

Investigating Students' Perception of Subject Selection in the Organization of High School Elective Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze how the subjects presented in the current curriculum are operated in various ways in high school and how students perceive them in terms of the importance of diversification of high school education. A questionnaire was conducted to achieve the purpose of the study, and the items consisted of 40 questions in terms of class planning, class operation, class evaluation, and school education environment. The survey was conducted using Google's online survey system for 32,262 high school students nationwide. The main research results are as follows. Although students were found to be generally satisfied with the operation of the elective courses, they responded that they lacked information on subject selection, and needed changes in teaching methods and assessments. In addition, although it was possible to select courses related to career/advanced courses or to take various courses, the respondents said that they lacked the efficiency of opening a small number of subjects or selecting classes. As a result, it can be seen that various materials and environments should be better equipped for more diverse elective courses.

Keywords: Curriculum, Elective Curriculum, Subject Selection, High School, Organization

1. Introduction

Korean school education is operated according to the curriculum established by the country. In other words, in the curriculum, the major subjects, educational goals, directions, and contents necessary for students are systematically presented, and the school organizes and operates these subjects and contents appropriately[1][2]. In the case of the Korean curriculum, there are many essential subjects and contents that students must learn in the elementary school curriculum, but as they go up to middle school or high school, there are more elective subjects and contents than the essential subjects[3]. In other words, if the primary school emphasizes the commonality of education, the higher school emphasizes the diversity and autonomy of education[4].

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In this regard, the high school curriculum specifies that various educational contents and subjects can be learned. When constructing a curriculum in high school, students consider career paths and aptitudes and expand the range of subject choices. However, due to various realistic conditions, such as college entrance exams, and Korea's educational climate, which has emphasized more commonality than diversity in education, there is a limit to diversification of curriculum operation in high school. In addition, there is still insufficient data on how the school should organize the curriculum and what practical options should be given to students to realize the autonomy and diversity of education. In addition, according to previous studies[5][6], students with high spontaneity and creativity choose more aggressive subjects. This shows that selective education is being realized not at the school level, but at the individual student's personality level, and it can be seen that various students' options are not secured.

The state needs to continually monitor how the curriculum works in the real school field and what the electives are, and suggest several systems to support them[7]. In other words, the issues surrounding subject selection arise from various aspects such as planning, implementation, results, and various conditions, so it is necessary to examine the more rigorous student subject options by separating the issues for each aspect[8][9]. Recently, several studies have investigated the subject selection status of high school students[5][10], but since the study was not diverse and focused on the operation of the school rather than the opinions of students, it is still in practical selection centered on students.

Therefore, this study is intended to systematically examine the current status of elective courses in high schools in Korea, which are operating the 2015 revised curriculum. Specifically, this study aimed to analyze how the school organizes electives, and how much it reflects the needs of the students. It also focused on what process and method reflects the students' choices, and what conditions are necessary for the actual selection operation.

2. Research Method

In order to achieve the research objectives, related literature research and questionnaire surveys were conducted. First, the literature study was conducted on documents related to curriculum operation, such as national curriculum documents, high school curriculum organization data, and curriculum operation guidelines. In addition, based on this situation, a framework for setting indicators to analyze the current status of elective courses was prepared as shown in [Fig. 1].



[Fig. 1] Indicator Setting Framework for Subject Selection Survey

Based on the indicator frame mentioned above, a total of 40 questions were prepared, consisting of the contents of the following [Table 1]. The survey consisting of the questions below was conducted for a month in November 2019 using the Google survey system. The survey was announced through cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education, and high school students from all over the country were allowed to participate for a fixed period of time. 32,262 high school students participated in the final questionnaire, and the reliability of the survey tool (Cronbach α) was .933.

[Table 1] Composition of the Survey

Domain			Main questionnaire
	CIPP	Step	
Class	Input (I)	Lesson plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide to completion course according to career and aptitude: linkage between elective course and career design • Information on elective subjects: subject nature, teaching, learning and evaluation guidance, etc. • How to decide on elective courses: Opening of desired subjects considering student demand
	Process (P)	Class operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contents: Consistency between the instructions of the selected subject and the actual class • Method: Whether it is conducted in a suitable way, such as student participation such as projects, discussions, discussions, cooperation, activities, and cooperation-oriented classes
	Product (P)	Class evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate evaluation, such as process-oriented evaluation • Assessment of the linkage between elective courses and career design: Whether or not it helps to advance to a higher school in an elective course, whether to help with career design outside of college, etc.

School	Context (C)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide practical course options: Consideration of student demand, consideration of students who decide to go to college or not, etc. • Various credit recognition policies such as community connection and learning experience outside school
		Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen students' academic design capabilities
More details			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of each class and environment • Advantages and disadvantages according to the characteristics of the optional curriculum

3. Results

3.1 Results of Perception Analysis on Class-related Areas

[Table 2] shows the results of students' perception analysis on class-related areas such as class planning, operation, and evaluation.

[Table 2] Results of Analysis of Students' Perception of Electives and Classes at School

Items	Frequency(%)					Sum
	1(No)	2	3	4	5(Yes)	
There is an opportunity to guide information about the elective course (explanatory material, homepage guide, student briefing session).	1,796 (5.6)	2,978 (9.2)	12,206 (37.8)	8,417 (26.1)	6,865 (21.3)	32,262 (100.0)
It is determined whether or not to open an elective by reflecting the needs of students.	2,151 (6.7)	2,621 (8.1)	10,903 (33.8)	8,942 (27.7)	7,645 (23.7)	32,262 (100.0)
The elective courses consist of a variety of instructional methods (discussion, presentation, practice) and process-based evaluation.	1,918 (5.9)	2,928 (9.1)	12,638 (39.2)	8,617 (26.7)	6,161 (19.1)	32,262 (100.0)
I think the general elective course will help me understand my subject matter.	1,514 (4.7)	1,982 (6.1)	11,470 (35.6)	9,907 (30.7)	7,389 (22.9)	32,262 (100.0)
I think that the career options will help my aptitude and career.	1,955 (6.1)	2,543 (7.9)	11,476 (35.6)	9,103 (28.2)	7,185 (22.3)	32,262 (100.0)
I think that the elective class will help you go to a higher school according to your career design.	1,535 (4.8)	1,859 (5.8)	11,472 (35.6)	9,646 (29.9)	7,750 (24.0)	32,262 (100.0)

3.2 Results of Perception Analysis on Areas Related to the Educational Environment

[Table 3] shows the results of students' perception analysis on class-related areas such as class planning, operation, and evaluation.

[Table 3] Results of Analysis of Students' Perception of the Elective Operating Environment

Items	Frequency(%)					Sum
	1(No)	2	3	4	5(Yes)	
The school provides enough opportunities for students to choose, such as running a "school-to-school joint curriculum" that allows them to attend classes at other high schools.	2,427 (7.5)	2,598 (8.1)	12,093 (37.5)	8,372 (26.0)	6,772 (21.0)	32,262 (100.0)
The school provides support so that students can select subjects and design well (career examination, career counseling, career experience, etc.).	1,940 (6.0)	2,602 (8.1)	12,131 (37.6)	9,009 (27.9)	6,580 (20.4)	32,262 (100.0)

3.3 Results of Recognition Analysis on the Characteristics of the Optional Curriculum

[Table 4] shows the results of students' perception analysis on what is more important in the operation of the selected curriculum among the above-mentioned areas.

[Table 4] Results of Students' Perception Analysis on the Importance of Each Area

Items		M	SD
The importance of factors for organizing and operating elective courses	Opportunities for information about the elective courses	3.48	1.093
	Decision to open elective courses reflecting student demand	3.54	1.134
	Utilization of various teaching methods and process-oriented evaluation	3.44	1.080
Awareness of electives and classes	Enhancement of students' academic understanding by subject for evaluation of general elective courses	3.61	1.049
	Improving the aptitude and career of students in career electives	3.53	1.103
	Career design help considering career	3.63	1.056
School electives operating environment	Supporting the operation and participation of joint curriculum between schools	3.45	1.131
	Support for course selection and career design	3.49	1.086
Sum		3.52	-

[Table 5] and [Table 6] show the results of students' perception analysis on the advantages and disadvantages of organizing and operating elective courses.

[Table 5] Results of Students' Perception Analysis on the Merits of the Elective Curriculum

Items	Frequency(%)	Sum
Aptitude and career-related subjects	20,804 (48.9)	42,524 (100.0)
Advantageous to going to a higher school	3,303 (7.8)	
Various courses available	11,435 (26.9)	
Various types of classes	4,743 (11.2)	
Evaluate the learning process as well as the results	2,239 (5.3)	

[Table 6] Results of Analysis of Students' Perceptions of the Disadvantages of the Elective Curriculum

Items	Frequency(%)	Sum
Relative disadvantage in calculating the grade of a small number of subjects	15,846 (31.8)	49,891 (100.0)
Reduced efficiency due to class shift	8,473 (17.0)	
Course selection without information on course characteristics	7,667 (15.4)	
If the course is not set, the burden on the selection itself	13,315 (26.7)	
Actually similar class content compared to the opening of various subjects	4,590 (9.2)	

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The researcher has analyzed from various angles how practical the selection of subjects is to the high school students in Korea and the diversification of education in high schools. The results reviewed above are as follows.

First, it was found that the students were generally satisfied with the school's electives and classes. It was recognized that the general electives were helpful for academic understanding, and the career electives improved aptitude and career search ability. In addition, they recognized that they were helped in career design through elective classes. However, the opportunity to receive information on the elective course was insufficient, and the method and evaluation of the elective course were insufficient. It was found that classes need to be changed, such as discussions, presentations, and practice in a variety of ways, and evaluations are also centered on the process[11].

Second, it was found that the students evaluated that they were doing well in the overall operation environment. However, it was recognized that the school's efforts to open minority subjects were relatively necessary. That is, it can be seen that it is necessary to create an environment for more diverse elective subjects.

In addition, students said that the curriculum for elective courses had the advantages of 'choice of aptitude and career-related subjects' and 'a variety of subjects'. However, students perceived that the elective curriculum also had problems such as 'relative disadvantage when calculating the grade of a small number of participating subjects', 'burden on the selection itself when the course was not set', and 'decreased efficiency due to class movement'. In addition, it appeared to recognize the following '1) no-sufficient information on elective subjects, 2) lack of teachers frequently presents unopened subjects, and 3) lack of elective subjects in art or physical education.'

Based on the above results, the following improvements are needed to operate the high school elective curriculum in a more advanced way in the future. First, a more flexible high school curriculum is required. In other words, considering the realistic conditions of the operation of the optional curriculum, it is necessary to operate the curriculum in a variety of ways, such as linkage between schools and provision of online courses[12]. Second, in order to successfully realize the elective curriculum, it is necessary to establish a high school undergraduate system to recognize not only education in schools but also out-of-school education, and improve the assignment system and link it with the elective curriculum[13]. Third, in order to realize a practical student-centered selection curriculum, various guide materials must be provided to students. In other words, it is no longer an option education based on the student's personal preferences, but a system should be created to ensure that all students receive stable education. In order to realize diversification and autonomy of education, the education field will have to make more efforts in the future.

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