

Problems and Issues of, and the Course of Development for, Korea's Teacher Training System

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I. Introduction

To secure excellent teachers is not only a factor that determines the future of education, but also a core element in a nation's development. In the coming knowledge-based society, the teachers should preserve high intellectual ability and academic excellence. They have to have pride as teachers who are professionals imbued with a sense of mission and endeavor for continuous self-innovation.

Such a call of an era has created a momentum to reflect upon the role and function of teacher training colleges, thereby highlighting, most of all, the issue of restructuring teacher training institutions. This kind of issue can be a very sensitive matter for it touches on the vested interests of involved parties.

Hence, it is no surprise to frequently come across various arguments that are intended either not to damage one's own interest, or to persuade others to support protecting one's own interest. Now, however, we have to have an understanding that such pursuit of individual interests may bring about the total collapse of the entire teacher training institutions. Thus, we ought to proceed with the discussion of the teacher training system only after we understand clearly what the current problems we face are and what the causes of those problems are.

To seek an alternative to the existing system whenever a systemic problem arises, even without analyzing the causes of the problem, may be a very irresponsible attitude. Respecting this kind of prudent approach, this paper intends first, to analyze the problems of Korea's teacher

training system and the related issues and second, to seek a course of development for the system.

II. Problems

The following is a systemic-theoretical account of the major problems inherent in Korea's teacher training system.

First, seen from the aspect of input element, due to the absence of a clear educational goal, identity of the teacher training institutions has not been well established. All the training institutions for the teachers at kindergarten, elementary, and secondary school levels lack clearly defined educational goals, so that their educational content remains colorless and ambiguous in nature. Moreover, the absence of identity is also shown in the fact that the training curriculum is not suitable for raising professionalism of the trainees since it fails to address the need of the educational scene.

Another problem is the fact that the support structure for managing the curriculum efficiently, for instance, facilities, instructional material, and teaching staff, remains insufficient. And the number of professors is particularly troubling; far more professors for subject-teaching programs are needed. In general, both in teachers' colleges and the teacher training programs of universities, the number of students per a course tends to exceed the feasible class size by a great margin, often compromising effectiveness of the training programs.

Second, in terms of procedural element, teacher internship training should be viewed as a crucial procedure of the teacher training curriculum, however, it tends to be managed in a superficial manner and thus, gets neglected. Many teacher training colleges lack affiliated schools and an office devoted to the internship training. Furthermore, general negligence of professors toward the internship training results in formalistic and inefficient supervision of the training programs.

It is also problematic that the curriculum of teacher training institutions is supervised in a way that is rather irrelevant to actual school curriculum. Middle school and high school, in particular, are completely separate from one another in terms of school system as well as in their establishment goals or educational contents. However, teachers of both middle school and high school are trained in the teacher training colleges by an identical curriculum and without any distinction.

Third, seen from the aspect of output element, teacher training institutions of both secondary school and kindergarten are too diversified. As a result, every year, the training institutions produce provisional teachers whose numbers far exceed the actual employment capacity of secondary schools and kindergarten; excessive supply of teachers has become a serious problem. Consequently, there exists a great accumulation of unemployed teachers, which makes it difficult to control supply and demand of the teaching force. Also, such a trouble has an effect of making excellent students turn away from the teaching vocation and thus causes lowering of teacher quality.

It is also problematic that the teacher certifying method applied to the graduates of teacher training institutions does not recognize the qualitative gap among different teacher training institutions. Especially, certificate conferring based on document evaluation takes only credit point accumulation into consideration without examining other critical qualities, such as character disposition suitable for teaching, healthy view of education, and actual instructional ability.

Fourth, seen from the element of circulation, in order to train and secure excellent teachers equipped with professional capacity and ability, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, local offices of education, and teacher training institutions should maintain close collaborative relationship despite their idiosyncratic roles and functions. But it should be acknowledged that the distribution of roles and functions among the three parties remain unclear and the collaborative

system is weak. As a result, teacher training institutions have difficulty in sharing the information on available resources, facilities, data, and professors in a way that helps effective curricular supervision. Such is another factor that stands in the way of developing the teacher training institutions.

III. Major Issues

1. The "Close(goal-oriented)" and the "Open" Institutions of Teacher Training

The "goal-oriented" refers to the way in which the government establishes a specialized institution for a unitary goal of teacher training and manages it independent of other general universities. The "open" refers to the way in which general universities offer teacher training via diverse methods without establishing an institution devoted to the specialized goal of teacher training.

The former gives advantage to the state in easily controlling the quality and quantity of the teaching force; its weakness lies in the direct state control, which is susceptible to making training program uniform and closed. In contrast, the latter has the strength in producing diverse and uniquely talented teachers; but it can suffer the absence of systematic and planned training program due to loss of the sense of goal and weak professionalism.

Advocates of the open style claim that teacher training be autonomous at the institutional level and the teachers be hired through free competition. That is, the best method to attract excellent human talent to teaching vocation is, they claim, to train future teachers in diverse institutions via diverse methods and select competitive individuals through an examination. Meanwhile, those who advocate the goal-oriented style object the open style in considerations of the possible

problems that are likely to arise from the diversified training system, such as many problems caused by the imbalance between supply and demand of teaching force, difficulty involved in making unique teacher training happen, and difficulty of controlling the teacher quality. Particularly, they argue that the goal-oriented style, rather than the open, is more effective in attracting excellent students to teaching, on grounds that students avoid teaching job more after implementation of the teacher-hiring examination than before the implementation and that the academic level of those newly entering the teacher training institutions has gone down after the implementation of the examination.

Recent debate surrounding the teacher training system tends to be less focused on the issue of the open style vs. the goal-oriented style, than on integration of the teacher education institutions, namely, integration of the universities of education and teachers' colleges.

2. Integration of the Teacher Education Institutions

Those who argue for the integration of the teacher education institutions, particularly that of the universities of education and teachers' colleges, claim that since the present national curriculum sets the basic curriculum as a ten-year course, teacher training should also be conducted under an integrated system. Concrete points of the integration include: first, extending the length of compulsory education; second, raising efficiency in investing the national budget and streamlining unchecked establishing of teacher education institutions; third, promoting the exchange between the two kinds of institutions in academic information and human resources; and fourth, forming diverse curricula.

The method of integration can be largely categorized into the following two: first, to establish an independent university that encompasses training of the teachers at both elementary and secondary school levels; and second, to establish a single undergraduate course or a

college within universities after integrating the separate institutions.

The former, advocates of establishing an independent 'teacher education university,' argue for integrating the universities of education and teachers' colleges and establishing an independent university dedicated to training future teachers for all school levels, i.e., kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school; it is tantamount to establishing the goal-oriented teacher training institutions.

Among these advocates, some also call for expanding the current universities of education to general universities of education in order to solve the problems faced by the current universities, for instance, the meager size that hinders effective management and the unitary curricular organization that obstructs diverse educational experiences of students. Weakness of this argument lies in securing the massive budget to purchase necessary land and construct the facility and buildings. Also, protest of some universities of education and teachers' colleges is also expected.

On the other hand, those who call for establishing the 'education college' within the existing universities intend to integrate universities of education with neighboring national and public universities. By doing so, they claim, curriculum can be diversified, so that educational experience of students will be broadened. They present the cases of the colleges of medicine and law, which belong to universities, in which their students take general education courses before beginning professional training.

This method has strength in the fact that the integration procedure would not require separate budget. But those who are against it argue that such integration will impoverish the educational content uniquely suitable for raising elementary and secondary school teachers and that the process of integration would unavoidably face conflict among involved parties.

3. Establishing Graduate Courses

The proposal for raising teachers in graduate schools is supported by many for it can raise the status of teachers by enhancing qualification of teachers. But a question remains as to how many students will apply to the course despite the lengthened training years. A similar question can be asked about whether or not the graduates can receive better treatment worthy of such lengthened training period. Therefore, critiques point out, this proposal cannot be implemented until the problem of upgrading the teacher status is solved. Also, there arises a concern that even after this problem is solved, mere lengthening of the training period would face identity crisis unless professionalism in teacher training course is insured.

However, it should be acknowledged that the undergraduate course alone is not sufficient to cover all of the teacher training curriculum, that is, general education, general study of education, study of subject content, study of the educational dimension of a subject, and internship training. Hence, in consideration of the fact that school education demands opening of diverse school subjects, some advocate majoring double or plural disciplines.

Specific methods to implement the graduate course training proposed thus far can be classified largely into two categories: '2+4' and '4+2.' The '4+2' method includes two methods. According to the first method, a trainee takes a four-year course in a teacher training university, passes the teacher hiring examination, and works as an apprentice teacher while taking a two-year master's degree course. According to the second one, a trainee takes a four-year university course, passes an examination that tests one's knowledge in subject content, and completes a two-year graduate course.

Meanwhile, the '2+4' method refers to a two-year undergraduate course plus a four-year course in specialized graduate school of education. Those who have taken courses in graduate school for two years and yet, do not desire entering teaching vocation are allowed to be

admitted to another course that grants undergraduate degree from the university to which the education course was offered. This method has a strength in encouraging students to decide entering teaching occupation based upon one's own aptitude because the timing of decision is deferred to the end of the sophomore year. However, on the contrary, selecting the future teacher at the end of the second year might make it difficult to attract excellent students. And it is also likely that confusion could occur in supervising the student affairs.

4. Establishing a Course for Doctor of Education

At the same time, as a means to strengthen the status of teachers as professionals and boost in-service training of the teachers, some have proposed adoption of the doctor of education course.

The first of the various methods presented is to reorganize the graduate schools of education currently classified as a special graduate school into a professional graduate school of education, which offers doctor of education (Ed.D.) degree different from the Ph.D. degrees conferred by general universities. The second method is to integrate the present graduate school of education and the degree programs of general universities, so that both the Ph.D. and Ed.D. courses can be offered by a single professional graduate school of education. The third is discussed in the fields of law and medicine and which is to train teacher applicants in the professional graduate school of education and establish the professional course for doctor of education. And the fourth method is to open a professional course for doctor of education on an experimental base for a certain duration in qualified graduate schools equipped with adequate education and research conditions to evaluate the feasibility of the pilot system until the integrated training system is fully established.

Introduction of the doctor of education course can be a means to secure the capacity and professionalism of the teachers suitable for the

knowledge-based society. Since teacher's professional role will be increasingly acknowledged in the twenty-first century, in which the society calls for changes in teaching and learning methods, expansion of the scope of knowledge, and diversified educational functions, it is evident that those who hold professional degrees will be needed in actual educational scene.

However, if such a new program is supervised in an unhealthy manner, the doctorate may be granted with relative ease, which, then, could damage the authority of the entire doctoral degrees. Also, if the doctorate is utilized as a means to be promoted in the teaching profession, it is likely that teachers neglect the innate duty of teaching and get involved in excessive competition for entering graduate schools.

5. Adoption of the Accreditation System

Those who agree to the evaluation-accreditation system for teacher training institutions argue that the system enables quality control of the training institutions that lag behind a certain standard, and thereby raise the qualitative level of the overall education and training. Furthermore, by making public the qualitative level of individual institutions that underwent the institutional evaluation, they argue, the societal trust toward the training institutions and teacher qualification can be enhanced, as well. They also present the institutional evaluation as an alternative to the existing tests for teacher accreditation and hiring on grounds that based upon the evaluation results, it will be possible to determine the optimum quota of trainees for individual institutions, and therefore, control the size of teacher supply and solve the problem of the imbalance between supply and demand of the teaching force.

Currently, evaluation of teacher training institutions takes place every five years in the following sequence: teachers' college (1998), graduate school of education (1999), university of education (2000), department of

education in general university (2001), and teacher education in general university (2002). The evaluation has been commissioned to the Korean Educational Development Institute. It had originally been conceived that the institutions with high evaluation result would receive concentrated administrative and financial support and be raised to become a quality training institution, whereas those with unsatisfactory results would be advised to transform themselves to the institutions that offer preparation for entering universities or occupational world. However, the evaluation results are not utilized in practice. Thus, in order to make the evaluation-accreditation system functional, the legal base should be established in the first place; and at the same time, objective evaluation standard and methods should be developed.

Those who object the evaluation-accreditation system argue that such a system cannot reform Korea's teacher training system and solve the problems deeply embedded in the system. And they maintain that it will be practically implausible to conduct fair evaluation and make active use of the evaluation results. They predict that the institutions with low evaluation results are not likely to accept the results and adjust their own trainee quota, even if the evaluation was undertaken fairly. Furthermore, since the government itself has never taken any steps following institutional evaluations thus far conducted four times, contrary to its announcement that it would act according to the evaluation results, there arose general distrust toward the government determination to actually utilize the evaluation results.

IV. Course of Development

1. Start from Internal Strengthening to Secure Professionalism

In order to raise professionalism in teacher training, such methods as integrating different institutions or upgrading to graduate courses are

likely to face formidable obstacles as discussed above and are practically very difficult to adopt. Moreover, even if implementation of such methods was possible, there is no guarantee that professionalism in teacher training would be attained by it, after all. If such methods turned out to be a failure at securing professionalism, then the implementation attempt itself would be a waste. Therefore, at this juncture, it appears to be wise to make efforts at strengthening the internal dimension of the existing system, rather than discussing systemic restructuring.

The recent support plan announced by the government, 'Development Measures for Universities of Education,' can be considered a highly desirable direction for policy in that it seeks internal strengthening of the existing system of training elementary school teachers. And if such a policy direction gets applied to kindergarten and secondary school education, then the exceptional investment in the national and public universities might attract more investment in private universities, which would consequently lead to overall improvement of teacher training institutions as a whole.

For the goal of securing professionalism in educational content, we should seek internal strengthening of the content by developing and implementing teacher education programs that are required for the knowledge-based society of the future. Teacher education curriculum that is irrelevant to the curriculum of actual school setting should no longer be allowed to exist. Also, it is very important to strengthen the teacher internship program. To this end, it will be necessary to form a collaborative system with the schools that take the interns and encourage active participation of the in-service teachers.

At the same time, it will be necessary to adopt the professional course for doctor of education as a mechanism to continue to raise professionalism of the current teaching force. Such a mechanism is needed when considering the social status of the teachers and the changing role of the teachers in the knowledge-based society. It is also

needed to elevate professionalism in terms of not only educational administration and supervision but also increasing educational effectiveness through enhanced professionalism of the teachers in both curricular management and classroom instruction. Nonetheless, there should be a strong systemic measure to prevent easy conferment of the doctor of education degree, which is likely to lower the general social trust toward the teachers.

In order to strengthen the teacher training institutions and secure professionalism, the government should come up with legal and institutional measures to attract excellent human resources to the teaching vocation. It should be noted that the Korean Court of Constitution has pointed out the existence of the special exceptions that could hamper equity, so that it is also likely, especially when considering overseas cases, that the attracting value of the teaching job will be further lowered. In recognition of the vision that in the knowledge-information society of the twenty-first century, a nation's destiny will depend upon securing quality human resources, the government ought to prepare the nation for the future not merely at the level of Constitutional protection but at the level of national strategy and construct the mechanism necessary for attracting quality human resources to the teaching force.

2. Quality Control Mechanism for Enhancing Accountability

It should be noted that one of the main reasons behind the rise of the current controversy over the teacher training system was the problem inherent in the supply and demand of the teaching force. And the cause of the problem lies in the excessive supply of teachers, that is, easy granting of the teacher certificates. That there are numerous individuals qualified as teachers is not a problem in itself. What is problematic is the fact that the excessive supply brings with it qualitative lowering of the teachers. The present teacher certification system of Korea automatically confers

the certificate as soon as an individual fulfills the graduation requirement. Since such a system, by granting the certificates to all graduates through an inspection procedure devoid of written or any form of examination, namely, an appropriate mechanism for quality control, has brought about qualitative lowering of the teachers and lack of their professionalism, which eventually creates the effect of diminishing the public trust toward the teachers in general.

Both the government and the teacher training universities are responsible for this kind of problem. The universities themselves ought to make efforts for constructing a system to raise excellent teachers and supporting the necessary human and material resources, however, many of them have been unable to do so. It has been an open secret that there exists qualitative gap among different teacher training institutions and among those individuals with the teacher certificate produced by different institutions.

The government side, particularly its support system, may be even more responsible for the current problem. The government's support for the teacher training aspect of universities remains far weaker vis-a-vis its support for other areas. Moreover, it has not attempted to make any quality control mechanism, merely watching the ongoing problem of easy granting of teacher certificates.

When we recognize that the source of national competitiveness in the twenty-first century lies in securing the human resources, we cannot just let the serious problems in the teacher training system go untouched. We have reached a point for a final decision to make an action that can influence the current practice to change, whether it would be: to control the total quota of teacher trainees and train only excellent students; or to fortify the requirement for certification and suppress the problem of easy granting; or to set expiration date for the certificate and create a mechanism to supervise the qualification and professionalism of the teachers.

We also need the quality control system for the teacher training institutions. Rather than being preoccupied with the problem of practical effectiveness - as the current practice of the institutional evaluation remains ineffective, we should strengthen the system based upon a long-term vision. Educational policy can no longer be approached by the conventional centralized manner. We have entered an era of pluralism and an era also characterized by decentralization and local autonomy. Hence, to seek autonomy in the teacher training system has become our task for the new era.

It should be remembered that autonomy is given to a person who can be responsible for one's own action. Korea's education system had not been granted autonomy for a long time. Thus, Korea's individual educational institutions did not have to be responsible for their actions. In this light, the present problem of lowered quality of the teachers had been originated largely from the prolonged practice of the centralized control of the government: that is, the individual institutions without autonomy have been training the future teachers within the institutional framework given by the government without any self-execution.

From now on, we should seek to increase autonomy of educational institutions, while holding them accountable for their own autonomy. Therefore, it should not be overlooked that the evaluation system for the teacher training institutions is highly likely to become the only systemic mechanism to raise qualification and professionalism of the teachers in the twenty-first century.