

Anatomy of Early English Education Teacher Training Programs in Korea

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(1) I. Introduction

This paper aims at investigating major issues and practices in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher training programs in Korea targeting at early language learners ranging from kindergarteners to first or second graders in elementary schools. A growing body of teacher training research has been focusing on in-service teachers working at public schools. As the field of teacher training aiming at those work or going to work in private language institutes is a relatively underexplored one, research that deals with the nature of the private language school or institute teacher training programs per se is scant in the professional literature. Primary and secondary school teachers of English are educated at universities in rigorous disciplines while English teachers for early English education are trained in inferior normal or private teacher training institutes. As the age of students starting to learn English is gradually coming down to the third graders officially and to kindergarteners unofficially, it deserves attention from ELT professionals in both private and public domains that the separation of teacher training for young learners (TTYL) from serious academic preparation may be harmful to the ELT profession.

(2) II. Research Questions

In this research, the researchers looked into the teacher training institutes producing teachers for early English language learners and investigated several key issues as follows:

1. What kind of teacher training institutes for young learners (TTYL) are there existing in Korea?
2. How are those teacher training institutes for young learners (TTYL) doing to produce qualified teachers?
3. What is the general evaluation of the curricula of these TTYL institutes?

(3)

III. Data Collection

With a view to delving into the general characteristics, curriculum aspects, and strengths or drawbacks of the teacher training programs designed for the early English education, the research looked into 35 teacher training institutes that include four graduate school programs, six private company-run programs, and twenty five university-annexed language learning or lifelong education centers. The researchers created eight categories to examine the teacher training institutes: curriculum, teaching faculty, training period, tuition, issuance of teaching certificate, target students, qualifications to be admitted into a program, and teaching practicum opportunities. The results of this research describe the current situations and problems the teacher training institutes targeting at early English education have in producing competent ELT teachers.

(4) IV. Findings

The research took a closer look at the teacher training institutes with eight categories. Due to the limit of the space, the analytical findings of the four categories are presented below.

1. Training period

The training period varies widely depending on the program offered in each institute. All of the regular graduate courses offer five-semester-long programs. Most of the private company-run programs were found to offer weekend programs which last eight or nine weeks amounting to 50 to 70-hour training in total. A majority of the university-annexed institutes offer a 15-week program equivalent of a 90-hour training. The analysis reveals that the training period is short and hardly enough to produce competent ELT teachers of young learners.

2. Teaching faculty

Except for the graduate courses, virtually all of the teacher training programs were found to have no permanent teaching faculty. It was revealed that they have been relying on part-time instructors or guest lecturers from outside of the institutes. Ironically, it was found that the teacher training institutes designed for early English education have been sharing many of the teaching faculty members. It can be interpreted as showing that the field is short of qualified teacher trainers or professionals.

3. Teaching practicum opportunities

The practicum is considered a core course in most TESOL teacher education programs (Richards, 2003). Yet, nearly all of the programs under research have no teaching practicum course or even micro-teaching opportunities at all. Only one program was found to offer a teaching practicum opportunity for a short period of time. As there is no formal period of practice and learning and little emphasis on reflective practice, it is afraid that those produced from these training institutes will wonder how to apply knowledge and skills gained from the program to a real classroom environment.

4. Curriculum

The table below describes the breakdown of the TTYL curriculum. As it shows, much emphasis is placed upon the ELT pedagogy and ELT teaching skills subjects.

| | Graduate school programs (4) | University-annexed programs (25) | Private company-run programs (6) |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| language skill | 1 | 10 | 1 |
| ELT pedagogy | 4 | 19 | 2 |
| General pedagogy | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Linguistics | | 2 | |
| Applied linguistics | 2 | | |
| ELT practicum | | 1 | |
| ELT skills (activities) | 4 | 21 | 5 |
| Exam preparation course | | 1 | |
| classroom observation | | 2 | |

(5) V. Conclusion

This research described the current situation of teacher training institutes offering programs targeting at early English education. The researchers are of the opinion that it is doubtful the current TTYL programs provide sufficient opportunities for trainees to develop methods and techniques for responding to the needs of young learners with various learning abilities.

To prepare effective language teachers, it is necessary to have a theory of effective language teaching (Richards and Nunan, 1990). In this sense, the programs reviewed play a part in helping pre-service and in-service teachers build up theoretical understanding of EFL education to young learners. It, however, is questionable that those who complete such a program are qualified enough to take a full charge of EFL education to the Korean young learners. The initial training to become a teacher in every field is very important. As Davies and Pearse (2002) claim, initial training, however, is simply the beginning of one's professional development as a teacher. In this sense, those teachers involved in the private English teaching field should be offered opportunities to update their knowledge and information for their professional development. At the same time, these teachers are also urged to "make regular contact with latest ideas and their classroom application" (Davies and Pearse, 2002). It behooves that ELT professionals start paying more attention to the teacher training programs for young learners.

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