

Creating Short-term Classes on Unification in South Korean Universities

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Abstract: Young adults will be the next generation of leaders, and it is critical for them to be cognizant of major issues that impact society. Unification is a significant issue in South Korea, especially in light of the recent summits between South and North Korea. This study is rooted in principles of peace education to promote peaceful discourse related to unification issues. Unification education plays an important role in K-12 education in South Korea; however, it is not prioritized at the university level. This case study, which included open-ended surveys, interviews, and focus groups, explored South Korean university students' (n=33) views of creating short-term classes on unification and the types of topics that they think should be taught in these classes. Primary results indicate that most participants expressed interest in taking short-term classes on unification issues. The paper also includes practical implications that can be considered when developing short-term classes on unification in South Korean universities.

Keywords: peace education, North Korea, South Korea, university education, unification education

1. Introduction

North and South Korea have been divided since the end of World War II. There are vast differences between the two countries. South Korea is a democratic and economically advanced country, which prides itself on technological innovation and advancement. North Korea is known for its repressive government, human rights abuses, and severe economic problems (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Ulferts & Howard, 2017). South Korean President Moon Jae In recently helped foster greater diplomacy and communication between the two nations. The topic of unification has taken on a more significant meaning considering the recent summits and other collaborative activities between the two nations. Unification education has been highlighted as a result of recent events, and there has been an increased interest in creating and expanding unification education programs (Kang, 2018). Moreover, peace education has been highlighted in the research as a strategy for addressing conflict and division between the two countries (Kim, 2016).

Unification education covers myriad topics ranging from potential future unification to issues impacting the two countries presently. Unification education comprises the study of the two Koreas, inter-governmental relations, policy, economic differences, politics, history, humanitarian issues (prisoners of war, aid, abductees and detainees, and separated families), the experiences of North Korean people, North Korean refugees, exchanges and cooperative activities, and other germane topics (Ministry of Unification, 2016). At the tertiary level, the government has sponsored the creation of a unification academy, unification forum, and unification clubs (Ministry of Unification, 2016). Some universities have special departments focusing on North Korean studies (e.g. Korea University, Dongguk University, the University of North Korean Studies) or unification studies (e.g. Ewha University), while other universities have unification academies, forums, and special related events. A graduate school unification thesis contest has also been promoted to foster greater interest in unification and topics related to North Korea. In late 2018, Seoul National University hosted conferences on Unification Education in the Era of Inter-Korean Peace and Cooperation and Unification Education for Inter-Korean Integration (Yu, 2018). In addition, the South Korean government recently selected several universities to participate in a special unification education program (Ministry of Unification, 2017). These programs are still in their infancy and have not been fully assessed for their effectiveness and practicality. Moreover, critical input from students, instructors, and administrators regarding these programs is important. Although offering special unification programs to university students is a positive endeavor, the number of students participating in these classes is relatively low, considering that only a limited number of universities in the entire country are participating in the program. Offering more classes, even if they are just short-term, on unification issues at a greater number of universities is critical for the future of Korea. Regrettably, unification related issues have not been a priority for many university students in recent years (Bae, 2017). This can at least be partially attributed to a lack of education about unification. Having more classes on unification at the university level, can help fuel a greater interest in unification and other pertinent issues in society.

University should be a marketplace of ideas and expose students to various classes beyond what is required for their chosen field. University is ideal for discussing complex social issues in greater depth, including unification. Although unification is included in K-12 curriculum, it is vital to explore deeper and complex topics related to unification in university. Furthermore, at the K-12 level students generally do not have specialized knowledge of specific majors or fields. In higher education, students are exposed to a wide range of classes and topics. Moreover, they begin to become more knowledgeable about their fields through major classes. As they develop more field-specific knowledge, they can apply what they have learned to the topic of unification. Unification issues can also be connected to elective and non-major classes.

Although research has examined unification programs in South Korea, there is limited research on unification education programs at the tertiary level. Recent research (e.g. Choi, 2017) has examined a specialized program on unification education but was limited to only universities that were selected to participate in the government sponsored unification education project. Unification education studies also tend to focus on other segments of society, resulting in much needed emphasis on university unification education (Bae, 2017). Ko (2015) referred to university unification education as a “blind spot,” in Korean education (p. 166). Lee (2018) stated that most unification related topics in South Korean university classes only focused on politics and economics and are delivered in lecture style format. Even these types of classes are not the norm.

There is a growing interest in developing more unification education programs in South Korea (Kang, 2018). Recently, K-12 schools were encouraged to participate in activities and lessons related to the inter-Korean summits. Most of the initiatives have been geared toward K-12 education though, leaving much needed research and discussion regarding unification education at the university level. In the process of developing new programs or classes, it is also important to obtain perspectives of the students who will take these classes. The purpose of this study is to examine South Korean university students’ perceptions of having short-term classes on unification and to determine what types of topics should be included in these classes. It also examined the students’ past university education related to unification topics. The following research questions were used to guide this study: 1) How do South Korean university students describe their university education pertaining to unification topics? 2) How do South Korean university students perceive having future short-term

university classes on unification? 3) What types of topics do South Korean university students think should be covered in future short-term university classes on unification?

2. Theoretical Background: Peace Education

Reardon (2000), a leading scholar in the field of peace education, defines peace education as a planned and guided learning that attempts to comprehend and reduce the multiple forms of violence used as instruments for the advancement or maintenance of cultural, social or religious beliefs and practices or of political, economic or ideological institutions or practices. (p. 401)

Peace education centers on creating a more just and equitable society (Wulf, 1999) and promotes peaceful strategies while reducing threats of violence (Harris, 2010). Peaceful initiatives and peace theory started gaining momentum in the early 20th century, especially in light of international conflict during World War I. Peace education formally emerged after World War II to help communicate the importance of peaceful discourse and non-violent interaction (Reardon, 2015).

Peace education has been successfully used in divided countries to support reconciliation and understanding (McGlynn, Zemblylas, & Bekerman, 2013). It has been adopted in various countries that have faced conflict including East and West Germany, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel (Bekerman, 2007; Hadjipavlou, 2007; Kang, 2018). According to Kang (2018), “Peace education in a conflicted society emphasizes nonviolent, integrated education to identify the cause of division and to achieve a peaceful system through a righteous process for overcoming division” (p. 139). In South Korea, successful peace education must move past division and strive to attain a harmonious coexistence through peaceful interactions and mutual cooperation (Kang, 2018).

In South Korea, peace education has been connected to unification education and has been used to address various social problems (e.g. Kang & Kwon, 2011; Lim, 2010; Synott, 2002). Kim (2016) examined unification education for peace development in moral education classes in South Korea and highlighted that curriculum should focus on democratic and peaceful concepts while promoting social justice. In the midst of harsh rhetoric, bellicosity, and future uncertainty regarding the Korean peninsula, it is critical for Korean people to come together to promote a climate of peace. Peace education can play a role in promoting peaceful solutions for many problems associated with unification (Kang, 2018). Regardless of whether the country unites or not, more steps need to be taken to bolster peaceful interactions and understanding of each country. The primary objective of peace education is to decrease and eventually end violence (Reardon, 1998). Thus, military engagements, war, and other forms of hostility are rejected in peace education. The Korean peninsula has technically been at war since the beginning of the Korean War in 1950 and violent altercations arise periodically.

According to former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (2012), “We must foster global citizenship. Education is about more than literacy and numeracy. It is also about citizenry. Education must fully assume its essential role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, and tolerant societies” (para. 33-36). Peace education gives students an opportunity to create a better society and future. Peace education is also connected with global citizenship education (Kwon, Walker, & Kristjánsson, 2018), which supports acceptance and understanding of diverse cultures and engaging in efforts to bring about positive change in society. Ultimately, students need to be equipped with knowledge to foster peaceful dialogue and understanding while taking action to bring about positive change.

In creating peace education programs, teachers and administrators should create new curriculum and teaching methodologies that are conducive to creating a climate that fosters peace inside and outside of the school (Bjerstedt, 1993). Peace education should also include the local community since the school is a part of the larger community (Jones, 2005). It is also vital for peace educators to be open-minded so that students are not restricted in sharing their views and are not being coerced to think a certain way (Reardon, 1988). University students are independent adults who should formulate their own opinions of various issues in society and share ideas with others. Furthermore, peace education should be relevant to the issues facing society (Bar-Tal, Rose, & Nets-

Zehngut, 2009). Students can be exposed to real-life issues that impact society and consider how principles of peace education can be used to make improvements and foster better understanding and reduced conflict. Additionally, experiential learning should play a major role in promoting the values of peace education. Experiential learning can include activities related to cooperation, intercultural communication, diversity, respect for others, and the promotion of non-violent discourse (e.g. Hicks, 1998; Rosandic, 2000). Peace education involves learning as well as reflection and practice (Synott, 2005). Students need to be given opportunities to process what they have learned and consider how they can use their knowledge to bring about change. Peace education curriculum and pedagogy can be especially valuable at the university level in preparing students to become democratic citizens who are fully engaged in promoting positive social change (Reardon, 2015).

3. Methodology

This case study explores South Korean university students' views of creating short-term university courses on unification. A case study involves "an in-depth analysis of one or more events, settings, programs, social groups, communities, individuals, or other 'bounded systems' in their natural context" (McMillan, 2008, p. 288). There were 33 participants in the study from one university in Chungbuk Province, South Korea that were selected through convenience and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The participants were in their twenties. Additionally, all were juniors and seniors except for two sophomores. Most students were majoring in English and could converse fluently in the language. Most of them had a double major (mainly business or education). There were 16 male participants and 17 female participants who were participating in either an intercultural communication class or a preservice teaching class. The methods of data collection included open-ended surveys (n=26), two focus groups (n=12), and individual interviews (n=8). Data was collected from April to June in 2018. All observations were recorded in a field journal. The field journal contains important descriptive details related to valuable or significant observations (Patton, 2002). Prior to collecting data, students were required to sign an informed consent form. In addition, the researcher also highlighted the importance of the students sharing their honest views rather than what they think seems "socially acceptable" or "right." The researcher was concerned that students may be inclined to respond with what they perceived to be as morally acceptable answers.

A 12-item open-ended survey (see Appendix A) was administered to 26 students. The questions focused on their thoughts regarding short-term classes on unification in university, what types of topics should be covered in short-term classes on unification in university, their past unification education, and other relevant themes. The research initially aimed to also explore the students' past K-12 education related to unification to determine how their past education may have influenced their views of university classes pertaining to unification. However, there was ample data pertaining solely to university unification education. Three questions centering on K-12 unification education were removed from the data results and analysis. It took most of the participants 15-20 minutes to complete the survey. The first focus group was also set up as a pilot group to determine if survey questions were appropriate and if anything needed to be altered or reconsidered.

During the focus groups, the researcher acted as a "facilitator" of the discussion (Silverman, 2011, p. 162). Participants were also encouraged to share deeper responses related to the open-ended survey questions, which were meant to be a springboard for further discussion to obtain richer data about the questions and related themes or topics. The first focus group comprised all male students who expressed interest in participating in the focus group because they are interested in unification issues. The first focus group participants also completed the open-ended survey. The second focus group consisted of two males and five female participants who were in a pre-service teaching class and share an interest in unification. The first focus group was 1 hour and 40 minutes, and the second was 50 minutes. Focus groups were intended to be about one hour, but the first group was eager to share many views. The second focus group members, although interested in the topic, were less vocal in sharing their views. They stated that they are fascinated by the topic but are not very knowledgeable about unification. However, after the focus groups the students wanted to ask questions related to unification that the researcher answered, but this information was not included as part of the data. Several students in the first focus group said they would like to even help organize these types of classes in the future. Students in the second focus group did not complete a written

survey due to time constraints. However, the questions were asked verbally, and the researcher was able to obtain detailed responses from the students.

The interviewees had completed the open-ended survey and indicated their interest in completing an interview by marking a box on the form and including their phone number. The purpose of the interview was to gain more insight and deeper responses related to the open-ended survey questions. The interviews were 20 minutes on average. Five males and three females participated in interviews. The interviews were conducted to elicit deeper responses regarding the participants' responses on the survey.

All survey data was compiled in a database, and focus group and interviews were transcribed. Results were coded using "pattern recognition" by examining significant themes and quotes that emerged (Patton, 2002, p. 452). The researcher first began by examining "recurring regularities" in the data (Patton, 2002, p. 465). A spreadsheet was used to organize salient themes and quotes that emerged. The results represent primary themes that were extrapolated from the spreadsheet codes. However, other notable responses that did not represent common themes are also included in the results. To improve credibility, a second coder was used. Member checking was conducted with five focus group participants and four interview participants. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

4. Results

4.1 Limited Discussion of Unification in University Classes

None of the students had taken a class in university that was focused specifically on unification. Students were asked if the topic of unification was discussed in any of their university classes. Only two students, Min Ji and Cheol Su, said they had taken a class, which discussed unification related topics. Min Ji stated that she briefly discussed unification related issues in an economics class. "It was a helpful course and had a lot of professional information related to economic differences between North and South Korea" (Focus Group). Another student stated, "I had a lecture about unification briefly. I could learn a little more about current North and South Korean relations" (Cheol Su, Focus Group). Students stated that there are no classes that focus on unification issues and that it is rare for this topic to even be discussed briefly in their major and elective classes. Three students, Ae Ran, Ha Yoon, and Seo Yun, also mentioned that many professors want to avoid discussing issues such as unification that seem divisive and can lead to tension in the classroom. Based on the responses, there is very limited discussion of unification related issues in university.

4.2 Gaining Insight into Unification Issues in University

Twenty students (Min Seo, Da Eun, Seo A, Ji A, Soo Ah, Ha Rin, Ji Woo, Min Su, Su Jin, Woo Hak, Do Yun, Ha Joon, Seo Jun, Si Woo, Ju Won, Yu Jun, Cheol Su, Ji Yoo, Ha Eun, and Seo Yun), stated that it would be valuable to have short-term university classes on unification, while nine (Ji Eun, Ji Yong, Min Ji, Joon Woo, Ji Ho, Ha Yoon, Su Hyeon, Min Jun, and Ye Jun) stated that longer classes would be better. Min Su who had favorable views about short-term classes on unification expanded on this by stating, "Yes, we should know about unification. We don't have a chance to learn about it in university" (Focus Group). Another student, Su Jin, stated, "It's important, but we shouldn't have these classes often" (Interview). As a result of recent political events, one student said, "These days North and South Korea's relationship is closer than before, so youth and young people should make a better society and a better Korea by learning more" (Woo Hak, Focus Group). Ji Eun expanded on this topic and stated,

In South Korea, many people put distance between themselves and the issue of North Korea and unification. In South Korean schools, there are few classes that discuss North Korea and the teacher hesitates to discuss this. So, South Korean students are naturally indifferent about North Korea. I think this is wrong. I think unification is not so long away. And we should know about North Korea to move forward as a nation. (Interview)

One student, Ji Yong, was very enthusiastic about unification. He said,

It will be hard to have a class about this topic. The older generation told us to not discuss political issues, but to me this is very important. I really want to talk about North Korean people and unification. We need to talk about these issues. We should debate and have discussion in class. (Interview)

Overall, students seemed to have favorable views of short-term classes related to unification. However, nine of the participants stated that they would prefer to take longer classes related to unification that are a whole semester. Primary reasons include that there is too much information to learn in a short-term class, that they are interested in this topic, and that it is a heavy topic that needs to be discussed deeply and short-term classes would be too shallow.

4.3 Questioning the Need for Unification Classes

Not all of the students were interested in taking a class related to unification. Four students, Jae Hoon, Seung Hyeon, Ae Ran, and Ji Su stated that it would not be beneficial to have a class related to unification in university. One student, Cheol Su (focus group) replied that it is somewhat important, but there are too many other priorities to consider it very important. He still indicated that he wanted to have these classes though. Another student stated, "I'm not sure it would be helpful. Students might be forced to follow the professors' views even if they do not agree" (Ae Ran, Focus Group). This point was reiterated by another student, "I don't think it's a good idea because professors' views will influence students too much" (Ji Su, Focus Group). A classmate responded by stating that although that is possible, these issues should be discussed, and students should be knowledgeable enough to form their own opinions about issues and do additional research if needed.

One student, Seung Hyeon, simply remarked that "Korean people are not interested in unification" (Focus Group). A similar response was made by another classmate, Jae Hoon. Although Jae Hoon discussed interest in attending this type of class, he also said, "Actually, well this generation doesn't want to unify because of economic problems. They don't want to have the economic burden from the North, so I don't think a class related to unification is necessary" (Focus Group). These students provided other reasons for why these types of classes are not necessary including that they need to be actively preparing for the job market, this type of class is not useful for the future, and that they already have too many classes to take. Two of the students, Ji Su and Ae Ran, mentioned that people should learn about unification independently and should not be forced to learn about in school.

4.4 Learning about Diverse Issues Impacting the Korean Peninsula

Fourteen participants (Su Hyeon, Min Ji, Su Jin, Woo Hak, Ji Yong, Min Su, Min Jun, Ye Jun, Min Seo, Da Eun, Ha Rin, Ji Woo, Ha Yoon, and Ji Eun) specified that broad unification related topics such as politics, human rights, history, and cultural differences should be included in unification related classes. Topics related to unification and North Korea that students want to learn more about include the pros and cons of unification, the lives of North Korean people, economic ramifications of unification, governmental differences, social issues pertaining to unification, cultural identities of North and South Korean people, why unification is needed, current issues related to North and South Korean relations, short-term and long-term effects of unification, and peaceful unification. One student stated,

There are so many topics that we need to discuss about the future of our country and North Korea. It is difficult to list all of them. We don't know enough now. I think many people are just concerned about their daily lives and haven't thought much about the future of our country. (Su Hyeon, Interview)

Other broad topics that students would like to discuss in class include intercultural communication, cultural differences, and daily lifestyles. Students generally seemed interested in examining various topics in university classes related to unification.

5. Discussion

Most students expressed interest in attending short-term classes related to unification topics. Although it could be beneficial to develop semester-long or extensive university classes on unification, there are time constraints that need be considered. South Koreans are notorious for working and studying for an excessive amount of time. Nevertheless, learning about unification issues is essential, and developing short-term classes could be very beneficial. To boost interest and to increase attendance, having short-term classes may be more practical than longer ones. It is critical for the younger generation to learn more about critical issues impacting the future of the country. Results indicated that most students have not discussed the issue of unification in any of their classes. Having meaningful classes related to unification topics can help students become more informed and take action to improve society.

Students indicated the importance of including broad unification themes in the classes. Students may have varying opinions on many of these issues, and it is important for them to share their opinions and have meaningful discussions with classmates (Han & Ryu, 2016). In creating these short-term classes, administrators and instructors could consult the Ministry of Education to get assistance and potential resources. Government policy may also be needed to help fuel a greater interest in unification education at the university level (Kim, 2015). Universities that are participating in the specialized unification education program through the government may also be able to assist instructors and administrators at other universities. This program offered at several universities includes special lectures and field learning opportunities (Choi, 2017). These types of learning activities can be applied to other universities throughout the country as well through short-term classes. Instructors should utilize various teaching methods so that students find lessons about unification to be meaningful and relevant (Bae, 2017).

Instructors who teach short-term classes on unification should consider participating in the unification education instructor program. This can help to reduce some of the issues related to instructor bias that several students mentioned as to why they think these types of classes should not be offered. In 2015, 84 individuals completed the program (Ministry of Unification, 2016). Of course, it is impossible to eliminate all forms of instructor bias in the classroom, and the issue of unification is often politically charged resulting in polarized views of the issue. Instructors should be educated about how to teach these classes without letting personal opinions largely dominate the class, leaving students fearful and hesitant to share their honest views. The unification education instructor program includes curriculum related to North and South Korean relations, government policy, current issues in North Korea, and other relevant topics (Ministry of Unification, 2016). These classes can be taught by university instructors, or universities can collaborate with regional unification centers that already have trained individuals who may be able to provide information or conduct classes. Additionally, individuals from the regional unification centers can potentially attend some of the classes and provide guidance to university instructors.

There are myriad issues surrounding unification that students can discuss with their peers and connect to other classes, especially related to their majors. For example, economic students could focus more on the economic aspects of unification. Social welfare students could address issues of humanitarianism and integration of North Korean people in society. Business students could examine how business may expand into North Korea in the future. Education majors could examine differences and similarities between the education systems of the two countries and what may happen to the education system if the two countries unite. Students could be given general scenarios or issues to discuss or more specific topics connected to certain classes or majors. Students do not have to be limited in linking unification topics to their majors, but the learning experience may be more meaningful to them if they see how the topics relate to their future field. Regardless of how the class is conducted, there should be an emphasis placed on promoting peace education principles by getting students engaged in meaningful, practical, and relevant activities that lead to viable solutions. Students should also be encouraged to participate in field experiences off campus to gain more insight into unification topics.

Students need to be given opportunities to reflect on past and present issues related to unification to determine ways to make improvements in society and the Korean peninsula as a whole. They also should have a sense of citizenship and identity in discussing themes pertaining to unification and other significant social issues (Hwang, 2015). University unification classes should give students a voice and an opportunity to reflect on their views of unification issues. They should

also be exposed to research, documentaries, books, testimonies, and other materials to help them to become more informed about unification issues. Ultimately, the students should be able to share their views and create realistic solutions for unification problems. Various strategies and methodologies could be used to teach about unification through peace education by engaging students in service-learning projects, research initiatives, collaborative learning, and problem-based learning.

According to Banks (2016), countries that do not “meaningfully and structurally include an ethnic or cultural group in the national culture runs the risk of creating alienation within that group and of fostering separatism and separatist movements and ideologies” (p. 39). When discussing the topic of unification, it is also important to examine the experiences of North Korean refugees and people living in North Korea, who have experienced numerous challenges (Lee & English, 2016). It is also vital to include other multicultural groups in these classes. Korea has traditionally been a homogeneous country, but there are many ethnic groups living here now. It is important to create a unification plan that accounts for all groups living in South Korea. These classes should be open to any university student who has a vested interest in the future of the Korean peninsula and not necessarily just South Korean students.

Finally, by implementing curriculum and teaching methodologies that center on peace education, students can examine peaceful strategies for dealing with unification issues. It is important for students to be engaged in active learning that leads to reflection and solutions (Han & Ryu, 2016). There needs to be an emphasis placed on experiential based learning in classes centered on unification issues (Kang, 2018, Lee, 2019). Through experiential learning, students can participate in authentic and meaningful discussions and debate that can potentially lead to action. In Shin’s (2015) study on the development of unification education in university, students recommended having presentations and discussions, placements for field activities, and experiential based learning activities. These suggestions could certainly be applied to this study. Students need to be engaged in authentic and practical activities and be given a voice in developing solutions to issues surrounding unification. The younger generation will be leading the nation in the future, and it is critical for this generation to share its views. They also can use their specialized knowledge obtained in university to consider realistic solutions to unification issues.

Peace education should lead to students making positive changes in their communities, countries, and the world around them. Understandably, many individuals have myriad responsibilities and may not be able to invest a considerable amount of time in addressing unification issues, but even small steps can make drastic differences. History is replete with numerous examples of how everyday citizens performing small acts of kindness or rebelling against social norms, made significant differences. Unification issues are clearly very important in present-day society, and these issues will continue to impact future generations.

6. Conclusion

The issue of unification is becoming an increasingly important topic in South Korea, especially in light of recent political developments. There have been several recent meetings between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae In, igniting a greater interest in the topic of unification. Creating short-term classes about unification classes can be beneficial and promote peaceful initiatives through education, research, active discussion, and community-based activities to give students a chance to get hands on learning experience and make a difference in society. Students should be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to be engaged citizens who take active measures to transform their communities and society in meaningful ways.

In South Korean universities, an emphasis is often placed on job market preparation and practicality. Bae (2017) reiterates that universities are also focused on the job market and competitiveness, which has resulted in a lack of interest in unification issues. There is a fierce level of competition in the South Korean job market, and many young adults focus their energy on self-improvement and future job prospects (Frayer, 2017). There is also a term commonly used to refer to this fierce environment called “Hell Chosun” (Chosun being a former name of Korea and the name of a major Korean dynasty). Justifiably, young adults need to invest a considerable amount of time in preparing for their future after graduation. However, that should not negate their responsibilities to

society. Citizens have a vital role to play in society by being active participants in significant social matters.

Most students indicated an interest in participating in short-term classes. In exploring unification issues, students should also have access to various qualitative and quantitative research studies (Kim, 2018), testimonies, documentaries, books, and other relevant resources. Merely teaching students about unification issues will not be enough to lead to change and development in society. With a limited class time, making a dramatic impact to stimulate student engagement in communities, society, and the world, will be difficult but certainly not impossible. There must be an emphasis placed on peace education through action. Experiential activities can be used inside and outside of the classroom to give students opportunities to think about real issues related to unification and consider potential solutions. Moreover, it may be valuable to do short case studies on other countries that have experienced conflict such as the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, South Africa, Cyprus, and South Sudan and Sudan.

Primary limitations of this study include a relatively small number of participants from only one university. The study was carried out in English, which is not the native language of the participants. However, most of the students were majoring in English and could speak fluently. Future research could reach a larger number of participants through quantitative data. Pilot and exploratory studies can be conducted to test out new short-term classes that address unification issues. It would also be beneficial to examine the perspectives of instructors or administrators who may oversee these courses. Gaining more insight into the government sponsored university unification education programs would also be valuable.

According to Unification Minister Cho Myoung-Gyon (2018), “During a time when inter-Korean relations and the political landscape are undergoing many changes, unification education is also transitioning from the existing education on national security to education on peace” (as cited in Yu, 2018, para. 7). Education on unification should of course promote dialogue of differing perspectives among students. However, unification education should also focus on peaceful resolutions and understanding of North Korea and its people. Furthermore, there are over 33,000 North Korean refugees living in South Korea who often face many struggles adapting to life (Ministry of Unification, 2018). University classes on unification must provide students with an opportunity to recognize and reflect on various issues and the pros and cons surrounding unification (Kim, 2018).

Through these short-term classes, students need to be given a voice to express their views. As one participant stated, the older generation made it clear to not discuss political issues, which are divisive. The issue of unification is controversial, but that does not mean that it should be avoided. Debate and dialog are crucial elements in universities that serve as a marketplace of ideas in democratic societies. However, students need to be respectful of others’ views, including their classmates, and understand their opinions without condemning them. Finally, students must be given opportunities to engage in learning and experiential activities to advocate for social change in local communities, society, and around the world.

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Appendix A

1. Have you taken any university classes specifically about unification?
2. If you have taken any university classes specifically about unification, what was the class about or what was the name of the class?
3. Have you had any class lessons or lectures in university (even short discussions or lectures) about unification?
4. What do you remember learning about unification when you were in elementary school?
5. What do you remember learning about unification when you were in middle school?
6. What do you remember learning about unification when you were in high school?
7. Do you think it would be helpful to have university classes related to unification? Why or why not?
8. If you think there should be university classes about unification, what topics should be discussed?
9. If you do not think there should be university classes related to unification, why do you think they are not needed?
10. Would you take a short-term class (such as 1-2 hours, one day, or several special lectures in a week) related to unification topics? Why or why not?
11. Would you take a long-term (16-week, semester long university class) related to unification topics? Why or why not?
12. Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you want to share about this topic?