12:16.

# Thank you!

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Manami Sato

Andy, Liu Jiahao

Manami Sato

Elle Couvillon

staceysmith

Elle Couvillon

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Shannon Rosol

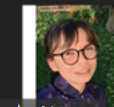
Susan Truitt

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Hillary Russo

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Asoko Nguyen

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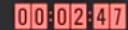
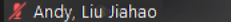
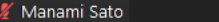
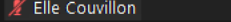
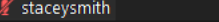

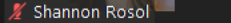
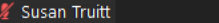

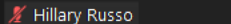
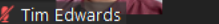

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