

ABSTRACT

Improving Teacher Education Curriculum

Mi-Kyung CHUNG

Kap-Sung KIM

Josh Sung-Chang RYOO

Byeong-Chan KIM

Sang-Wan PARK

Chan-Soo MOON

■ Introduction

Diverse approaches are adopted in many places to improve educational competitiveness in preparation for the future society. In particular, *teachers* draw our special attention as the one of the most influential variables for attaining the quality of education. Thus we become more deeply interested than ever in how to raise our teachers' competencies and how to educate pre-service teachers to become excellent in-service teachers. With this research interest in mind, this research report mainly analyzes a survey on in-service teachers' opinions about, first, what the expertise, knowledge and competencies of successful teachers capable of adapting to social changes or fulfilling national policies are, and second, which elements teacher education curriculum should further emphasize in order to foster such expertise, knowledge and competencies.

The scope of teacher education curriculum reform that this research proposes is in fact beyond the scope that particular teacher education majors such as English education or mathematics education can take. Thus the proposal of this

article must be adopted as a call for reforming overall teacher-related systems such as teacher qualification process and pre-service teacher recruitment rather than only for altering the contents of curriculum at each school of education, as the whole system must cooperate to attain the ultimate goal to equip our teachers with proper experiences and knowledge. Additionally, as teacher education curriculum are managed at the level of each school of education at each university, the type of overall suggestions that this research report presents would better fit for practical contexts than specific prescriptions for every program.

■ Results

The contents of this research is as follows. First, it offers theoretical backgrounds for teacher education curriculum both to form a knowledge base for teacher education curriculum issues and to draw a link to the results of the first year's research that has been conducted on the same topic but with a different group -- pre-service teachers. Second, it explores the concept and nature of teachers' job functions, expertise and competencies to ultimately develop criteria for determining how much a specific teacher education curriculum may contribute to fostering teachers' successful performances. Third, in order to provide the priority list of significant elements to adopt in reforming teacher education curriculum, the survey was done about the *importance* of each teacher function, the *difficulty* levels that in-service teachers experience in performing each role, and the degrees to which particular teacher education curricula they have received are *helpful* in preparing them to perform each task. Fourth, it analyses the possible roles, functions, and expertise that would be additionally required for the teachers of our future society. Fifth, it offers practical implications as reference points from the analysis of several major cases of teacher education curriculum in

Finland, Japan, France and the United States. Sixth, the survey asked whether the teacher education curricula they have experienced are sufficient for preparing them to perform effectively in practice and what they would request in revising teacher education curriculum. Seventh, based upon the synthesis of the research results, it proposes the ways in which teacher education curriculum could be reformulated to booster the quality of teacher education, and presents the ideas of policy reforms and further research to realize the proposals.

In pursuing research aims as above, this research conducts a *literature review* and a series of *interviews with experts* both inside and outside of education. *In-depth interviews with in-service* teachers were conducted to examine their views about teacher roles and competencies, their own evaluations of current programs and requests for better teacher education curriculum organization. *A large scale paper-based survey* was also conducted to examine their definitions of teacher competencies, their evaluations of current curriculum and requests for any revision. *External manuscripts* were used, edited or added to cover the topics of future teachers' expertise, and international cases of teacher education systems and curricula.

The results of this research show that the *essential competencies* required for teaching profession are the capacities related to teaching and learning, interpersonal capabilities, communication skills, teacher leadership, core teacher traits (proper educational perspectives, teacher ethics, service mentality, senses of humanities). In addition, other capacities are also requested for successful teaching practice such as proper understanding of curriculum, curriculum reorganization skills, metacognitive skills, applying proper evaluation tools and teaching skills for various educational contents and students' characteristics, understanding learners, counseling skills, understanding practical issues at K-12 schools, appreciation of educational laws, conducting proper educational

administrational procedures, guidance for developing students' specialties, harmonizing theory and practice, expert knowledge of the subject matter, interdisciplinary and consilient understanding of subjects, creativity, liaison-building skills between sources inside and outside of schools, multicultural education, global education, and ecological education. This research emphasizes that teacher education curriculum must include in its organization and contents these core competencies of teaching profession.

The *requests* that in-service teachers have made through a paper-based survey and a series of in-depth interviews are as follows. The areas of roles that teachers find most difficult to perform are guidance for students' school life, management of proper interpersonal relationship with students and their parents, and practical application of teaching skills. More in particular, regarding subject matter teaching, teachers emphasized the abilities to teach for different levels of students, to adopt proper teaching skills, to interact effectively with students, to apply teaching models and theories to practice, and to coach students' hands-on experiences. Regarding guidance for students' school life, counselling skills, counselling experiences, communication skills, and understanding learners' development stages are particularly emphasized. With regard to classroom management, they pointed out understanding and embracing students' diversity, managing classroom-based programs, and experiencing related case studies in teacher preparation as the most significant elements. Concerning curriculum management, reflecting flows of situational changes, reformulating curriculum, and reflecting needs from the fields are nominated as the crucial elements by the teachers. Among parents-related roles, having the attitude toward parents and building helpful relationship with parents are emphasized. In administrative roles, document skills for proper forms, and organizing meaningful programs and events are stressed. Finally, concerning professional development, they emphasized participating in

in-service training about contemporary theories and practices, social changes, teaching skills, and practically helpful knowledge.

Regarding *reorganizing the ratio* among subject matter courses, teacher education courses and liberal arts courses in teacher education curriculum, more people voted for expanding the ratio of subject matter courses than the other types of courses. Within subject matter courses, more teachers wanted teacher education curriculum to include more courses on 'subject matter teaching' than the courses on 'subject matter contents.' For teacher education courses, respondents asked for more courses on practicum and core teacher traits. About a half of all the respondents voted for reducing many education courses (educational psychology, educational philosophy, etc.) into four categories – Understanding Education, Foundation of Educational Methods, Understanding Learners, and Understanding Teaching Profession. For liberal arts courses, they requested teacher education curriculum includes more elements on interpersonal skills, communication skills, interdisciplinary understanding between subjects, creativity development, facilitating information and media, and understanding the changes in the future society.

Regarding *teacher-related administrative systems and policy*, the respondents emphasized liaison-building between teacher education programs and the fields, reinforcing personality development, emphasizing teaching methods, focusing on communication skills, reflecting social changes, extending experiences and practicum, and educating for sacrificial devotion. Concerning teacher recruitment, they stressed the importance to evaluate teachers' personality, qualification, adaptability to the field, and the possibility of installing internship programs.

■ Conclusions

The *ideal* teacher type that this research presents is 'a teacher who owns

professional expertise and personal calling for fostering global and creative persons.' The *overall directions* recommended for the teacher education programs aimed at educating thusly conceived teachers are, first, construction of proper environments for interdisciplinary understanding of subjects matters, second, teacher education based upon core competencies for teaching profession at practical levels, third, the establishment of evaluation for teacher education programs, and finally, teacher education that takes up a leading role for social harmony.

Accordingly, the proposed types of *improvement* for teacher education curriculum are as follows. The types of teachers the new teacher education curriculum would foster are the teachers who possess creativity, rightful and ethical personality, who can successfully perform professional roles, and who can adapt to rapid social changes. The newly suggested direction for teacher education curriculum must seriously incorporate, first, harmonizing theory with practice, strengthening liaison between teacher education and K-12 schools, fostering creative minds, acquiring interdisciplinary and consilient knowledge, and developing research capacities. This report concludes with specific administrative ideas to make these goals more reachable through proper reformation of the current teacher education curriculum.

The *overall requests* that this research report concludes are as follows. First, teacher education for richer liberal arts background, wider understanding of diverse subjects of study, and broader appreciation of human society. Second, teacher education for practical knowledge, skills and attitudes readily applicable to K-12 schools scenes, which would require the mixture between theory and practice, and a closer relationship between teacher education and the fields through reinforcing practicum and internship. Third, teacher education geared only toward the people who want to become teachers, not also toward those who enter into and leave the programs without any serious

intention to be teachers. Fourth, teacher education for truly professional skills to conduct education for excellence and in-depth studies, and to autonomously manage and rearrange curriculum materials. It would be just impractical to require all the teacher education programs to embrace all these elements into their curriculum planning. Yet the practical suggestions that this report presents at the end might be useful for restructuring the current teacher education curriculum.