

## Who should become a superintendent? An analysis of stakeholders' perceptions in South Korea

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### Abstract

Along with the comprehensive restructuring of the local office of education across South Korea, the leadership role of superintendents has become a national concern. This requires an examination into the qualification and recruitment method of superintendents to sustain the restructuring effort. In this study, 2,240 stakeholders including teachers, parents, and education officials responded to a survey about their perceptions of controversial issues surrounding superintendent recruitment. Results show that stakeholders are generally dissatisfied with the current practice through which superintendents are recruited. However, there was a perception gap between school-level stakeholders and education officials, depending on their respective interests. Based on the findings, implications for improving superintendent recruitment policy are suggested.

**Keywords:** superintendent recruitment, local office of education, education reform, survey, Korean education

## Introduction

Restructuring educational administration has long been considered one of the major topics of educational reform in South Korea. Pointing out the drawbacks of the educational administration system, which had traditionally been controlled by a central authority, scholars and practitioners have insisted that the local education authority should be given more autonomy to support teachers, students, and parents (J. R. Choi, 1998; T. B. Jeong, Song, & Kim, 1998; H. J. Kim et al., 2005; Yu, 2002).

Korean educational governance is composed of three layers: The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the highest authority; 17 Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education (MPOE) are located between the MOE and 178 Local Offices of Education (LOE) at the regional level. In recent years, the problems and issues surrounding these educational authorities have been discussed and diverse reform measures have been proposed (Y. C. Choi, 2010; S. Y. Kim, 1998; Oh & Jung, 2009).

In particular, the LOE have faced a strong criticism that they are not only inappropriate but also that their duties overlap with those carried out by the upper level authorities. Therefore, it was suggested that the LOE should be restructured to provide support services such as curriculum development, consulting, and provision of educational information for elementary and secondary schools (J. R. Choi, 2003; T. B. Jeong et al., 1998; H. J. Kim et al., 2005). However, this has not been successful so far. Along with the launch of the Lee Myung-bak government in 2008, which emphasized competition, autonomy and decentralization as the key principles of government administration, the LOE reform was ignited. Eventually, on September 1, 2010, the name 'Local Office of Education' was changed to the 'Local Support Office of Education (LSOE)' to make sure that the office provides supporting services (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology [MEST], 2010).

The painstaking reform process has resulted in the recognition that the leadership of the superintendent is essential for executing the revised functions successfully (Hwang, Hyun, Kim, & Jang, 2011). Nevertheless, superintendents have not received much attention in recent years, and have become "invisible CEOs" (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Despite their importance as the head of the LOE, the average length of service was only one and a half years. In most cases, they were appointed by the state superintendents from the pool of school principals approaching retirement age.

Superintendents were criticized for their failure to demonstrate active and creative leadership roles (Ro, Song, & Shin, 2002), so it is not surprising that unprecedented attention was given to the qualification of superintendents and how to recruit them (Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education, 2010). Superintendent appointment methods had several limitations, such as failing to attract young and capable candidates who have visions for change. In addition, more often than not, those who had contributed to the election process of the state superintendents were appointed, revealing a typical negative effect of the electoral system. The appointment process itself was also in question, lacking proper measures to verify

the qualifications, competence, and leadership abilities of the candidates.

As an attempt to overcome the drawbacks of the appointment method, several LOEs have adopted an open competition system, in which a superintendent was selected through open competition among candidates. However, the effort has not yet been satisfactory due to the problems associated with the operational limitations. Especially, conflicting interests among educational stakeholders have provided momentum for controversies over the appropriate qualifications and recruitment methods for superintendents. The interest of parents and teachers, who gained power in the selection process under the newly adopted open competition method, is much different from that of education officials, who used to control the superintendent recruitment process under the conventional appointment method. Parents and teachers no longer consider themselves just passive beneficiaries; instead, they try to participate in education as active decision makers. The transformation of the LOEs to LSOEs is just one example showing this change.

Therefore, it is becoming increasingly necessary to explore the perception of diverse stakeholders on the recruitment method as well as the qualifications of superintendents who would successfully lead the newly reformed LOE. Nevertheless, no significant progress has been made in studies on superintendents, along with their qualifications and recruitment methods. The purpose of this study is to analyze the perception of educational stakeholders of the required competencies, qualifications, and recruitment methods for superintendents, which are demanded after the restructuring of the LOEs, in order to draw implications for superintendent recruitment policies.

Our research questions were: (1) What are the characteristics of superintendents serving at LSOEs? (2) What are the competencies and the qualifications newly required of superintendents since the reform of LSOEs? (3) What are the appropriate recruitment methods for superintendents? (4) What are the qualifications to become a superintendent and how can his/her professional expertise be developed?

## Superintendents: An overview

### The structure of educational administration and the duties of superintendents

As of April 2013, the local governance of educational administration consists of 17 MPOEs and 178 LSOEs. The numbers and jurisdictions of the LSOEs vary depending on the MPOEs, which are clarified in the 'Enforcement Decree of the Local Education Autonomy Act.' The state superintendent, who is the administrative chief of each MPOE, is in charge of the K-12 school education within the jurisdiction. As South Korea has adopted the local education autonomy system since 1991, the educational administrative body exists separate from the general administrative body, and state superintendents are elected by the direct vote of the citizens. LSOEs,

which are the lower level organizations under the MPOEs established to deal with educational administrative duties, are led by local superintendents. Although some are selected through open competition process, most are appointed by the state superintendent. To be considered qualified, they should have administrative and teaching experience. If they served as a school principal or a supervisor at the LSOE level, this would satisfy the administrative experience demand.

Local superintendents lead and supervise the public and private K-12 schools within the jurisdiction, based on the 'Local Education Autonomy Act (Article 35)' and the 'Enforcement Decree' of the same act. In addition, they are in charge of personnel affairs of vice-principals and teachers, while principals and supervisors are appointed by the state superintendents. The duties of the local superintendent cover a wide range of areas, including matters pertaining to: 1) the curriculum, such as teaching-learning activities, career guidance of students, recruitment and management of instructors, 2) advancing science and technology education, 3) education welfare, such as special education, education for learning difficulties and supporting students from low-income families, 4) students' safety and health, such as physical education, healthcare, school meals, and maintaining safe school environments, 5) the zoning of the students' commutes to school, 6) parental participation in school affairs, workshops and counseling for parents, and the operation of the school council, 7) life-long learning, 8) other duties concerning the operation and the management of each school, such as budget planning and executing, tuition, and registration fees.

## The changing leadership of superintendents

These days, superintendents are perceived as those who actually determine whether schools can satisfy the needs of students. Therefore, a variety of roles, which are different from traditional roles, are required of them. For example, the superintendent should adopt the multiple roles of "a moral steward of the system," "a strategic leader," "a representative of the school system," "a protector of the school system from the environment," "a mediator of the relationship between the school system and external organizations," "a planner and an executor of the professional development programs," and "a director of resource allocation and policy implementation" (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2008, p. 210).

After the restructuring of the LOE as the LSOE, expectations of the roles of Korean superintendents are changing. Previously, superintendents had been perceived as the head of local education, the subordinate of the state superintendent, and an administrator of school education. Since the reform, however, they have been expected to focus more on promoting local education; serving the teachers, students, and parents; and maintaining collaborative relations among local education stakeholders.

Scholars have suggested different leadership roles for superintendents. For example, Hayes (2001) emphasized strategic leadership by arguing that

superintendents should be top analysts, with sufficient competence to analyze the demands of community members, not to mention school staff and parents within the jurisdiction. In the current environment, where stakeholders' demands conflict and educational resources are increasingly scarce, superintendents should have the political skills to induce support from stakeholders whose behaviors affect the education of children (Sergiovanni et al., 2008).

Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, and Koff (2005) reiterated the importance of organizational leadership. Superintendents should have professional expertise in managing the curriculum, personnel affairs, and finances, which would eventually make them accountable for student achievement.

Superintendents should also exercise community leadership. As superintendents spend more time outside their office or schools than before, the network management ability of superintendents becomes more important (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Superintendents should have strong interpersonal skills so they can induce cooperation among members in various educational and cultural organizations, as well as have access to their resources (Fuller et al., 2003). In this process, they should be able to build trust with local residents and school staff (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Moral leadership constitutes the last leadership role required of superintendents, which gathers particular attention in South Korea. This refers to the mindset to communicate with various local organizations and school personnel in a democratic manner (Owen & Ovando, 2000). Superintendents try to serve the school and community by applying ethics in overcoming challenges, while behaving ethically and demonstrating a fair and responsible attitude.

## Superintendent recruitment methods and controversies

Superintendents are recruited by three different methods in South Korea. The appointment method is the most common, and is widely practiced; the open competition and recommendation methods supplement the appointment method.

Under the appointment method, the personnel office of the MPOEs confidentially selects candidates to be appointed by the state superintendent. Since the state superintendent has the authority to appoint the candidate, he/she can choose someone who fits with his/her vision of education and who will carry forward the local education policies with consistency. This method enables the state superintendent to manage the organization with maximum stability. However, there are also drawbacks to this method. The state superintendent may choose the local superintendents from his/her own private network, usually from senior supervisors working at the MPOE. Also, it is hard to verify the competencies and qualifications of candidates in an open and competitive manner.

The open competition method (OCM) has been introduced to overcome the problems associated with the appointment method. Under the OCM, candidates

apply for the position publically, and the selection is made through open competition. A selection committee, composed of 10 to 15 members, is organized to evaluate the candidates through document review and interview. Representatives of parents and teachers, experts from the community such as lawyers and professors, community leaders, and sometimes educators recommended by the teachers' unions participate in the committee, in addition to personnel officials at the MPOE. Upon completing the selection process, the committee recommends three candidates, out of whom the state superintendent makes the final selection.

This method can reflect the different opinions of diverse stakeholders, such as teachers and parents. Also, the candidates' qualifications and leadership skills and styles can be examined openly. More importantly, this method helps identify and select more competent candidates, since the personnel matters can be brought into a public forum. However, the OCM is not exempt from criticism either. For example, fairness and objectivity of the competition are not yet guaranteed (MEST, 2010). Another issue is that candidates tend to avoid disadvantaged regions, which may result in highly qualified candidates deliberately not choosing these regions.

The recommendation method is a combination of the appointment method and the OCM. Its selection process is similar to the appointment method, while the process of identifying candidates is different. Since the candidates are identified and recommended by the search committee in an open manner, the pool of candidates can be expanded, and the applicants can be evaluated through a multi-stage evaluation process for optimal objectivity and transparency.

It is at the state superintendent's discretion to adopt an appropriate recruitment method for each metropolitan city or province. However, the need to move away from the appointment method is gaining public support. Nevertheless, it is still controversial to expand the OCM nationwide, as stakeholders have different opinions, depending on their perspectives and interests.

There are also controversies surrounding the qualifications and the competencies of superintendents. For example, there is a debate over whether experience as a teacher or school administrator is essential to becoming a superintendent. Since candidates should have many years of service as a teacher or school administrator to be qualified as a candidate, their older age may hinder demonstrating change-oriented leadership. In addition, people outside of the education field have a very limited chance of being appointed.

As the role of superintendent is becoming more and more professionalized, scholars and practitioners assert that a professional preparation course or superintendent license needs to be introduced. For example, to become a superintendent in the United States, a person must complete a professional preparation course, which is equivalent to a graduate degree, and acquire a license (Kowalski, 2006). These kinds of traditional requirements, however, sometimes prevent the inflow of capable leaders in the area of political or economic sectors (English, 2003). In South Korea, however, the main issue is the absence of any pre-service program for superintendents, through which their professionalism can be

cultivated. However, given that there are only 178 superintendent positions across the country, the need for such courses or programs is still up for debate.

## Methods

This study was conducted by analyzing documentary data on the superintendent recruitment system of MPOEs, and by conducting a survey. For the first research question, on clarifying the characteristics of Korean superintendents, data on the age, years of service, recruitment method, and career as a principal of the superintendents were collected from the 16 MPOEs. A data collection sheet was developed by the research team and sent to the MPOEs with the help of the Ministry of Education (MOE), who commissioned this study. Officers in charge of personnel matters at the MPOEs filled out the form and returned it to the research team.

Meanwhile, a survey was conducted for the other three research questions. The sample consisted of four groups: the MPOE officials, the LSOE officials, school teachers and administrators, and parents. The groups were selected by cluster sampling.

For the MPOE official group, a total of 160 officials were selected by sampling 10 officials from each of the 16 MPOEs around the country. For the LSOE official group, 225 officials were selected by sampling 5 officials from 45 of the 180 LSOEs. The 45 LSOEs include all of the 15 LSOEs with experience of the OCM and 30 LSOEs with no experience of it. The OCM is new, so it has never been executed in most LSOEs. With an assumption that there must be a difference in views on the superintendent recruitment system between the experienced and the inexperienced LSOEs, 30 LSOEs, twice the number of the experienced LSOEs, were randomly sampled to analyze the difference in a balanced way. For the school teacher and administrator groups, 1,890 teachers and administrators were sampled from 270 elementary and secondary schools, randomly selected within the same 45 LSOEs. Seven people from each school were sampled, including the principal, the deputy principal, department heads, and classroom teachers.

For the parent group, 810 parents were sampled by selecting 3 parents from each of the 270 sampled schools. Parents in our sample were all members of the School Council (SC), which is the legal school governing body, composed of teachers, parents, and community leaders. Since the parent members of the SC usually take part in the educational decision making process both inside and outside of the school, they know the policies concerning school matters better than other parents. There are 5 or 6 parent members in the SC, so approximately half of the parent members in each school were sampled.

The survey was conducted online for two weeks between October 15 and October 28, 2010. The URL for survey access was sent to the MPOEs, the LSOEs, and

the schools via an electronic document system, so the survey subjects could access the URL directly and respond to it anonymously. The MOE helped the research team by disseminating the URL to respondents.

The survey instrument containing items about superintendents' duties and qualifications, the current recruitment method, and the qualifications newly required of the superintendent was developed. It was then reviewed for its content validity by scholars and researchers in educational administration and leadership studies, current superintendents, and MPOE officials. For each survey item, participants were asked to respond on the 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree '1,' disagree '2,' neutral '3,' agree '4,' and strongly agree '5'). For questions on the appropriate recruitment method and years of service, the respondents were asked to choose the one closer to their opinion among the suggested statements.

The survey data collected was analyzed utilizing the SPSS 12.0 for Windows (IBM, Armonk, NY). To see if there is a difference among the four groups' perceptions on recruitment method, the competencies, and the qualifications of the superintendents, an *F*-test was conducted. To check if there was a statistical difference among the sampled groups, the Scheffé test was conducted. Finally, the  $\chi^2$  test was performed to compare perceptions on the appropriate recruitment method and years of service.

## Results

A total of 2,320 people, including 1,597 teachers and administrators (68.8%), 453 parents (19.5%), 169 LSOE officials (7.3%), and 101 MPOE officials (4.4%) responded to our request for participation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey respondents

Groups	Respondents	%
Teachers and administrators	1,597	68.8
Parents	453	19.5
LSOE officials	169	7.3
MPOE officials	101	4.4
Total	2,320	100.0

### The characteristics of superintendents in South Korea

As of April 2010, which was before the LOE was reformed to the LSOE, the characteristics of superintendents working in the 180 LOEs nationwide are as follows. In terms of recruitment methods, 96 of the 180 LOEs (53.3%) adopted the



appointment method, 69 (38.8%) adopted the recommendation method, and only 15 (8.3%) adopted the OCM. While the state superintendent can decide how to recruit their superintendents, the data show that they prefer the appointment method (see Table 2).

Table 2. Recruiting status of superintendents in South Korea (2010, April)

Type of recruitment	No. of LOEs (%)	Average Age	Experience as a principal			Average years of experience as a supervisor
			1st Term (%)	2nd Term (%)	Total	
Appointment	96 (53.3)	59.5	74 (77.1)	22 (22.9)	96 (100)	7 yrs 1 month
Recommendation	69 (38.3)	59.4	62 (89.9)	7 (10.1)	69 (100)	5 yrs 7 months
Open competition	15 (8.3)	59.8	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)	15 (100)	5 yrs 5 months
Total	180 (100)	59.5	146 (81.1)	34 (18.9)	180 (100)	6 yrs 5 months

The average age of superintendents was 59.5, leaving them only 2.5 years to serve prior to retirement at the age of 62. This was 1.5 years higher than the average age of principals nationwide (Korean Educational Development Institute [KEDI], 2010). The average age of the superintendents selected by the OCM was even higher than that of the superintendents selected by the appointment and recommendation methods. All of them had served as principals before they became superintendents, and 18.9% served two 4-year terms of service. They also had served as supervisors for an average of 6 years and 5 months before they were employed as superintendents. Supervisors are officers working at the MPOEs or LSOEs, dealing with inspection and supervision of schools and teachers. Teachers become supervisors through a demanding competitive process. Since the supervisor and principal qualifications are interchangeable, supervisors serve as principals during their service.

A look at these characteristics reveals that superintendents in South Korea are veteran educators who have only a little more than 2 years of service before retirement. Also, they become superintendents mostly by appointment and the recommendation method after serving as supervisors and as principals.

## The competencies and qualifications newly required of superintendents

The mean response to the question of whether the competencies and qualifications required of superintendents be changed, based on the organizational reforms, was 3.95 out of 5 (see Table 3). Parents showed the strongest positive response, with a mean of 4.19, followed by teachers and administrators (3.98), MPOE officials (3.43), and LSOE officials (3.41). The mean difference among the groups was statistically significant at the level of .001.

Table 3. Perception of the need to change the competencies and qualifications of superintendents along with the LOE reform

Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t/F</i>	Scheffé test
Teachers & Administrators (a)	1,597	3.98	.989	34.892*	a < b
Parents (b)	453	4.19	.788		a > c
LSOE officials (c)	169	3.41	1.265		a > d
MPOE officials (d)	101	3.43	1.252		
Total	2,320	3.95	1.011		

\* $p < .001$ .

The 2,320 respondents were asked to evaluate the 10 items of the competencies and the qualifications, which had been demanded of the newly reformed LSOE superintendents, on a 5-point Likert scale, based on the importance of each item. The item with the strongest agreement from respondents was, 'the attitude as a public officer such as integrity, faithfulness, sense of responsibility,' with a mean of 4.76. This was followed by 'the attitude toward open communication with the Office of Education officials' (4.54), 'the leadership as an educational administrator and the trust from the local educational community' (4.52), and 'the planning ability to propose the vision and the direction of the local education development' (4.49) (see Table 4). Overall, the personality traits as a public officer, such as the fundamental attitude and trust, were ranked higher in importance than the competencies, such as managing, analyzing, and planning abilities. Obedience and devotion to the higher administrative authorities or superiors was not valued much.

Table 4. Perception of the importance of the competencies and qualifications of superintendents along with the LOE reform

Classification	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Ranking
Attitude as a public officer, such as integrity, faithfulness, sense of responsibility	4.76 (.497)	1
Attitude toward open communication with the Office of Education officials	4.54 (.624)	2
Leadership as an educational administrator and trust from the local educational community	4.52 (.652)	3
Planning ability to propose the vision and the direction of local education development	4.49 (.641)	4
Ability to understand and analyze the local demands on education	4.48 (.613)	5
Ability to establish and create excitement around local educational policies	4.46 (.668)	6
Attitude as a service provider for schools and residents	4.44 (.677)	7
Professional knowledge on curriculum, personnel affairs, and finance	4.35 (.704)	8
Network management ability to acquire human and physical resources for the local community	4.33 (.683)	9
Devotion to the Metropolitan Provincial Office of Education and State Superintendent	3.84 (1.047)	10

## Recruitment method and length of service

64.2% indicated a preference for the open competition method, when given a choice between it and the appointment method (see Table 5). Parents (85.0%), along with the teachers and administrators (64.6%), mostly supported the open competition method, in contrast with MPOE and LSOE officials, who mostly supported the appointment method (76.2% and 71.0%, respectively). This difference was statistically significant at the level of .001.

Table 5. Preferred recruitment method

Groups	Appointment method (%)	Open competition method (%)	Total (%)	$\chi^2$
Teachers & Administrators	566 (35.4)	1,031 (64.6)	1,597 (100)	248.208*
Parents	68 (15.0)	385 (85.0)	453 (100)	
LSOE officials	120 (71.0)	49 (29.0)	169 (100)	
MPOE officials	77 (76.2)	24 (23.8)	101 (100)	
Total	831 (35.8)	1,489 (64.2)	2,320 (100.0)	

\* $p < .001$ .

46.2% of respondents thought that 3 years was the appropriate term for a superintendent, followed by 2 years (30.1%). Just over one fifth of respondents thought each province should decide its own term length (see Table 6). Teachers, administrators, and parents preferred 3 years, while the MPOE and LSOE officials preferred 2 years. Given the fact that most LSOEs specify superintendents' terms as two years in their regulations, and the actual term of the superintendents is far shorter than that, it is clearly understood that the stakeholders at the school level want the term to be extended. This difference was statistically significant at the level of .001.

Table 6. Appropriate superintendent service period

Groups	1-year (%)	2-year (%)	3-year (%)	Authority decides (%)	Total (%)	$\chi^2$
Teachers & Administrators	11 (0.7)	450 (28.2)	777 (48.7)	359 (22.5)	1,597 (100)	60.797*
Parents	5 (1.1)	125 (27.6)	225 (49.7)	98 (21.6)	453 (100)	
LSOE officials	2 (1.2)	80 (47.3)	47 (27.8)	40 (23.7)	169 (100)	
MPOE officials	0 (0.0)	44 (43.6)	23 (22.8)	34 (33.7)	101 (100)	
Total	18 (0.8)	699 (30.1)	1,072 (46.2)	531 (22.9)	2,320 (100.0)	

\* $p < .001$ .

## Qualifications and developing professional expertise of superintendents

There was strong support (4.18) for the need for superintendents to have experience in educational administration (see Table 7). LSOE officials (4.59) and MPOE officials (4.56) were stronger in their agreement that this was necessary than teachers and administrators (4.18) and parents (3.95), which was a statistically significant difference at the level of .001.

Table 7. Necessity of educational administration experience for superintendents

Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t/F</i>	Scheffé Test
Teachers & Administrators (a)	1,597	4.18	.922	27.147*	a > b
Parents (b)	453	3.95	.971		a < c
LSOE officials (c)	169	4.59	.583		a < d
MPOE officials (d)	101	4.56	.590		b < c
Total	2,320	4.18	.915		b < d

\* $p < .001$ .

There was less agreement regarding whether there was a need for a superintendent certificate system, with a mean of 2.88. Parents were in strongest support of this (3.39), followed by teachers and administrators (2.85), LSOE officials (2.33), and MPOE officials (1.90). The difference in means is statistically significant at the level of .001. Thus, only the parent group is positive, while other groups had negative perceptions of the certificate system (see Table 8). There was equally minimal support for the need for a professional preparation course for superintendents, with a mean of 2.76 (see Table 9). Responses by group were similar to those for a superintendent certification system.

Table 8. Necessity of a superintendent certificate system

Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t/F</i>	Scheffé test
Teachers & Administrators (a)	1,597	2.85	1.161	68.635*	a < b, a > c
Parents (b)	453	3.39	1.045		a > d, b > c
LSOE officials (c)	169	2.33	1.252		b > d, c > d
MPOE officials (d)	101	1.90	.985		
Total	2,320	2.88	1.188		

\* $p < .001$ .

Table 9. Necessity of a professional preparation course

Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t/F</i>	Scheffé test
Teachers & Administrators (a)	1,597	2.69	1.188	61.182*	a < b
Parents (b)	453	3.35	1.098		a > c
LSOE officials (c)	169	2.36	1.197		a > d
MPOE officials (d)	101	2.02	1.068		b > c
Total	2,320	2.76	1.211		b > d

\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Most respondents agreed that the competence and the qualification of a superintendent, who is the head of the LSOE, needed to be changed along with the reform of LSOEs; parents, in particular, agreed strongly with this view. This shows the educational consumers' robust recognition that superintendents should have the competences and qualifications to bring innovations and advancements to the local education, as the keynotes of educational administration have been laid in localization, decentralization, and liberalization (Lee & Yang, 2013). We also found that the most important qualifications were perceived to be personal characteristics, such as the attitudes and trust as a public servant and educational leadership. This shows that educational stakeholders hold negative views of the current superintendent role, which emphasizes passive obedience to higher administrative authorities or superiors. There were clearly contrasting views between the groups of teachers and administrators, parents, and MPOE and LSOE officials regarding the appropriate recruitment method and years of service; those at the school level preferred the open competition method and a three-year term, and the officials preferred the appointment method and a two-year term.

This result seems to reflect the extent of their influences on the superintendent recruitment system. Under the appointment method, the state superintendent's view or the MPOE's stance is considered seriously, while the views of stakeholders at the school level are not valued as much. However, under the open competition method, teachers and parents take part in the superintendent recruitment process through a selection committee. A recently published policy report confirms that autonomy at the school level is far from being satisfactory, although some educational power, thanks to the decentralization effort, has been delegated from the central MOE to the local education authorities (Hwang et al., 2011). This seems to be the reason for et al., teachers', administrators', and parents' strong preference for the OCM, as they can influence the selection process.

Nowadays, educational stakeholders tend to act systematically in pursuit of collective advantages, rather than pursuing an individual goal within a limited range (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Knight, 1992). However, education officers also try to maximize their own interests, fearing they would lose their vested rights, which often becomes an obstacle for educational reform (Grindle, 2004). In this vein, Kang (2001) indicated that Korean bureaucrats' resistance to reforms initiated by political leaders is often successful, as politicians heavily rely on bureaucrats for policy making and implementation, which presents a challenge for successful reform of LSOEs.

Regarding the service term, stakeholders at the school level felt that the superintendents should carry out the leadership role for a longer period of time. For teachers in South Korea, in particular, the burden of miscellaneous work tasks, such as handling official documents, on top of classroom teaching, has been a chronic problem. The LSOEs send out more official documents than any other authorities or

organizations (Choi & Park, 2010; Y. S. Jeong, Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2012). Along with the change of superintendent, the schools within a jurisdiction have to adopt new plans proposed by the new leader. This certainly distresses teachers and makes them prefer a more stable superintendent leadership. A slightly different reason was provided by Waters and Marzano (2006), who proved that the length of service of superintendents has a significant impact on improving student achievement. School level stakeholders desire longer superintendent service terms as they are more concerned about the achievement of their students. For them, the two-year term seems too short to see any improvement of outcomes.

Candidates' experience in educational administration is the most demanded qualification. This view is supported by the recent perceptions of superintendents, which focus more on their role as instructional leaders who can improve curricula and instruction, rather than their role as supervisors (Petersen & Barnett, 2005). Spillane and Louis (2002) pointed out that it is crucial for the superintendent to have teaching experience to understand and support teachers better. This supports the argument that to serve as a superintendent in South Korea, it is essential to have the experience in teaching and/or educational administration. In this matter, school-level stakeholders and educational authorities agree.

Becoming an educational administrator as a supervisor or a principal requires more than 10 years of experience in addition to passing the promotion course or the supervisor exams. Therefore, under the current recruitment system, a person from outside of the education sector has a low chance of being selected as a superintendent. So far, nobody without experience in teaching and/or educational administration has been selected as a superintendent. Certainly, there are a few studies that demonstrated that someone with a non-traditional background had better performance and leadership than someone with a traditional background, such as teaching and/or educational administration experience (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Nevertheless, considering the overt, exclusivity-based culture in South Korea, it could be an issue that the inflow of competent outside personnel is blocked at its source.

Lastly, the perceptions around introducing a certificate system and establishing a professional preparation course program to enhance the professional expertise of superintendents are exceedingly negative. This reflects the view that, although the certificate system exists for school principals, the superintendents do not need to be either certified or provided with a professional preparation course since they serve only for a short period of time and have no visible roles or responsibilities. Given that the U.S., which has traditionally adopted the superintendent certification system, is gradually easing the requirements or moving toward abolishing the system (Kowalski & Glass, 2002), moving the authority to set requirements to local boards of education (Feistritz, 2003), adopting the certificate system does not seem to be urgent. Nevertheless, for the LSOE to perform its newly given duty as a supporting organization, the professional expertise and leadership of the superintendent is very important. Therefore, more in-depth research on the alternative mechanisms that can enhance the professionalism and the leadership of superintendents is essential.

## Conclusion and implications

As the LSOE, which had been a bureaucratic organization focusing on management and supervision, was extensively reformed in its functions and structures and moved toward a supportive organization, this study was conducted with the purpose of identifying the ideal characteristics of the superintendent leads the organization. It also aimed to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the qualifications required of superintendents, the competencies and the qualifications, and the appropriate recruitment system. Based on the perceptions of stakeholders, such as school teachers and administrators, parents, and MPOE and LSOE officials, who have an interest in the qualifications and recruitment of the superintendents, the following conclusion and implications were drawn.

First, the superintendents in South Korea, as of April 2010, were mainly senior personnel with only about 2 years before retirement. Most superintendents were selected through the appointment or the recommendation methods, after working as supervisors and principals. This finding supports the view that the superintendent position has become the final opportunity for those who had served as an MPOE or LSOE official and a principal before retirement. It does not support the view that the position leads change and improvement in schools and student achievement. This implies that a new approach to the issue of who should become a superintendent is necessary.

Second, along with the restructuring of the LSOEs, the competencies and the qualifications of the superintendent should be changed. As we found, the demand for change was very strong, by stakeholders' both at the school and education office levels, which means that they had been dissatisfied with the competencies and qualifications of superintendents. The stakeholders put even higher importance on superintendents' moral characters, valuing characteristics such as integrity, sincerity, sense of responsibility, willingness for democratic communication, and trust from the local education sector, more than professional expertise in managing, analyzing, and planning. This shows that, for a superintendent to demonstrate his or her educational leadership in South Korea, respectful character and attitude are much more important. Therefore, the selection process should not be focused on the visible information such as career background and performance; rather, the selection criteria and the procedures should be realigned so that the candidates' philosophical values, character, and reputations can be systematically verified.

Third, the stakeholders at the school level prefer the open competition method to the appointment method because they want that a superintendent with 'supportive leadership,' which is appropriate for the LSOE functions focusing on supporting schools. Accordingly, it is necessary to break away from the conventional recruitment method and open the door to younger and more competent candidates. It is also necessary to secure fairness and clarity in the selection process by establishing a thorough and open verification process for the candidates. In addition, to secure the stability of the local education operation and use the accumulated

professionalism to its maximum, it is necessary to examine the extension of the superintendent's term.

Fourth, although it is important to accumulate professionalism experience to perform the superintendent's duties well, we found that both school- and education office-level stakeholders do not view as important the addition of a certificate system or establishment of a professional preparation course for superintendents. Therefore, it would be better to cultivate the knowledge and skills by reinforcing the existing programs before and after the selection process, rather than adopting a new system.

For the past years, the superintendent position in South Korea has not been well recognized. Accordingly, the issues surrounding the competencies and the qualifications required of superintendents, as well as the recruitment methods, have not been fully discussed. This study was conducted at a time when the LOE had reformed itself both name and function. Hence, it is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to securing competent superintendents who can fulfill their duties for local education development.

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