

Vocational training for the blind in Korea

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1. Outline

Job training is currently regarded as an important part of unemployment insurance programs. It is significant since job training can considerably improve the work ability of the disabled who show relatively low ability to work compared to the non-disabled.

In particular, vocational training for people with visual impairments requires more specific methods and procedure and professionalism in comparison to the training for people with other disabilities. For example, general teaching method used in computer programmer programs is not appropriate for the visually disabled. Special software such as screen reader and screen magnification and hardware including Braille display are required for them. Professionalism regarding the use of these equipments is an additional requirement both for teachers and the blind students. Job training for the blind using Braille text, audio materials made possible by recording, embossed visual materials and so on is a specialized training compared to those for people with other disabilities.

With these reasons, vocational training for the blind is operated by separate organizations and agencies with separate education. In the U.S.A., commission for the blind and designated agencies by the state government work for the blind in 25 states including Michigan and Idaho. National Industries for the blind which is the American association of protection facilities is operated separately from National Industries for the Severely Handicapped which is an association of the protection facilities for the severely handicapped as well as the visually disabled.

UK operates separate agencies such as Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) and Royal National College for the Blind (RNCB) only for the visually disabled. Canada also provides rehabilitation services through Canadian national institutes for the blind (CNIB).

No specialized administrative organization for the blind in Korea; however, job trainings are provided by agencies for the blind which has their own professionalism.

2. Present state of the blind population in Korea

Korea policy for the disabled is based on the registration system like Japan. An individual who gets disabled has to receive a disability determination for the disabled part by a medical doctor and the welfare card for the disabled will be issued. Then he/she will be regarded officially as a person with disabilities and the blind are qualified to receive public rehabilitation services as a legally blind after getting a disability determination from an ophthalmologist.

As of March 2005, 175,979 people are registered as legally visually disabled. Details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of the registered blind people in Korea as of March 2005, Ministry of health and welfare (unit: person)

Degree of disability	Male	Female	Total
1 st	14,981	13,340	28,321
2 nd	3,758	3,196	6,954
3 rd	4,901	3,802	8,703
4 th	4,983	3,651	8,634
5 th	9,198	5,608	14,806
6 th	75,270	33,109	108,379
Total	113,091	62,706	175,797

The blind takes up about 10.6% of total disabled people in Korea and the number of registered disabled people is 1,654,627 as of March, 2005.

Available services for the disabled are different depending on the degree of disability and standards for the determination of disability is presented in Table 2. Korean registration system of the disability is similar to the Japanese system. Most severe disability is 1st degree and the least severe is 6th degree. The degree of disability is classified by comparing its degree by types of disability. For some disabilities, they are classified from 1st to 6th. Hearing handicapped, respiratory disorder, facially handicapped, internal organ handicapped (kidney or heart disorder) are classified from 1st to 3rd or 2nd to 6th considering the relativity between disability areas. Summary of the standards for the determination of visual disability is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Legal standards for the determination of the visual disability

Degree of disability	Standard for determination of disability
1st	people whose visual acuity of better eye is less than 0.02 (visual acuity is based on the international visual acuity table and corrected visual acuity is used for those with refraction error. Hereafter same)
2nd	people whose visual acuity of better eye is less than 0.04
3rd	1. people whose visual acuity of better eye is less than 0.08 2. people whose vision fields of both eyes are remained less than 5 degrees from each point of gaze
4th	1. people whose visual acuity of better eye is less than 0.1 2. people whose vision fields of both eyes are remained less than 10 degrees from each point of gaze
5th	1. people whose visual acuity of better eye is less than 0.2 2. people who lost more than half of vision field of both eyes
6th	people whose visual acuity of poor eye is less than 0.02

As it can be noticed from Table 2, impairments only on acuity and visual field are acknowledged and the determination standards are based on acuity with best correction. This is similar to standards of the determination of the disability of W.H.O. or U.S.A. Korea has more comprehensive standards than international standards as it acknowledges acuity of the poor eye as the disability whereas they are normally based on the better eye.

Table 3 shows the legal standards of W.H.O. and U.S.A. for the determination of the visual disability for the visually disabled.

Table 3. Standards of W.H.O. and U.S.A. for the determination of the disability for the blind

Country	Standard for the determination	Reference
W.H.O	Blindness : visual acuity of less than 3/60 or corresponding field loss in the better eye with best possible correction. Low Vision : visual acuity of less than 6/18 but equal to or better than 3/60 in the better eye with best correction. Low Vision, Severe : performs visual tasks as a reduced level. Low Vision, Profound : difficulty with gross visual tasks. Near Blind : vision unreliable Blind : totally without sight.	
U.S.A.	Blindness : central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with best correction or widest diameter of visual field, subtending an angle of no greater than 20 degrees". Severe Visual Impairment : visual acuity better than 20/200 but less than 20/70 in the better eye with best correction.	Rehabilitation Services Administration of the Federal Government

	<p>The term "blind" refers to an individual or class of individuals whose central visual acuity does not exceed 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses or whose visual acuity, if better than 20/200, is accompanied by a limit to the field of vision in the better eye to such a degree that its widest diameter subtends an angle of no greater than 20 degrees</p>	<p>Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, Section 5 (41 U.S.C. § 48b)</p>
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It might cause some confusion regarding the measurement of visual acuity. It measures the ability to read letters from a distance. In the international standard of visual acuity measurement as well as the U.S.A. marks visual acuity with fraction; the numerator representing testing distance in feet and distance a normal person can see in feet. For example, 20/200 means what should be seen at 200 feet away requires the viewer to be at 20 feet. Some countries including Korea use decimal point system. Exactly speaking there is difference between fraction system and decimal system. However, fraction is to be converted to decimal number for decimal system. Reducing 20/200 gives 0.1.

With regular visual acuity table, tester points and asks to read letters with eye closed at a distance of 6m (20 feet). If a person has poor vision testing distance of 3m (10 feet) is used and number on the table divided by 2 is the person's visual acuity. In other words, the person's visual acuity is 0.05 when s/he reads the letter representing 0.1 at a distance of 3m (10feet).

3. Occupations of the blind in Korea

Among 175797 legally blind people in Korea, 30 percents (52739 people) are considered to be economically productive population. Less than 10,000 people are employed among those 52739 people. In detail, massager is ranked first place for the occupations for the blind and others include fortuneteller, acupuncture, special teacher, employee at the rehabilitation institute and telemarketer. Workers except special teacher and employee at the rehabilitation institute had direct/indirect public vocational training including one as a part of regular education and got employed.

Telemarketer program which started from the middle of the 1990s is recognized as an occupation with higher employment rate for female with visual impairments. It is also considered to be a field where the blind or the disabled can be easily employed.

Recently, there have been efforts to find new occupations for the blind as more of them get higher education and assistive technology devices are widely used. They are making faster steps to develop

Screen Reader with which audible authorization system will be possible and use as a part of government administrative computer system.

The blind are present in every country; however, it is difficult for them to find a place to work. Even though countries and society are advanced, they only guarantee the equal employment. Thus, it is required to help them have various abilities for work life with the aid of their own effort and public services.

4. Organization of vocational training

In Korea, it is very rare that government leads the vocational trainings for the blind. Government only provides legal, institutional and financial support and most of trainings are offered by private run welfare institutions or professional vocational training institutions.

There are two major vocational training programs for the blind. One is based on the vocational competency development training system led by the department of labor and Korea employment promotion agency for the disabled. The other is offered by special school for the blind as a part of their regular courses.

1) Vocational competency development for the disabled

Vocational competency development for the disabled, which is managed by the department of Labor and led by Korea employment promotion agency for the disabled (hereafter the agency), is provided for various types of occupations by private institutions. However, specialized project team for the blind provides services at the Ilsan vocational competency development center sponsored by the agency.

However, private vocational training institutions which are represented by welfare center for the blind operate most of vocational training programs for the blind.

(1) Specialized project team for the blind

Specialized project team for the blind (hereafter specialized team) was organized to promote the employment of the severely handicapped who have visual impairment, brain disorder and mentally handicapped. They have a relatively low employment rate and require highly professional employment services. Specialized team is currently working at the Ilsan vocational competency development center.

Specialized team does not use traditional vocational trainings for the blind and provides customized training methods to boost competitive employment. Customized training has two major components: pre-employment training and professional training program. The blind who shows a strong will to work register the customized program and the pre-employment training is provided. Pre-employment training is composed of Braille and computer usage training, orientation and mobility training and independent living training including social adaptability training. These pre-employment trainings are customized by individual sex, educational background, status of acuity, cause of the loss of the vision and the level of education. Training duration varies.

During the professional training, employers who are willing to employ the blind are searched and the positions in which the blind are assigned later are analyzed. Training program is then developed based on the analysis results and the students get trained.

These customized training programs proceed with an employment possibility in the future and thus can provide stable trainings. However, it is difficult to find employers who are willing to hire the blind and to achieve successful results due to the difference between employer's requirements and individual characteristics such as age and sex.

Nonetheless, these trials will reduce the inefficiency of conventional vocational trainings and moral doubt of individual trainee and increase the attendance of the blind. It is also worth as it can achieve the ultimate goal of the vocational training as a customized employment program which is an employment.

(2) Private vocational competency development training

In Korea, vocational competency development training should follow rules related to the operation of training and others set by the agency as it provides a financial assistance. The agency also has an authority to control and monitor the operation of the training by private training institutes.

Private training institutes can provide vocational competency development trainings without any financial aid; however, it is difficult to cover all the expenses by themselves. Therefore, most of trainings offered by private institutes are financially aided by the agency and they contribute the expenses within the range of 20 percent of total budget.

The agency provides a financial support to private institutions using voucher method considering the types of vocational training, duration of training, degree of the disability and quota. Voucher method is a payment method by measuring the performance of actual service provided to a client and it does

not support standardized budget. In Korea, 3 to 4 dollars are paid for 1 hour training and the payment is monthly basis.

Private training institutes for the blind which are designated by the agency are mostly welfare institutes for the blind and some of them receive financial support.

2) Vocational education

According to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of Korea Vocational training by special school for the blind school is a kind of education for the disabled and includes school subject education, therapy education and vocational education. School subject education is defined as a regular education teaching school subjects such as mathematics, science and history. Therapy education includes speech and physical therapy education and one related to independent living. Vocational education is an education specified on the disability and massage and acupuncture are the vocational education for the blind. Thus all the blind students from special school for the blind study both massage and acupuncture and acquire certification upon graduation.

The ration of school subject education, therapy education and vocational education is 3:2:5. School subject and therapy education are offered in elementary and junior high school level and the vocational education only in high school.

Vocational education in special education for the blind is managed and monitored by Department of Education and budget allocated to education is included in the overall national education budget. This applies to all the institutions regardless of the characteristics of the establishment (e.g. public or private). Schools follow the standardized educational contents and they are given only some authorization for certain educational contents.

Vocational education offered by special school for the blind is limited to massage and acupuncture and students do not have any choice on other vocations. Schools also do not provide various educational contents. Massage and acupuncture are taught as a part of education; however, there has been a continuous conflict with oriental medical doctors. Although both sides understand each other in terms of education, this is mainly due to the lack of their understanding on qualifications on massager and oriental doctor in the government health policies.

5. Occupations and its training contents

1) Vocational training for conventional occupations

In Korea, occupations of the blind are generally divided into conventional occupations and new occupations. Conventional occupations include massager, fortuneteller and acupuncture. The following is a review about vocational training for the conventional occupations and the support from the government for the training.

(1) Massage and acupuncture

Massage related education started from the 1910s and it continued among special schools for the blind even when the government of Republic of Korea was established. Massage education by private institution started in the 1970s by Korea Massager Association, an organization to protect the rights of the massager. The education sustains and develops policies for the blind massager. It officially opened massage training center and has been served as a designated private vocational competency development training institution since 1998.

Duration of the training is two years and training allowance is provided to students to encourage their attendance and to protect stable income during the training. This allowance is paid by the agency to all the students who participate in the training. It ranges from \$80 to \$ 200 in proportion to number of family members to support. There is a concern that training allowance may fade the original objective of the training. Despite the moral disappointment that might happen, this is a very important factor to improve the training results as the disability often makes the students unable to finish the training course due to the lack of income.

Training program contents consist of basic subjects such as anatomy, physiology, health science, theory of massage, theory of acupuncture and detailed subjects include practice of massage, acupuncture practice, clinical practice, introduction to oriental medicine, pathology and diagnostics. Other electives include work moral, computer usage, Korean and social adaptability. In general, students take basic course on 1st year, detailed on the 2nd year and practice subjects and training subjects should be taken during the whole period of training.

Eight permanent institutions are run and two are temporarily run on an irregular basis. Only the registered blind are qualified for the training as massage certification will be given only to the blind.

Blind massagers are common in many countries and it makes sense a lot. This is because the blind perform massage very well despite the visual disability. Also, they use of their tactual sense and no side effects are expected. In addition, it is a highly paying job as it is conducted by people.

(2) Fortunetelling

It has been more than 200 years since the blind were educated fortunetelling. Originally Department of Blind provided a fortunetelling education to the blind.

In earlier days, Office of meteorology and Astronomy which is a special agency was in charge of predicting death of king, child birth of the royal family, the destiny of the country and so on. The office also operated the training institution of fortunetelling based on the Book of Changes. They started to train the blind with the belief that they have a good memory and do not tell a lie as they cannot see. Some outstanding blind were assigned in the governmental position, 'bongsa'.

With the modernization, the department of the blind was privatized and then changed to the institute of fortunetelling after establishment of lawful government and Korean War.

The institute of fortunetelling offers fortunetelling training to the blind without any financial aid from the government and courses are mainly about the understanding the interpretation of the Book of the Changes and Yin and Yang and the five elements. Duration of the training varies and the training is similar the apprentice system.

(3) Teachers for the special school and the workers for welfare institutions for the blind

To include teachers for the special school and the workers for welfare institutions for the blind in the occupations for the blind is the most visible means to solve the employment problems for the disabled since government train and employ the blind to have them work for the disabled. In fact, most of the advanced countries use this kind of employment policies for the disabled because the disabled can offer the most appropriate services for the disabled fulfilling their needs. Old Korean saying says that widows can understand widows best. This implies that the disabled can designs and provide the best programs for the disabled. Government official is therefore the most common occupation for the blind in Korea and all the institutions for the blind employ a certain number of the blind every year.

Korean situation is similar to U.S.A. and the blind are working as teachers for the special school for the blind. Most of them teach vocational education.

Workers for welfare institutions for the blind are certified social workers and work in the various fields for the blind at each institution.

These two occupations are the most stable for the blind and guarantee the employment, social recognition or social status. Thus, they should be taken into consideration with the priority on the implementation of the employment policies for the blind. However, there are several disadvantages of them; they should have a regular education higher than post secondary school and there is a limitation of quotas of the institution in which post secondary educated people can work. These disadvantages make those occupations common for the blind.

In Korea, there have been sufficient employment opportunities until the end of 1990s since the blind first entered the university at the beginning of 1950s. They worked for a special school for the blind and the welfare institute for the blind contributing to the welfare of the blind in Korea. These days many people with visual impairments enter universities. However, special schools or welfare institutions are not able to employ all the graduates and we should see the alternatives. Government employee or work with companies is considered to be good alternatives now. This kind of progressive movement can be seen in many countries including the U.S.A. and Japan. America recognizes post secondary education as vocational education and provide a great deal of support to the post secondary students who are visually impaired. They are trying to find a job with regular companies considering their abilities and aptitude.

If your country does not recognize what to do for the blind and what they need, providing good environment where the blind can study and plan the system that they can have higher education will be the most effective policy.

2) Vocational training for new occupations

Telemarketer may be the new occupation for the blind in Korea. Other new occupations include health keeper, computer aided steno, computer programmer, etc. None of them except telemarketer has shown remarkable results. However, continuous effort should be made when considering the desire of the blind for the new occupations.

The most important thing for the selection of new occupations is to investigate if the blind can perform them despite the visual disability, not to see how much they use their vision. In addition, various considerations including the possibility of employment, prospects of the occupation and the degree of professionalism required should be taken.

There is also no firm guarantee that all the occupations can be successful. In fact, there are more failure cases than successful ones. In Korea, new occupations such as press monitor, stock investment analyst and real estate agent are considered to have been unsuccessful.

(1) Telemarketer training program

Telemarketer is a professional sales person who markets services or goods including private insurance services, health food, and credit card subscription using telephone. It is one of many marketing strategies and uses telephone as their marketing medium. Using telephone reduces marketing budget and enables telemarketers to have a direct communication with customers.

There are three major reasons why telemarketer is getting more attention in Korea. First, it is more advantageous to women rather than men. Second, employment may be possible after short-term training which usually takes six months. Third, employers do not feel pressure when employing the disabled.

Pronunciation correction is required for telemarketer as they talk over the phone and to convey the idea correctly. In this case, it is said that women have more exact pronunciation and better listening skills than men. The fact that announcement in a public place are done more by women than men might be a good example for better understanding.

Duration is important for the vocational training because visual disability has shown to occur in adulthood. The blind who are in their thirties or forties are not in good condition physically and financially to get vocational training for years. For this reason, telemarketer can be considered to be best suitable job for the disabled as the training can be completed within 3 to 6 months.

Companies want to hire those who are capable and telemarketers should take the training. Thus, telemarketing companies offer their own training courses. When employing new people, they are required to take the course. Those who completed telemarketing course including the blind can be placed on the job after having brief workplace adaptation training. This is the reason why companies are willing to hire the blind despite their disabilities.

However, there are also disadvantages. First, they usually prefer young women. Second, the salary is based on performance and thus very unstable. Third, it is hard to stay in one work place for long-term.

For inbound and outbound calls, customers show preference on female telemarketers. This is because customers feel more favorable for young women, their pronunciation is advantageous for

better communication than men in the same age group and the salary is based on their performance, not their work experience.

Unstable salary means the salary is determined by the performance of the individual worker. Salary is calculated by the sum of base salary and performance bonus depending on the monthly sales performance or the number of contracts that they have made with the customers. This is the strategy to encourage motive for the individuals; however, it also leads the employment insecurity.

There are several reasons telemarketer cannot stay in the same workplace for long-term. First, they may be recommended to retire when they show poor performance continuously for 3 to 6 months. Second, it is difficult for them to work for long-term depending on the products. New insurance or credit card products are released continuously whereas old products are out of market. Also, English learning books or health food tend to be replaced by other products once they are sold within short period.

The most important courses of telemarketer training program are pronunciation correction and dialogue skill. For pronunciation correction, students drill the same pronunciation and difficult pronunciations. Dialogue skill is very important as a sales strategy. In fact, telemarketer has written explanations about the products to sell and read them within 1 minute. However, customers usually do wait for that long. In the case that unexpected things happen it is important to study dialogue skill.

Other subjects include common sense on economy, work ethics and social adaptation and courses are done after completing the theory of telemarketing.

(2) Health keeper

No vocational training has been offered for health keeper. However, health keeper is considered as an important new occupation to be trained because it has unique characteristics in comparison to massage. Health keeper is an occupation which provides massage service to workers who are exposed to industrial accidents such as stores in which they have to stand all day and automotive factories. Health keepers have been worked at the stores and it has been very successful as massager certification is only assigned to the blind.

The training is not offered with the title of health keeper, but it has been introduced as an entrepreneur training with the title of massage management. This training program provides relevant information to the blind who wish to open massage center. It helps the blind acquire professional

skills and get various information required to opening a business by introducing various skillful filed of massage. It provides support to the students to be employed by the cooperating companies.

(3) Computer programmer

Computer programmer training is a one year course in Korea. It has a longer training duration, but employment rate is relatively high. Also there is a possibility for the blind students who are certified to be hired by companies. However, limited number of programming languages is available for the blind and the technology for the training of the programmers should be developed continuously. This is impossible if no computer related technology is accumulated in a respective country.

So far, those how have completed computer programmer training have worked as a computer teacher for the blind or Rehabilitation Technology software developer showing satisfactory performance in their positions. However, there has been no case of competitive employment and more than 50 percent of the students tend to give up the course as the training duration is very long. It is also hard for those who are older than 40 years to participate the program as they have to be able to understand creative and complicated contents.

Training courses include theory of computer science, computer structure, the theory of computer system and practice of programming and more than 40 percent of whole courses are assigned to making programs leading to build practical ability.

(4) Computer aided to Steno (CAS)

Training for computer aided to steno (CAS) was provided to the blind in Korea before the 2000s. CAS enables easier computing and faster entry compared to conventional manual stenography. Also, the demand for professional CAS workers is huge as the blind work by themselves and the society is getting more advanced recognizing the importance of archives. In Korea, there are two professional stenographer and four people got the national license. They work for various conventions and close caption service for the deaf.

Training courses include general stenography, usage of stenography equipments, common sense, orthography, and practice and practice takes up more than 40% of whole courses.

(5) Other vocational trainings

In addition to vocational training described above, many other training programs including press monitor, window software programmer and stock investment analyst have been offered; however, no visible results have been shown yet.

The reason for these results is that two important perspectives have not worked together in terms of occupation selection for the vocational training: whether all the blind can easily learn and whether they can be employed after completing training.

Vocations which the blind are capable to perform well have been selected and they have been trained by the developed training programs. It has shown that it is hard to operate the training program as the blind cannot understand easily and it is very difficult for them to find a job after completing the training. However, there were successful cases in which nobody expected the success and there was a lot of failure when they were sure about the success. This shows how hard it is for the blind to be employed.

However, the cause of the failure of the training is not the problem of job market. Some blind people take the training without a firm determination to find a job in the future and some take a long training by intention only to receive training allowance. Training institutions train the blind who are not expected to be employed just to make the training exists.

6. Conclusions

No work market is formed only for the blind. It is also difficult to find the work environment in which the blind freely participate by their own will. Furthermore, a lot of education and professional care is required for them due to the characteristics of the visual disability. Vocational training for the blind should be an integrated service and those who work for them should be striving for keeping professionalism.

Various social environments should be changed in order to form one occupation. Also, vocational training can be a meaningful service within an integrated service system which includes education, secure living and rehabilitation service.

Job has two meanings and job training should be emphasized more as a way for self realization, not as a way to make a living for social minority including the blind. This is because occupations available for the blind would be fewer if job is considered as a way to make a living and obtain goods and services for their living and everyone can be employed in the selected occupations. Therefore, vocational training can be truly done when occupations for the blind are regarded as a way to demonstrate their abilities and play a role as a member of the society. This also can encourage the blind not to be afraid of failures, help them have a customized training and draw more active participation from them.