

Program Development of an Overseas Teaching Practicum for Korean University Students

An Evaluation on the Program between 2009 and 2012

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Abstract—This article illustrates the development of the overseas teaching practicum of a Korean private university between 2009 and 2012 in Malaysia. This program provides Korean pre-service teachers more substantial teaching experience as well as an opportunity to gain a multicultural competency. This study finds several different matters, which might be considered before implementation of this program into other places.

Keywords-Japanese teacher training; overseas practicum; multicultural competency; global human resources

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

This is a Project-Based Development Research in Education. This research began when I came to a Korean University as a faculty of Japanese in 2008. In my first semester at the university, some final year students, who wished to gain the teaching credential in Japanese from The South Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, went to a four-week field practicum at a junior high or high school. After the practicum, I had an opportunity to have a dinner with a female student. She had her field practicum at a high school, which she graduated from. I supposed she experienced many teaching hours in her 4 weeks. But, in fact, she did not. She confessed that she did only few hours of teaching and did something else in the rest of her time at high school like serving teas and helping teachers by photocopying. I could not believe what she told me, because I also had a four-week of teaching practicum at high school in Japan and they gave me a lot of teaching hours and never asked me to serve teas for the teachers then. Accordingly, I started my investigation on the field practicum in Korea.

First, I interviewed my Korean colleagues at the university and gradually, the reality of high school education in Korea was illuminated. Throughout the country, the competition among high schools had been tougher and tougher due to the national university entrance examination (officially, The College Scholastic Ability Test). Card (2005) named it the life and death exams in South Korea and reported how much Korean parents keen on sending their children to prestigious universities, particularly the top three; Seoul National, Korea and Yonsei University, which are nicknamed SKY. Thereupon, Korean high schools would like to minimize the teaching hours for pre-service teachers, and sometimes schools do not accept

field practicum due to the reason. On top of that, Japanese is not one of their major subjects for the test and schools do not want to sacrifice their limited time for the minor subjects, which makes the circumstances for our students even worse. Finally, I concluded my preliminary investigation that there was no solution to the shortage of pre-service teachers' teaching hours at Korean high schools.

Nevertheless, my investigation unexpectedly revealed another issue of the public education in Korea, which was based on the rapid social change. As Ahn wrote that "Since 2005, 'multicultural'-based terms such as 'multicultural society', 'multicultural family' and 'multicultural education' have grown explosively in Korean society" (2012, p.97), the society has been rapidly multicultural. This social change has been brought by two different groups; the foreign workers and brides mainly from China, Vietnam and Philippines (Kim, 2009). Moon says that "[i]n 2008 approximately one million foreign nationals lived in Korea, which was more than 2% of the total population" (2010, p.3). He continues;

South Korea is not an exception to transnational flows in and economic, political, and cultural sense. A long-standing belief that Korea is an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally "homogeneous" society has been challenged by recent migrant workers, families, and ethnically diverse student populations from different countries. In this context, the following questions arise: how might such transnational movements encourage Korean educators to reframe citizenship education? (ibid, p.2).

To meet the social change, "The South Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (KMRD) began to pay attention to multicultural education and introduced the Education Act for Children in Multicultural Family in 2006" (Choi, 2010, pp.175-176). Watson added;

The policies that are included under the terms multiculturalism, cultural diversity and "celebrating difference" are engaging substantial political debate in contemporary South Korea. Multicultural policies are often thought to represent the maturing of liberal democracy in South Korea since its institutional inception in 1987. (2010, p.337).

However, the majority of the society did not easily follow to the direction which the government led to. Moon emphasized that "Since the 2000s, Korean educators and policy

makers have been struggling with how to respond to the issues of diversity and citizenship education influenced by transnational flow and global change" (ibid, pp.5-6), because "The liberal assimilationists posit that the 'one-culture and one-nation' model benefits Korea's political, economic, and social advancement" (ibid, p.6).

In 2012, I took another investigation for my own article published by The Association of Private Universities of Japan, and it revealed that alongside with the rapidly increasing Korean ODA (Official Development Assistance), overseas volunteers from colleges and universities have been multiplied between 2000 and 2011. Behind the change, the Korean government integrated all the aid-related activities for college students under many different ministries into KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea. It can be said that while struggling with adopting non-Korean people into their own society, the government has encouraged young students' voluntary activities outside of the country.

The University I work for also integrated all the voluntary programs for both domestic and overseas into an office, The Volunteer Corporation under the president of the university in 2009. All the overseas volunteer activities were combined into a general subject SGS 300 then. The 300 means that the university provided financial supports to 300 undergraduate students every year, and encouraged them to go out from the peninsula for volunteer activities. It became very popular among students and the number increased to 400 in the following year and currently, 500, which is about 10% of the undergraduate students at the university. In 2012, the office claims that this program has dispatched the student volunteers to 18 different countries since 2009.

Each department submits their own plan to the office, and once it is approved, the department put it into practice. After the completion of the activities, one credit point would be provided to all the participants by the office.

B. Purpose, Rationale and Importance of the Reserach

The purpose of my own project is providing the pre-service teachers enough teaching hours for their field practicum, and developing a practicum, which nurtures its participants' multicultural awareness and ability to manage multicultural student groups.

As already discussed in the previous section, training teachers who have such awareness and skills has been crucially important in the today's Korean society, and meets the social needs.

As a requirement for a high school teaching credential in South Korea, the university has conducted its field practicum for pre-service teachers at a Malaysian high school since 2009. Initially, the program was planned and conducted by author with his Japanese language students after revealing that the practicum at South Korean schools did not provide the pre-service teachers enough hours of teaching experiences due to the hard competition among schools. The overseas practicum between 2010 and 2012 has been evaluated by author, which resulted in three different journal articles published in Korea.

In the U.S., International Service-Learning has been commonly utilized for teacher training, and researchers reveal that this pedagogy transforms the participants not only to gain more civic responsibility and academic engagement, but also an awareness of cultural diversity (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Wade, 2000; Roberts, 2013). In some countries in Asia, including South Korea, even though they are still homogeneous in comparison to the U.S., the society is getting more and more multicultural as explained above, which means that the importance of preparing teachers for multicultural classroom has been increasing.

The practicum already has been evaluated once with an ordinary measurement, which was not different from the one used for the practicum at domestic Korean schools. Now, service-learning has been widely utilized to mature its participants' awareness of cultural diversity in the U.S. If the practicum in Malaysia also developed the pre-service teachers' skill to manage a multicultural classroom, this program can be proposed as an effective method for next-generation-compatible school teachers in South Korea.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In practice of service-learning for teacher training, Roberts (2013) investigated the North American teachers' service experience in rural Costa Rican schools and revealed that the program developed "innovation in teaching in reaction to a contrasting educational setting" (p.253), as well as "reflectivity, discover insights, and ... perspective consciousness" (ibid).

Wade (2000), one of the pioneers of service-learning for multicultural teacher education, claimed that:

"Service-learning experiences in diverse communities can lead preservice teachers to increase their awareness of diversity, to learn to accept or affirm children and families of color, and to begin to question their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs ... Teacher educators committed to enhancing preservice teachers' multicultural teaching competencies must focus on facilitating collaborative partnerships with communities of color; involve preservice teachers in a range of service experiences including direct service, advocacy, and political action; and provide frequent opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect deeply on their own biases and the political and social institutions that create the need for service in our society." (p.26)

Sallee and Harris (2007) examined a service learning program, in which Taiwanese and Korean university students had a teaching experience at American public schools for 6 to 8 weeks. In comparison to the cultural difference in school between the east and the west, such as teacher-centered vs. student-centered, active classroom participation and teacher as authority vs. teacher as friend, the eastern participants not only knew the American school culture, but also relatively recognized their own cultures.

Saviki (2008) explored the experimental education for international educators and insisted that effective education should be experimentally held in "dynamically changing environments (e.g., living in a foreign country)" (p.76), utilizing the nature of "the study abroad experience" (p.86). He also emphasized that the focused reflection is more effective when it follows the Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (1984),

which consists of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Type of Design*

This is a project-based development research in teacher education, which draws an ethnography and autoethnography with a content analysis on mails, documents and interviews from the international service-learning perspective for multicultural teaching competency.

B. *Selection and Description of the Site and the Participants*

This research is on the field practicum as a pre-service teacher training in Goshen Adventist Secondary School. Goshen Adventist Secondary School is located in the Sabah Province of Malaysia. The Malaysian government did not build a school in the region for a long time, thus this is the oldest school in town. Alongside with the economic growth, the government began to provide a complementary public education in the area over the last few years, and it makes the oldest private school struggle to recruit students, especially after elementary school.

The reasons why Goshen Adventist Secondary School was chosen for this practicum were:

1. Many lessons were held in English.
2. The location is relatively safe.
3. There are multiracial/cultural classrooms.

Those are exactly what this project would like the school to provide our pre-service teachers.

C. *Data Collection Strategy*

The data has been already collected for the evaluation programs of field practicum every year. Those are "recycled" for this study from a different perspective.

D. *Data Analysis Strategy*

Content analysis on the interview transcriptions will be employed. The data were already examined from the perspective of ordinary (which means homogeneous) teaching practicum in Korea. But the same data will be re-evaluated from the perspective of multicultural teaching competency.

Particularly in 2012, I brought my students to the school and observed them while they served as pre-service teachers for four weeks. Every night they made their lesson plans for the next day with my support, and I conducted to make a problem-tree based on problem-solving method with them. Obviously, it can be said that my influence on them were more than just an observer. Therefore, the story will be drawn ethnographically, as well as auto ethnographically. I regard myself as a participant of the practicum, because I played an important role in the practicum.

IV. FINDINGS

A. *Legal Permission*

In order to gain a teaching credential in Korea, pre-service teachers have been allowed to do their teaching practicum outside of the country. According to Teaching Credential Certification Work Manual (2013) issued by the Ministry of

Education, a four-week teaching practicum can be taken place in the school, which the embassy of the country issues an apostille as an accredited school by the government. However, some other countries strictly delimits the location of the practicum. For example, in Japan, the government only allows pre-service teachers to have a practicum within the Japanese soil. I confirmed with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan that even in the Japanese schools outside of Japan, which have been officially accredited by the government they do not permit pre-service teachers to practice their practicum for teaching credentials.

For the above reason, the legal issue needs to be clarified and solved before planning such a overseas field practicum for teaching credentials.

B. *Differences in Academic Years*

Schools begins at different time in different places. Here in Korea, it normally starts in March and ends in February, while in the most Western countries it begins in September. In Malaysia, their school year starts in December and ends in November. However, Korean universities schedule their time for field practicum to meet their academic year and dispatch pre-service teachers to Korean high schools in May every year. We did not realized the difference in the first year of our overseas field practicum in Malaysia, and sent out students to the country in May 2009. The first evaluation on the program revealed that the timing was not suitable for the Malaysian schools due to SATs' (Standardized Achievement Tests) in June. One of the most important purposes of this program is proving our pre-service teachers more teaching hours but the practicum in May is not able to meet the purpose. After the first practicum in Malaysia, we attempted to find out the most convenience time for both institutes, and reached an agreement to reschedule it to the final week in June. It is the time after SATs in Malaysia and during summer holiday in Korea. Since 2010, the practicum have been held between the final week in June and the third week in July.

Between Korea and Malaysia, we have found that the time is the most reasonable for both of us, but obviously, through discussions, we have to find out a different period of the year with a different country.

C. *Supervision during Practicum*

In our first year of the practicum, only one female student was sent to Malaysia and she was fluent in English. In the following years, 3 students in 2010 and 4 students in 2011 participated the practicum and they included some students who were not relatively fluent in English in comparison to the first year. In their feedback reports, it revealed that the local Malaysian teachers did not provide them enough supervisions and it was much less than what the pre-service teachers expected. Probably, the expectation was constructed from the practicum in Korea. I have never experienced practicum in Korea, but after interviewing both Korean students and Malaysian teachers, I feel that Korean high school teachers deal with pre-service teachers during practicum much more than the practicum in Malaysia. In fact, I observed full-period of their four-week practicum in 2012, and I did not see much the involvement of Malaysian teachers in our practicum. Instead, I

observed their lessons everyday and organized a time to reflect on the lessons every night.

D. Funding

All the participants of the practicum must bear any of the expenses on their practicum, and for the domestic practicum, most participants can commute to the schools from their homes. However, in order to participate the overseas one, they need to stay at the guest house, which the local school prepares, and go to the school canteen three times a day during their stay. But those are not too expensive for pre-service teachers. The heaviest burden for them should be travel expenses between Korea and Malaysia. Fortunately, the faculty in charge of teacher training course showed his understanding on this program and spent a part of their air fares from the course budget since the first year. As a result, the university has dispatched 10 pre-service teachers to Malaysia between 2009 and 2012.

E. Expansion to the Other Department

In 2012, when the Assistant Academic Dean visited the field practicum for the first time, he told me a possibility of expanding this program to the other departments in the future. I thought he was right, because I understood this practicum has more suitable majors than Japanese. Unfortunately, Japanese is not one of their compulsory subjects in the Malaysian national curriculum, and other departments have pre-service teachers of other academic subjects. For example, Mathematics, P.E. and Science are compulsory for them. Computer and the Bible are not, but they regard them as important subjects. The Vice-Academic Dean mentioned the university can provide pre-service teacher in those subjects, and just as he said, this program has been expanded to the other subject in 2013. I was on my sabbatical leave then so that I was not able to observe the latest practicum, but the Vice-Academic Dean reported me that he visited the school again in the middle of the practicum and made sure that it went successfully.

This program began with Japanese, because I belong to the Japanese Department. However, there was a better start with different subjects. I would like to suggest that an overseas practicum should be started with the local's compulsory subjects, because with them, it is easier for us to make a win-win relationship between university and its counterpart.

V. CONCLUSION

This article illuminates the events which the overseas field practicum has experienced since 2009. Through continuous evaluations, the program has changed and updated itself every

year and those segments of the events can be categorized into 5 different major groups. In other word, it can be said that those are the lessons learnt from our challenge. It already has been evaluated and concluded that the program has achieved the preliminary targets, which provides pre-service teachers more teaching hours and multi-cultural classroom experiences. However, this article also contributes other universities, which tried to introduce such a program into their teacher training courses. To refer the stories pointed out in this article, they can minimized the risk of failures, because they do not need to follow the way we straggly went through. I hope that more universities send their pre-service teachers to the world and give them teaching experiences abroad.

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