

Chung, J., Hong, M., Kim, S., Yang, J., & Yoon, T. (2017). Redesigning a university entrance interview protocol: a case study with pre-service elementary school teachers in Korea. *Journal of Education and Learning*. Vol. 11 (4) pp. 416-425. DOI: 10.11591/edulearn.v11i4.6828

Redesigning a University Entrance Interview Protocol: A Case Study with Pre-Service Elementary School Teachers in Korea

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Abstract

In Korea, a national university admission is made based on a variety of factors like Grade Point Average(GPA), Statement of Purpose(SOP), Letters of Recommendation, as well as other achievement records and/or descriptions of specific qualifications. In reviewing applications, the admissions committee considers GPA, SOP, recommendation letters and other factors are also taken into consideration in the interview process. An interview test is designed to measure the overall ability of pre-service teachers, particularly focusing on their character and nature. Thus, the purpose of this study is intended to understand the admission processes of a national university in Korea, and to design the interview test questions to choose the ideal pre-service teachers who are to work in the public elementary school after graduation. In order to answer this question, a survey questionnaire was distributed to 478 college students and then results were collected and analysed.

Keywords: *university entrance exam, Korean university exam, admissions, interview tests*

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Introduction

In Korea, education policies usually have gone along with the university admissions system. In fact, it has always been a difficult task for admission officers and faculty members in a university to make a prudent decision after a careful review of thousands of applicants' documents. Each year in Korea, approximately 600,000 students in the 12th grade take CSAT (College Scholastic Ability Test) to get matriculation into a university in which they yearn to study. Along with this test, they are asked to prepare for the university entrance package which includes a recommendation letter from a homeroom teacher, a 3-5 page-long statement of purpose, and their high school grade report. This is the most common and respected type of getting admission. Strong candidates are required to prove a good GPA, extracurricular activities, and either an interview and/or essay test as an extra round. Basically, some key criteria that is taken into consideration include as follows:

- cumulative high school GPA
- class rank
- CSAT test scores
- the quality of statement of purpose containing solid college preparation, strength of a candidate, specific academic interests, and etc.

There was an interesting survey¹ about future hope, conducted by the Ministry of Education (MOE) from June 22 to July 29, 2016, and a total number of 27,264 students participated in the online poll to answer their future dream and job wanted. This poll has been conducted on an annual basis by MOE and according to the recent poll, the results revealed that becoming a public-school teacher in the future is No 1 priority among all levels of students. Detailed results of 2016 academic year are shown as below.

Figure 1. Top 10 Future-wanted Jobs of Korean Students in 2016

rank	level	Grade	Grade	Grade	2016년 학생 희망직업 10위			
		1-6	7-9	10-12	초등학생	중학생	고등학생	
1 st		teacher	teacher	teacher	1위	선생님	선생님	선생님
2 nd		athlete	police officer	nurse	2위	운동선수	경찰	간호사
3 rd		doctor	doctor	biologist	3위	의사	의사	생명·자 과학자 및 연구원
4 th		chef	athlete	police officer	4위	요리사	운동선수	경찰
5 th		police officer	serviceman	serviceman	5위	경찰	군인	군인
6 th		judicial officer	chef	IT technician	6위	법조인	요리사	정보시스 및 보안전문
7 th		singer	biologist	chef	7위	가수	생명·자연 과학자 및 연구원	요리사
8 th		pastry chef	IT technician	doctor	8위	재병원, 재과원	정보시스템 및 보안전문가	의사
9 th		scientist	singer	engineer	9위	과학자	가수	기계공학 술자 및 구원
10 th		professional gamer	government official	flight attendant	10위	프로게이머	공무원	승무원

¹A poll was conducted by MOE(2016):

http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201612202243025&code=940401

As shown as Figure 1, it becomes very clear that all the students from grade 1-12 wish one day to become a public-school teacher. Ironically, it has become quite competitive to get accepted in teachers' college due to the fact that many of students are willing to apply and fulfil their dream as a classroom teacher. However, there are only a dozen of universities in Korean which are aimed to produce and train competent elementary school teachers. Those are all run by the Korean government. Unlike being a secondary school teacher, students have to graduate from national university of education if they want to work in a public school. Upon graduation, they are given a certificate of an elementary school teacher issued by the Ministry of Education. A total number of 12 national university of education in Korea hold and share similar objectives and visions to help promote educational philosophy and develop comprehensive understanding of education and quality teaching abilities. Below shows the main objectives of education of Chuncheon national of education (CNUE) in which the researchers are currently working.

- A community center for education and culture in the 21st Century, Chuncheon National University of Education aims to
 - **Promote the spirit for human-oriented education**
 - Democratic Citizens Spirit
 - Comprehensive Human Love
 - Systematic Teaching Abilities
 - Creative Frontiers' Spirit
 - **Develop structures for the realization of people-oriented education**
 - Construction of Rational Curriculum
 - Development of Progressive Curriculum
 - Support for Efficient Educational Activities
 - **Produce teachers who realize people-oriented education**
 - Teacher who has a rational philosophy of education and practical teaching abilities
 - Teacher who has devoted attitude toward education
 - Teacher who participates in the societal development with the cooperative public spirit

In addition to those objectives, a national university of education in Korea is also committed to promoting practical abilities, contributing to the development of democratic society based on the spirit of teamwork and justice, as well as capabilities as leaders with extensive knowledge. Therefore, admission officers in the university of education have to ponder how to select such talented or competent student as to discipline as an ideal teacher needed in this 21st century to fulfil its objectives. However, this is a real task and a challenge at the same time.

Characteristics of the Ideal Teacher

Teachers working in a public-school system play a very pivotal role in the process of education. Both practically and theoretically, there is few teacher who ever becomes totally ideal in any part of the world. It is so difficult to become an ideal teacher, because to become an ideal teacher would mean that he or she has achieved a certain level of perfection with good character, personality, attitude, nature, capability, grounding, aptitude and qualification as a teacher (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Harris & Owen, 2007; Yates, 1988). Of course, there must be a series of other factors, as well, to be considered what an ideal teacher may possess. A good sense of humour, openness, self-confidence, communication ability, and so on are good examples (Creemers, 1994; Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Mattern et al, 2010; Miller, 1987).

Characteristics of Good Teaching

Good teachers bear in mind that education is a foundation of all in our life, and those teachers tend to have a normally good teaching skills and practices, personal qualities, and positive attitude towards students. McMillan (2007) stressed the importance of teaching and its main objective. He argued that a simple aim of teaching is to help students' learning possible, and to teach is to make an assumption about what and how the student learns. In the end, teaching well implies learning about students' learning. One set of characteristics of good teaching, extracted from Ramsden's work (2003) shows as follows:

- A desire to share your love of the subject with students
- An ability to make the material being taught stimulating and interesting

- A facility for engaging with students at their level of understanding
- A capacity to explain the material plainly
- A commitment to making it absolutely clear what has to be understood at what level and why
- Showing concern and respect for students
- A commitment to encouraging independence
- An ability to improvise and adapt to new demands
- Using teaching methods and academic tasks that require students to learn actively, responsibly and co-operatively
- Using valid assessment methods
- A focus on key concepts, and students misunderstandings of them, rather than covering the ground
- Giving the highest quality feedback on student work
- A desire to learn from students and other sources about the effects of teaching and how it can be improved.

Given those factors are the keys to become a good teacher, it is also very crucial for admission officials to select the best candidates who want to be a teacher.

Procedures of Evaluating Candidates' Application

When the final test score is announced in a month after taking CSAT, students finally tend to take a moment to choose and apply for universities for admission. Although the whole admission procedures may differ slightly based on each university's entrance policies or procedures, a national university of education takes 2 steps to make a final decision, which would be 'acceptance' or 'rejection'². The first step is to have a careful review of all the university entrance packages submitted by each applicant. It usually takes 5~6 weeks to filter out who is supposed to proceed in the second step, which is a literally interview test.

In other words, each candidate's application for admission is evaluated twice. The first review is basically performed based on the application packages. A number of three faculty members who are in charge of reading application packet conduct the first review. The application readers are above level of an assistant professor, who are appointed for the office of admissions part-time. They are expected to be able to bring their insight and cold judgement to the task of making the first-round admission decisions. Made up of full-time faculty members and admissions professionals, they screen candidates based on clear thinking, clear decision, accuracy, and fairness. This first-round review is carried out as a blind review, so that other application readers cannot share his or her recommendation for admissions. As explained above, admissions readers consider many of the aspects which are like grade reports of high school, CSAT scores, active participation in extracurricular activities, volunteering, mentoring and evidence of leadership, awards, and service for others and communities. Specifically, they pay attention to the applicant's high school, in particular, the strength of the curriculum, accomplishment of students, and how grades were earned. Later, these factors are considered in making a recommendation for next-round admissions status based in on this specialized level of knowledge.

The second review is, simply put, an 'interview test'. The application is then sent on to be validated by another 3 second reviewers who are in charge of an actual interview process. As such reviewers in the first review, three reviewers perform a face-to-face interview with a candidate. Each candidate is provided around 15 minutes, including 5 minute-preparation time to answer given interview questions. While conducting an interview, 3 reviewers read carefully the application package of each candidate again, refer to any memos or recommendations made by the first-round reviewers and then validates the admissions decision. During this process, each application interviewer gives it a broad perspective drawn from his or her professional experience. Each also tries to look at all the candidates as the whole person, because they are to be a public-school teacher. In fact, this is the main purpose of an interview which lies on evaluating the applicant itself as a whole person, not just a test score. One of significant aspects the admission officers pay a close attention is particularly to view all the applicants as a big picture, that is, a combination of passions, talents, interests, desire and motivation beyond grades and test scores (Eva et al, 2004; Nurnberg et al, 2012; Shahani et al, 1991; Trusheim et al, 1990).

² Unfortunately, there does not exist so-called a provisional admission in national university of education in Korea.

This is why an interview test matters before making a final acceptance decision. Therefore, interview questions mainly consist of asking candidates' character, personality, attitude, nature, capability, grounding, aptitude and qualification as a teacher.

After two reviews are finished, the final decision is lastly made based on the results of both comprehensive, holistic and individualized first-round review and the interview process. Once reviewers make an admissions decision and recommendation, officers in the admissions office will have a careful review one more time, and send out the official announcement for admission. Throughout the whole procedures, all the reviewers consider a variety of components having an impact on being a teacher, which will be thoroughly assessed and weighted to make the best choice for the university.

Interview and Interview Test

The term, 'interview' derives from Latin and middle French words, meaning to see between or 'see each other'. Oxford English dictionary (2013) defines it as "an oral examination of an applicant for a job, college place, etc." Generally, interview is conducted between people where questions are inquired and answered. According to Dessler (2012), "An interview is a procedure designed to obtain information from a person's oral response to oral inquiries." By conducting a systematic interview, the interviewees can deeply grasp needed information and knowledge from the interviewer. In order to choose the best or at least qualified candidate in a teachers' college, an interview test has been emphasized along with other areas (Brownell et al, 2007; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Mallozzi, 2009; Morris, 1999; Rapley, 2001). The interview is the second stage of the selecting process and the most important. By conducting an interview, the reviewers of admission have a chance where candidates can describe their visions, experiences and skills and can get an idea of what they want to accomplish with the university (Edwards et al, 1990; Mounset et al, 2006; Ralston et al, 2003). During an interview, one of the reviewers' purposes can be to gather additional information about candidates which is not stated in the application packet. Reviewers strive to figure out who will be a good teacher while having a conversation and asking questions. Basically, an interview is conducted in a Korean language to analyze candidates' motivations, goals, aptitude, and relative knowledge in the field of education. and takes approximately 10 minutes. Accordingly, it is very important for each candidate to be logical and communicate well with the interview questions to deliver sound and systematic opinion.

Methodology

This current study has two cardinal aims, Firstly, it aims to design the interview protocol with which CNUE utilizes for making recruiting efforts to talented candidates and secondly, to suggest an interview evaluation model to apply in the admission process. In order to find out the significant factors that admission officials at teachers' college should recognize, a quantitative research method was selected to meet the intentions of the research. The researchers created and administered online participant questionnaire. The whole research process was conducted for 2 weeks through Google online survey tool. After collecting data, the results were analysed quantitatively.

Participants

The survey was initially distributed to 570 in-service elementary school teachers enrolled in an undergraduate program at a teachers' college in Korea, and among them, a total 477 number of participated in this study. As described as below, Table 1 shows detailed information about participants and survey.

Table 1. Basic Survey Information

Item	Detailed information
Period	2015. 10.23~11.6
No. of Participant	478(Male: 151 / Female: 327) out of 570
Response rate	83.8%
Web address	https://goo.gl/opcdsZ

Materials

For this research, an online survey tool using Google form was chosen, since it allows participants to access and answer any given questions immediately using their digital devices. In fact, it makes researchers easy in terms of giving a comfortable approach to create a survey that contains as many questions as needed to ask, in a variety styles. Plus, one of the most distinctive features of Google form could be cost-effectiveness and user-friendliness. It provides free platform to create a survey and a

beautifully formatted visual report of collected data which are composed of pie graphs, bar graphs, or line graphs depending on the data collected. Speed and accuracy were another merit for using Google form in that researchers were able to figure out the results with the summary report, and it was easy to read, having real numbers, percentages, and a bar graph. Below are some of the screenshots of online survey using Google form.



Figure 2. Screenshots of Online Survey Form

Questionnaire

In order to figure out any important aspects that admission officials should take into consideration when interviewing, a questionnaire was distributed to the students. It was composed of 18 questions with 2 additional open-ended ones to synthesize participants' thoughts or opinions. In detail, it was split into 3 sections. Questions from 1 to 7 were categorized as Section #1, which were related to asking participants' previous interview test experiences. Section #2 including questions from 8 to 15 inquired their thoughts about a few significant factors needed to include in conducting an interview. Lastly, section #3 was an open-ended type of question about participants' opinions and perspectives on a-must-be-included-factors in the interview questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire for participants was created online using Google survey tool. The researchers both texted and emailed the survey link directly to all the participants who were supposed to fill out and completed it within one week. The result was notified immediately to the researchers' account whenever the questionnaire was finished. Since this was online-based questionnaire, the data were easily gathered and analysed using Google spreadsheets. In terms of open-ended question answers, those were collected and categorized to identify any meaningful texts as well as comments which were related to this research purposes. Personal thoughts and opinion data were especially critical in terms of understanding in-service teachers' perceptions of designing the interview questions for choosing the best candidates, a pre-service teacher.

Results

Natural Factors on Considering in the Interview with Pre-Service Teachers

In order to design a reformed interview question and to seek a strong candidate who is to be a public-school teacher, it is required to ask questions about a basic nature of a student as a desirable candidate. So, questions were given to grasp what kinds of natural factors would be important to be asked. As Table 2 below shows, more than 40% participants agreed that character ought to be regarded as the most important factor when admission officials choose a candidate. Character can be referred as

the sum of qualities that defines a person including a person's ability, thoughts, opinions, ideas, motives, intentions, temperament, judgment, behavior, imagination, perception, emotions, loves, and hates. So, this means that asking character questions of each candidate also should be involved in the interview.

Table 2. Results of Pre-service Teachers' Nature

order	items	no. of respondent	%
1	character	197	41.3
2	values	68	14.3
3	communication ability	47	9.9
4	a sense of duty	41	8.6
5	subject matter knowledge	40	8.4
6	passion	27	5.7
7	empathy	25	5.2
8	intellectual endeavour	13	2.7
9	problem-solving strategy	12	2.5
10	self-expression	8	1.5
total	-	478	100

Intellectual Factors on Considering in the Interview with Pre-service Teachers

About a quarter of total participants responded to the survey that a question asking individual's openness ought to be embedded in the interview. Openness involves teachers' attitudes towards adapting new techniques and methods in teaching, and refers to collaboration, ability for learners and something about transparency, or openness in communication. 66 students picked up problem-solving ability as the second item which also needs to be considered in creating interview questions. Like learners, teachers also encounter lots of unexpected obstacles while at school. Thus, questions about problem-solving competence are designed to know how each candidate can take personal action to solve problems, resolve conflicts, discuss alternatives, and focus on thinking as a vital element. Along with a good communicative skill, decision-making ability was ranked as the third important factor. By adding a decision-making situation, admission officers can figure out how a candidate forecasts the outcome of each option, and based on all these items, determines which option is the best for that particular situation. (Read more: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/decision-making.html>)

Table 3. Results of Pre-service Teachers' Intellectual Factors

order	items	no. of respondent	%
1	openness	101	21.4
2	problem-solving ability	66	13.8
3	language skill	57	11.9
4	decision-making	56	11.7
5	intellectual decision	50	10.2
6	creativity	47	10.1
7	logical thinking	46	9.6
8	teaching performance	45	9.4
9	information processing ability	10	1.9
Total	-	478	100

Personal Factors on Considering in the Interview with Pre-service Teachers

Approximately 40% of the total participants agreed to add questions of asking candidates' personal qualification as a public-school teacher. In particular, they pointed out the significance of candidates' being respectful and careful to others as the first priority. Next, commitment for others was chosen from 95 students in that public-school teachers are committed to providing good quality of education as well as equity and excellence to young learners. In addition to this, it was emphasized that questions should be added in the interview process for a sake of grasping each candidate's passion, leadership, and self-confidence. Detailed results are shown as below at Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Pre-service Teachers' Personal Factors

order	items	no. of respondent	%
1	respect/care	176	36.9
2	commitment	95	19.9
3	honesty/trust	55	11.5
4	empathy	53	11.1
5	passion	25	5.2
6	fairness	21	4.4
7	leadership	19	4.0
8	self-confidence	18	3.8
9	cooperation/participation	16	3.1
total	-	478	100

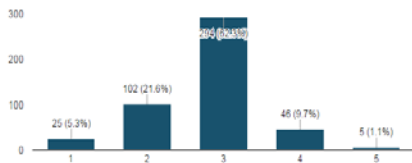
Other Opinions on Considering in the Interview with Pre-service Teachers

As the related findings are presented in Table 4 below, around 10 themes were found as important factors which needs to be considered in designing an interview question. 79 pre-service teachers out of 478 answered that the interview should include in-depth questions to figure out candidates' personal character, personality, and/or nature. 42 participants stated that the overall interview time needs to be expanded to understand candidates' character, behaviour and ways of thinking better. Currently, the interview has been conducted less than 10 minutes. In addition to this, 33 students suggested to add more diverse topics in the interview, which may contain diversity and quality in education, multiculturalism, environmental issues, and so on. Interestingly, 4 participants requested making interview questions from high school curriculum, not from the diverse themes.

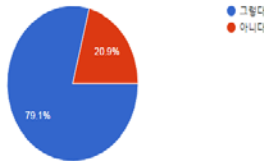
Table 4. Results of Pre-service Teachers' Opinion on Interview Test

order	items	no. of respondent	%
1	adding questions to ask candidates' personal character, personality, nature	79	33.3
2	expanding interview time	42	17.8
3	adding more diverse interview topic	33	13.9
4	raising the difficulty of interview question	18	7.6
5	adding questions to ask candidates' self-confidence, passion	16	6.8
6	feeling satisfied with current interview question	10	4.2
7	adding a concrete rubric of interview test	9	3.8
8	changing interview waiting time	8	3.4
9	revising a guideline on evaluating interview	5	2.2
10	making questions from high school curriculum	4	1.6
11	arranging number of interviewee	2	0.8
12	etc	11	4.6
total	-	478	100

6. 수시 또는 정시 개별면접고사 질문 난이도는 어떠했습니까? (응답 472명)



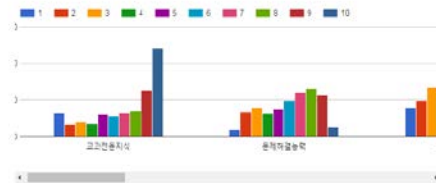
7. 우리대학 면접문제는 고등학교 교육과정 범위와 수준에서 출제되었다고 생각하십니까? (응답 478명)



7-1. 위 문항에 아니라고 답한 경우 이유는 무엇인지 적어주세요. (응답 90명)

Part II. 면접서 예비고사 인적성 관련 사항

8. 우리대학에서 예비고사의 기본적 자질을 파악하기 위해 면접 시 고려해야 할 우선순위는 무엇입니까?



9. 우리대학에서 추구하는 지성을 겸비한 예비고사 선발을 위해 고려해야 할 우선순위는 무엇입니까?



Figure 3. Screenshots of Online Survey Results

Conclusions and Suggestions

In particular, it is elementary teachers that are to educate young learners, to guide them to become a better citizen and to provide them with hope and dream. They are committed to delivering the best quality of instruction as well as having the joy of the classroom filled with young minds with passion, enthusiasm, respect, and responsibility. So, it is very significant to train and educate pre-service teacher, but it is always very difficult and tricky to choose a strong candidate who is to be a public-school teacher in the admissions process.

Therefore, when it comes to selecting a good candidate, the fundamental consideration lies on how to design interview questions, because through the interview, interviewers and admissions officials can figure out each candidate's qualification which is not shown on the application packet. As presented above in the finding section, it is concluded as follows: 1) in terms of designing questions about grasping one's qualification, participants answered that it is necessary to add questions of one's character, values, communication skills, a sense of duty and subject matter knowledge in order. 2) in order to find out the intellectual potentials of candidates, the responders pointed out that questions of openness, problem-solving ability, language skill, decision-making and intellectual decision should be taken into consideration. 3) with regards to personal factors, it was emphasized that questions about respect/care, commitment, honesty/trust, empathy and passion need to be asked to the interviewees.

To sum up the findings of this current research study, it can be suggested that interview tests be conducted as a double-round system. At the first round called 'Experience-based Behavioural Interview (EBI)', the interviewees are required to answer questions based on their own previous experience through which the interviewers can pay attention to each candidate's nature, character personality, and other important factors. Then, the second-round interview will be called 'Situational Interview (SI)'. Like Experience-based Behavioural Interview, during a situational interview candidates are inquired specific questions about what may happen on teaching or managing class. The aim of this second round interview is to assess a situation and to provide solutions on how he, or she would handle it. Situation based interview questions can involve problem-solving and handling difficult issues and circumstances in the school. By listening to the with solid information on how candidates would handle the situation, the interviewer can make a decision of their intellectual and personal character or strength.

Acknowledgement

The authors appreciate the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of this manuscript and their many meaningful feedback and suggestions.

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