Promising practices

Managing the oversupply of teachers using quality assessments

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Teacher education pathway category(ies): Assuring
Stakeholder category(ies): policymakers
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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Korea on 4-8 December 2017.

The OECD review team identified a number of “Promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising practice 3.
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Context

Korea has experienced a rapid expansion in educational participation over the last 60 years, with currently 80% of graduates of high schools moving on to higher education (Research Institute for Teacher Policy and Ministry of Education, 2016[1]). To deal with a rapid expansion in the number of school students, South Korea had to train large numbers of teachers rapidly, which in turn fostered a major expansion of the number of secondary teachers graduating (Bermeo, 2014[2]).

However, as participation in secondary education has become almost universal and low birth rates are causing the number of secondary school students to decline, there is less need for a high number of graduates. Indeed, the system now produces many more graduates than are needed in schools, competition among graduates for the available teaching positions is therefore strong, at least in areas that are considered desirable places to live and work - although this is not universal and many more remote areas have difficulties attracting graduate teachers. This situation is very different in the case of primary school teachers, for admission to the only 13 institutions providing ITE is highly competitive and candidates enjoy high job placement rates (National Centre on Education and the Economy, 2017[3]).

Of course, this is not a desirable situation for the graduates who are unable to pursue their chosen career, or the government that is funding their initial teacher education (ITE). The Korean government has responded to this situation by:

- Introducing an employment exam as the final stage of ITP to gain employment as a teacher, with the objective to set a fair method of assessment that also guarantees that the best candidates become new in-service teachers.
- Reducing the number of ITE places available over time and, in doing so, attempt to ensure that the highest quality ITE providers are receiving a greater share of the available places.

How does the employment exam work?

The employment exam consists of two phases. The first is a written exam, focusing on pedagogical theory and, for secondary teachers, the content of their subject specialization. The second phase is more practical and consists of interviews and demonstrations of lesson planning and teaching.
Table 1. Test specification for Secondary School Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Subject (points)</th>
<th>Item type (items)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Education (20)</td>
<td>Extended-response essay (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject Major (80)</td>
<td>Filling-out, (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restricted-response essay, (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extended-response essay (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>In-depth interview (40)</td>
<td>Oral, (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson Planning (15)</td>
<td>Constructing, (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching demonstration (45)</td>
<td>Performing (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practical or experimental skills (30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The exam is developed by the Korean Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE). It develops both the written exam and the questions for the interviews and scenarios. KICE also develops rubrics for assessing these. Developing the exam is a major exercise, with KICE staff assisted by over 100 item developers, mainly university professors and experienced teachers. Although the exam is designed to assess against the national curriculum for initial teacher education, in practice some stakeholders reported that there can be a disconnection between the content of ITE courses and what is required to pass the exam.

The exams developed by KICE are not mandatory for all provinces, but the vast majority use it, as it is expensive and difficult for provinces to develop their own tests with the same level of rigour. Given the number of candidates, the exam is highly competitive (Jo, 2008[^5]). Only around 12% of candidates were successful in 2015, although this rate is now considerably higher – in 2005 only 5.5% passed the examination (Research Institute for Teacher Policy and Ministry of Education, 2016[^1]).

**How does the ITE evaluation process work?**

This comprehensive programme is now in its fourth iteration, and the criteria for the fifth iteration are being developed. The evaluation process is designed to serve three related purposes:

- To assist the government to manage the quality of ITE provision.
- To provide ITE providers with information they can use to improve their programmes.
- To provide public information to assist potential ITE students and their parents in choosing a provider.

Criteria for evaluation are developed by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) in consultation with stakeholders. The fourth set of evaluation criteria introduced qualitative criteria in addition to the previous quantitative criteria. The reviews themselves are conducted by panels of five teacher educators, who read the provider’s self-assessment, and then conduct a site visit to validate that assessment. Consultation during the site visit is largely with university staff, including those who are responsible for evaluating and improving the programme. Students’ perspectives are obtained through a survey (Gu, 2009[^6]; Research Institute for Teacher Policy and Ministry of Education, 2016[^1]).
The grade allocated to an ITE provider is determined by points scored on the above criteria. A score above 800 points out of 1000 translates to an A grade, while a score below 500 results in an E grade. These grades have real consequences:

- An institution obtaining a C grade must reduce its student intake by 30%.
- An institution obtaining a D grade must reduce its student intake by 50%.
- An institution obtaining an E grade may no longer deliver ITE.

In the previous round of evaluations, institutions receiving an A grade received additional funding, but this is no longer the case. The evaluation process has been effective in reducing the number of ITE places for secondary teaching by 7% in 4 years (Table 2).

Table 2. Admission quota for entrance into initial teacher education programmes, by year and ITE entry route

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution providing ITE programme</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>9 500</td>
<td>9 579</td>
<td>9 727</td>
<td>9 780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of education at university</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General ITE courses at university</td>
<td>8 390</td>
<td>8 707</td>
<td>9 147</td>
<td>9 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school of education</td>
<td>13 887</td>
<td>14 118</td>
<td>14 342</td>
<td>14 792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32 561</strong></td>
<td><strong>33 193</strong></td>
<td><strong>34 020</strong></td>
<td><strong>35 146</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Why is it a strength?*

The OECD review team in its review of Korea on 4-8 December 2017 saw the ITE evaluation approach as a strength of the system because:

- *It provides a defensible means of reducing places.* The need to reduce the number of graduates and programmes in a situation where a large number of ITE providers had been encouraged to operate in the past is a difficult problem. The existence of a well-established evaluation system and a long-term approach have allowed this reduction to occur following a legitimate and objective process. Stakeholders interviewed by the review team generally reported that the measures are well understood and accepted, and that providers are rarely surprised by their ratings. In addition, the rigorous, centrally developed exam provides a defensible basis for ranking candidates. It is also highly consistent with the approach across the Korean education system, where high stakes exams are well accepted and valued.

- *The evaluation provides a basis for improvement.* Although it is easy to focus on the use of the evaluation results to allocate places, for the majority of providers who achieve an A or B grade, the major purpose is improvement. The evaluation process provides objective, benchmarked information on performance that can be used to guide providers’ improvement efforts.

- *The exam focuses on teaching performance.* The second stage of the process focuses on teaching performance, through lesson planning and teaching demonstrations, and it is delivered by provincial education offices, who are able to customise it and recruit those teachers who are best suited to working in their schools.
How could it be improved?

The OECD review team also noted that:

- **A broader range of measures could be used.** The measures currently used for the evaluation are well accepted and relatively objective. However, they could be broadened to focus more on outcomes and the performance of graduates once they enter the classroom. Surveys of graduates and of principals who employ them could be added to the system without compromising its objectivity. Since there is a need to further cut the number of places, the threshold should be more ambitious.

- **There is an opportunity to showcase good practice.** The evaluation system identifies providers that are widely recognised as high performing. Beyond recognition through an A grade, the practices of providers scoring highly on particular criteria could be highlighted and shared to support improvement across the sector.

- **There may be a mismatch between initial teacher education programme content and the employment exam.** Pre-service teachers and graduates interviewed by the review team felt that their courses did not focus sufficiently on the content of the exam, and many were motivated to seek tutoring or other support to prepare for the exam. Ensuring that the exam matches the curriculum as taught in ITE would reduce duplication of effort and build the exam’s validity.

- **The assessment of teaching performance could be more authentic.** Although the assessments of teaching performance in the second stage improves the reliability of the exam, when the process is so selective, there is a need to target the qualities required for effective teaching as directly as possible. If these performance assessments were carried out in real classroom during ITE, it would both increase the reliability of the exam and would strengthen the link between ITE and recruitment into schools.

References


