

Abstract

Mid- and Long-term Approach to Development of the Free-semester Program: A Focus on Expanding the Program to All School Levels

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This study aims to suggest mid- and long-term approach to development of the Free-semester Program, a pioneering policy for the innovation of the Korean education system. There are three main purposes of this research: 1) to establish the necessity and significance of extending the Free-semester Program, 2) to design a model for the expansion of the Free-semester Program to education at all levels, including elementary, middle and high school, and 3) to discern the policies necessary for implementing the suggested model and use it to propose mid- and long-term measures of development. In order to address these topics, this study reviewed previous national and international research regarding free-semester programs. In addition, this study conducted expert and research group meetings, Delphi survey, focus-group interviews, and professionals' forums.

Chapter 2 explored the directions and tasks for educational reform policies by reviewing previous literature on education reform. Also, this study examined major education reform cases in Finland, Singapore, and the U.S., as well as the latest core policies on the

Free-semester Program in Korea. Results showed that competency-oriented educational reforms are being administered by states across the world. Education policies led by Korea's central government and metropolitan and provincial offices of education are also following this trend, with the Free-semester Program as the top focus.

Chapter 3 analyzed the process of promoting the Free-semester Program, advantages and potential disadvantages. In addition, it investigated the need for expanding the Free-semester Program based on existing related studies. The Free-semester Program has shown positive effects in improvement of teaching and assessment, relationships among school members, student participation, and in students' core and career competency during its trial operation phase. However, these positive outcomes seem to be limited to the free semester period. These points demonstrate the necessity of expanding the Free-semester Program to all school levels. The expansion of the Free-semester Program is necessary in order to reform school-based education in accordance with the essence of education and to link existing educational policies on teaching and learning methods, college admissions, and assessment methods. It is also needed to foster core competency of the students.

In Chapter 4, the results of the Delphi survey with professionals were presented to prepare for mid- and long-term measures of expanding the purpose and achievement of the Free-semester Program.

In Chapter 5, directions for extending the Free-semester Program and models for expansion of the program to all school levels were proposed by combining results from research group meetings and workshops, expert meetings, focus-group interviews, Delphi study, and forums. First, the following three proposals were suggested for the middle school expansion model: the linkage semester model, the free year program model, and the free middle school model. Each can be operated gradually or in phases by choosing a suitable model according to the school's circumstances and conditions. The expansion models for high school mainly feature curricula chosen by students. Three different models were suggested, depending on the free semester activities chosen: the afternoon model, the all-day model, and the split model. Lastly, regarding the expansion models for elementary school, the study suggested measures for the linkage between the Free-semester Program and the normalization and substantiality of elementary education.

Chapter 6 proposed mid- and long-term measures which can promote the Free-semester Program, focusing on issues that should be solved in order to carry out the expansion model of the Free-semester Program to all school levels. First, with respect to improvement of school record assessment in secondary school, in order to 'promote learning and convert assessment into a catalyst for growth', this study suggested various measures, such as establishment of a conceptual foundation for process-based assessment, substantiality of performance assessment, and ease of burden from competition through criterion-referenced (absolute) assessment. Second, with respect to linkage of high school and college admission, the study argued that an exemption to grade reporting during the free semester from high school and college admission, implementation of criterion-referenced assessment of school records, and a reformation enabling competency-oriented entrance examinations are necessary for the 'realization of an entrance examination system that promotes the normalization of school education.' Third, in regard to linkage with the Revised National Curriculum of 2015, the study suggested specific measures such as consolidation of autonomy in designing and operating the free-semester curriculum and preparation of implementation guidelines for the high school curriculum. Fourth, with respect to substantiality of career activities, the study proposed measures that can secure safety and continuity by establishing ties with local communities. Fifth, with respect to the enhancement of teachers' competency as a whole, methods such as offering comprehensive teacher training programs which combine educational philosophy, curriculum studies and teaching and learning, and promoting compulsory teacher training programs designed in response to life cycle were suggested. In addition, with respect to establishment of various support systems, the study proposed ways such as improving the system to enhance the quality of learning, securing an operating budget and supporting the Free-semester Program, and promoting the efficiency of manpower management using local school-to-school clusters.

In conclusion, this study proposed a comprehensive road map for the mid- and long-term development of the Free-semester Program by combining its vision, objectives and tasks with measures for future development.

Key words: Free-semester Program, mid- and long-term expansion model, educational improvement, elementary, middle, and high school education