

GETTING THE BEST FOR OUR STUDENTS

Read this article and do the multiple choice.

There is a strange paradox to the success of the Asian education model. On the one hand, class sizes are huge by western standards with an average between 30 and 40 students per class in countries like Japan and Korea. On the other hand, school children in developed Asian economies rank among the highest in the world for academic achievement in the areas of science and mathematics, especially on standardized tests. Meanwhile, British secondary school students fail to shine in conditions most educational researchers would say are far more likely to help them succeed.

Why do Asian students seem to perform so well then? Is it their legendary discipline? Certainly, classroom management seems to be a whole lot easier in places like Korea, and perhaps lessons are more effective as a direct consequence. After all, we are only too aware of the decline in discipline standards in our own schools; belligerent and disrespectful students appear to be the norm these days. Teachers in Britain seem powerless to control what happens anymore. Surely this situation cannot create a very effective learning environment, so perhaps the number of students is far less relevant than is the manner in which they conduct themselves.

But there are other factors to consider, too. Korean students spend a lot more time with their teachers. It seems logical to suggest, therefore, that they might form stronger bonds and greater trust, and that Korean teachers, in understanding their pupils better, might be able to offer them a more effective learning program. Of course, trust and understanding leads to greater respect as well, so Korean students are probably less likely to ignore their teachers' advice.

Then there is the home environment. The traditional family unit still remains relatively intact in Korea. Few children come from broken homes, so there is a sense of security, safety and trust both at home and at school. In Britain meanwhile, one in every two marriages fails and divorce rates are sky high. Perhaps children struggle to cope with unstable family conditions and their only way to express their frustration is by misbehaving at school. Maybe all this delinquent behavior we are complaining about is just a cry for help and a plea for attention.



But while the Japanese, Korean and Asian models generally do seem to procure excellent results, the statistics don't tell the whole truth. You see, behind those great math and science scores, there is a quite remarkable work ethic. Asian students tend to put their education before literally everything else. They do very few extracurricular activities and devote far more time to their studies than their British peers. And this begs the question: is all that extra effort justified for a few extra percentage points in some meaningless international student performance survey? So Asian students are on average 3-5% better at math than Britons - big deal! What is their quality of life like? Remember: school days are supposed to be the best, are they not?

There has been a lot of attention and praise given to these Asian models and their "impressive" statistics of late. And without question, some of this praise is justified, but it seems to be a case of two extremes in operation here. At one end, there is the discipline and unbelievably hard work ethic of the Asian students - success in education before all else. At the other end, British students at times appear careless and extremely undisciplined by comparison, but at least they DO have the free time to enjoy their youth and explore their interests. Is either system better outright? Or is it perhaps about time we stopped comparing and started trying to combine the best bits of both, so that we can finally offer our students a balanced, worthwhile education? We are not just dealing with statistics; never forget that every statistic is a little human being somewhere who desperately needs our help and guidance - who deserves it.



For questions 1-8 choose the answer - A, B, C or D.

1. What does the writer mean when he says there is a "paradox" in the Asian education model?

- A. There are too many students in each class.
- B. You would expect larger classes to get poorer results but they do not.
- C. Class sizes are much smaller in other parts of the world.
- D. Asian students outperform their peers in other countries.

2. British secondary school students

- A. have larger class sizes.
- B. fail at school more than they succeed.
- C. do better on standardized tests.
- D. enjoy better classroom conditions.

3. What does the writer suggest might make lessons in Korean schools more successful than in Britain?

- A. better teachers.
- B. better school boards of management
- C. more effective lesson planning.
- D. better discipline

4. What does the writer mean when he says: "perhaps the number of students is far less relevant than is the manner in which they conduct themselves"?

- A. class size does not affect student performance.
- B. class size is important to maintain control
- C. the way students behave might be more important than class size.
- D. the way teachers conduct classes affects student performance.

5. The traditional family unit

- A. is more common in Korea than in Britain.
- B. is disappearing in Korea due to high divorce rates.
- C. is bad for children that come from broken homes.
- D. is unstable in Korea due to conditions in the home.

6. According to the writer, Asian students

- A. focus too much on recreational activities.
- B. don't have as good a work ethic as British ones.
- C. don't allow themselves much time to relax and have fun.
- D. make a big deal of their good results.

7. What are the "two extremes" mentioned in the last paragraph?

- A. neglecting school and neglecting free time.
- B. good discipline and a hard work ethic.
- C. success and failure.
- D. carelessness and indiscipline.

8. Based on what you have read, what do you think is the writer's opinion of the two educational systems discussed?

- A. The Asian system is clearly better.
- B. The British system is too strict.
- C. Neither system is perfect.
- D. Both systems are quite satisfactory for different reasons.