

A Study on “Program” in Early Childhood Curriculum in Korea : Focusing on the Practice of Korean Eco-Early Childhood Education

Abstract

This study reviews the status of the “Program”-focused curriculum behind the “standardization of curricula before schooling” that is currently becoming an issue in Korea. The review examines the policies for nursery contents, the national curriculum, learning theories, and how the “Program” ranked in childcare practitioners’ awareness.

The study considers the problems resulting from the development and dissemination of the “Program,” with a focus on the teachers’ role in preparing the curriculum. The “Program” is defined as “a curriculum model developed by the specialized investigator.” For the analysis, a literature survey (analysis of curriculum structure for policy analysis) and a field survey (interviews on a questionnaire survey) were performed. In addition, the field survey identifies the incumbent practitioners’ awareness regarding Eco -Early Childhood Education in the Korean national curriculum.

Chapter 1 reviews the historical education policies and nursery contents based on the political and social context of Korea and clarifies how “Program”-focused curriculum policies have been adopted.

Chapter 2 examines the changes in the national curricula, commentaries, and “tutorials for teachers,” and the preparation process for the curriculum model is presented as a public frame, along with the teachers’ roles within it. According to the review results, planning for “educational activities” involves considering the equivalence among the contents in five areas and in the relevance to the “subject,” while the subject-centered curriculum is organized and operated in the Korean national curriculum. In addition, the structure created by these subject-centered curricula has been shown to be restrictive so as to prevent childcare practitioners from freely planning the types, contents, and times of educational activities.

Chapter 3 analyses the relationship between the “Program” and an “educational childcare course” based on college textbooks written for childcare practitioners and on government publications to review the meaning of the “Program” in Korean curriculum theories. The results showed that in curriculum development at the level of individual institutions and childcare practitioners in Korea, no discussions were held concerning the institutions’ independent policies, targets, and contents nor the development of the inherent curriculum suited to that purpose.

Chapter 4 reviews Korean Eco-Early Childhood Education and its associated programs. The chapter clarifies how the structural features of Korean Eco-Early Childhood Education are different from the national curriculum and shows that curricula different from the subject-centered curriculum exist within the Korean society.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze childcare practitioners' awareness regarding the national curriculum and the "Program" from the perspective of those who practice Korean Eco-Early Childhood Education. The results showed that conflict existed between the practice of the curriculum model presented in the Nuri curriculum as a guideline for the current national curriculum and the practice of the Eco-Early Childhood Education and that Eco-Early Childhood Education practitioners adapted to the Nuri curriculum in accordance with the standards for the subject-centered curriculum. The Eco-Early Childhood Education practitioners were also aware of the existing curriculum model's restrictions, i.e., the "Program" or "departure from the program."

The present study's results show that the centralized curriculum model is disseminated in the field through tutorials for practitioners, while the childcare practitioners are playing the role of a reproduction agent rather than a program developer. In addition, Eco-Early Childhood Education practitioners transformed their practice to fit within the principles of the Nuri curriculum.

Lastly, the present study discusses the practice of childcare with a focus on children's free play, and the childcare practitioners viewing childcare based on their own experiences and values was critical for breaking the childcare practitioner's internalization of the program. Furthermore, based on the above study results, the "Program" as a Korean curriculum development form before schooling is strongly related to the present "standardization of the curriculum."

The present study reviews the status of Korea's current Nuri curriculum that presents the "subject-centered curriculum" as the only curriculum model. However, in the revised Nuri curriculum to be enforced in Korea starting in 2020, play-centered childcare will be the most emphasized, while the national "single type of programs" are to be abolished in principle. After 2020, significant changes are also expected to occur in the Korean childcare practitioners' awareness of the "Program." Under the revised Nuri curriculum, Korean childcare practitioners will need to review how to recognize the "Program" and how to develop the "internalization of the program."