

# South Korea's Teacher Education Innovations: Impact and Implications

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## **Abstract**

*This research entitled “South Korea’s Teacher Education Innovations: Impact and Implications” aims to find out the impact of the innovations undertaken in Korea’s Teacher Education in the areas of teacher education curriculum, teacher certification and development, teacher recruitment, selection and retention, and teacher assignment or workload as perceived by the teacher and administrator respondents.*

*To answer the objectives of the research, several methods were used. First, secondary literatures were reviewed to identify the recent reforms in Korea’s teacher education. Second, a survey questionnaire was distributed to teacher respondents to find out the impact of these innovations as well as the factors affecting the success and failures of these reforms. Third, an interview questionnaire was distributed to administrators and former administrators of teacher education institutions to corroborate and deepen the results gathered from the teacher respondents. The survey questionnaire and the interview questionnaire were both originally written in English, later translated to Hangeul to facilitate the gathering of data.*

*Results show that Korea has implemented numerous innovations in Teacher Education in the specific areas mentioned above. Respondents perceived that the innovations in Korea’s teacher education on the following areas have High Impact: Teacher Education Curriculum objectives, methodologies and evaluation; Teacher Certification and Development; Teacher Recruitment and Retention; and Teacher Assignment or workload. Meanwhile the innovations in Korea’s Teacher Education on the following areas were only considered of Moderate Impact: Teacher Education curriculum content and Teacher selection.*

**Keywords:** *teacher education, education, teaching, teacher, classroom teaching, school administration, educational management, teacher training*

## **1. Introduction**

Quality education has always been identified as the ultimate thrust of all educational institutions all over the world and quality education can only be achieved through quality teachers. *Quality teachers* are described as having the following characteristics: pedagogical knowledge, subject area content knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective teaching, strong understanding of human growth and child development, effective communication skills, strong sense of ethics, and capacity for renewal and ongoing learning (Cobb, Darling-Hammond, and Murangi, 1995).

Teachers are considered to be the most important resource that brings about the quality of education and determines the success or failure of education. The quality of education depends primarily on the quality and professional development of teachers (Im, Yoo, and Pak, 2001; Lee et al., 2013a; Park, 2014; Treagust, Won, Petersen, & Wynne, 2015).

If this is so, there is an urgent need for all countries, particularly teacher education institutions, to fulfill its social mission, that is, to provide a well-trained teaching force

essential in preparing students to function competently within an increasingly technologically information-based society (Cobb, 1999). Though technological advancement is imperative in bringing about quality instruction, the fact cannot be discounted that the teacher remains to be the most important and useful visual aid. Nothing can ever replace the teacher in the classroom.

In a paper presented by Toby Linden to the World Bank entitled “Upgrading Korean Education in the Age of the Knowledge Economy: Context and Issues” (2002) he emphasized the need for lifelong learning because we are now in the age of a Knowledge Society rather than a Knowledge Economy. This means that there is a need to create a lifelong learning system to be able to meet the challenges of the knowledge society. Lifelong learning, he added, implies a different learning paradigm because there will be a demand for additional competencies, additional types of learners, and additional learning modalities.

This lifelong learning system has its implications to teacher training according to Linden: 1) training begins with teachers identifying needs and demands; 2) most training takes place in the learning setting (schools, universities, etc.) where trainees observe, visit, assist, and teach. Training is done in both formal and non-formal settings; 3) training emphasizes actual classroom teaching behaviors; 4) groups or cohorts of teachers are trained together to build networks and collaboration; and 5) training occurs throughout the teacher’s career.

Since the time these reforms have been introduced in teacher education, so much has been done, many activities and strategies have been applied. It is apt and timely to look back at this point and find out the innovations and developments undertaken and its impact on the overall goal of establishing lifelong learning in Korea.

Korea’s teacher education system has been the subject of many studies and researches (Darling Hammond

& Cobb, 1995; Im et al., 2001; Ingersoll & Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2007; Jones, 2013; Kwak, 2012). It has also been compared with other countries such as in the case of Japan (Kim, 2009; Kim et al., 2003), United States (Kim et al., 2009), United Kingdom (Kim et al., 2009; Noh, 2004; Shim, 2010), and China (Liu & Park, 2013). However, a study on the impact of the recent innovations in teacher education has not been conducted yet.

## **2. Research Problems and Aims**

This research seeks to find out the impact of the innovations recently undertaken in Korea’s teacher education to the following: teacher education curriculum, teacher certification and development, teacher recruitment, selection and retention, and teacher assignment or workload. It further strives to discover the factors attributed to the success as well as failure of the implemented innovations to teacher education in South Korea.

## **3. Methodology**

Secondary data were used to know more about Korea, its educational system, and most particularly about the status of teacher education in the country. The respondents were teachers from the elementary and high school levels who were currently teaching and or enrolled in the graduate schools of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) and administrators and former administrators of TEIs.

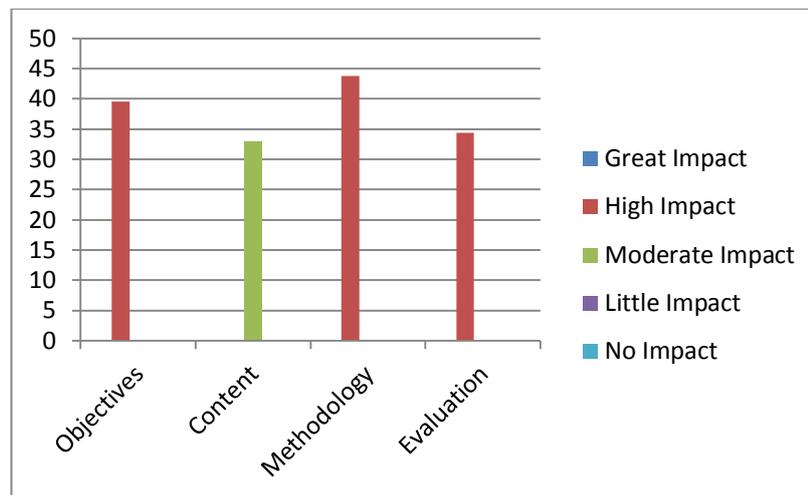
Survey questionnaires in English which were later validated and translated into Hangeul were distributed to faculty respondents and interview questionnaires to administrator respondents. The survey questionnaires for the faculty respondents were divided into two parts: Part I was to measure the impact of the recent innovations on teacher education in Korea as perceived by the respondents, and Part II was to identify the

factors affecting the success or failure of the innovations introduced. For the administrator respondents, 13 interview questions were asked regarding these recent innovations on teacher education in Korea.

#### 4. Findings and Analysis

The following tables show the impact of the innovations made in Korea's Teacher Education as perceived by the faculty and administrators of TEIs.

##### A. Impact of Korea's Teacher Education Innovations to the Teacher Education Curriculum



**Impact of Korea's Teacher Education Innovations to Teacher Education Curriculum**

The Education Reform of 1995 was launched with the goal of training excellent teachers who can meet the needs of the era of globalization and the information age in the field of education. The Ministry of Education revised the education curriculum to focus the direction of the TEIs and to reinforce the employment selection system of new teachers. In the revised curriculum, areas on pedagogy, ethics of teachers, information management ability, computer use, class management and skills on counseling students were emphasized (MEST, 2004).

The teacher respondents perceived that the innovations in the current Teacher Education Curriculum (TEC) have a **High Impact** on the Objectives of Teacher Education (TE). It shows that the innovations and developments have positively affected teacher education in Korea to a high extent. The results also reveal, however, that the respondents have some reservations in terms of the attainability of the objectives in the given time frame.

The innovations and developments in terms of Content have, to a certain degree, positively and negatively affected teacher education in Korea, giving this item a **Moderate Impact** rating by the respondents. It can be noted however, that as far as equipping teacher education students with the desirable attitudes towards becoming effective and efficient teachers is concerned, the respondents said that the innovations have positively affected teacher education in Korea to the highest extent.

In terms of Methodologies/Strategies, the results imply that the innovations and developments in teacher education curriculum have, to a high extent, positively affected teacher education in Korea, giving it a rating of **High Impact**.

Similarly, in the area of Evaluation, the developments and innovations have a **High Impact** on the TEC. The innovations have positively affected teacher education in Korea to a high extent. It shows however, that in terms of the use of recitation as a form of assessment, the respondents perceive this only with a Moderate Impact.

Generally, the fact that the area on TEC was assessed to be of **High Impact** only and not of Great Impact reveals that the teachers and administrators themselves realized there are some areas that need improvement as far as TEC is concerned. One of the administrators interviewed suggested that there be an “*expansion in the number of completing curriculum education subject, enhancement of pedagogy subject’s reliability, and the enforcement of education training.*”

Since broadening the base of the academic disciplines was one of the perceived needs in teacher education, the curriculum for teacher education was revised in such a way that more optional courses were offered. Optional courses focused on academic disciplines such as computer education, information processing, special education, and foreign languages. This offers teacher education students with a wider career options in teaching (Bui Minh Hien, 2003).

The results affirm the OECD report that TEC in Korea is content-laden and students have no time for reflection and personal study. Much of the time is spent on treating the subjects as academic disciplines and not on the enhancement of pedagogical skills.

Too much concentration on the content of the curriculum encourages a lecture-centered and teacher-centered methodology. Thus, recitation as a tool of assessment was given only a Moderate Impact rating, still making paper-pencil test as an evaluation tool more popular. Allowing the students to recite and express their own reflections about the subject matter is one of the effective means of assessing students’ learning.

Practice Teaching is the ‘*sine qua non*’ of teacher education. It is the stage crucial to the development of the instructional and pedagogical skills of a future teacher. It serves as an exit evaluation of student competencies acquired and learned during his studies. In a research by Anne Power (2001) she found out that through the practicum, pre-service students developed skills in understanding their personal effectiveness in teaching, developed the ability to look at their own achievements and improved performance in the classroom.

Koreans believe that education is the propelling factor that led and will continue to lead them towards economic, social and political growth. This immeasurable drive for education has motivated the government to put priority to education in the context of an emerging knowledge society and globalization. The government identified education reforms as central in the preparation of a Korean society to meet the challenges in the next decades. The Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER) in 1996 took a paradigm shift and envisioned an educational system which is “learner-centered and fosters imagination, creativity, divergent thinking, risk-taking, moral sensitivity, co-operation and develops a holistic balance in personality.”

## **B. Teacher Certification and Development**

The respondents consider the innovations in teacher education to be of **High Impact** to Teacher Certification. The innovations have positively affected teacher education in Korea to a high extent. Specifically, assessment of instructional ability and passing a teacher employment test were applauded by the respondents as having Great Impact on teacher education.

Certification is the process by which a non-governmental agency or association bestows professional recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications specified by that agency or association (Oakes, 1999). In the case of Korea,

the university or TEI where the student graduated from gives the certificate which becomes a requirement for him to be able to take the teacher employment examination.

The OECD (2004) reports that teacher certification from the TEIs is weak, lacks intellectual rigor and also lacks public confidence. Though the respondents agree that these processes of certification and teacher employment examination are laudable, some apprehensions are on the types of examinations given such as the multiple choice types and interviews. These must be enhanced to measure the expected competencies from a future teacher.

Although the government has increased the points given to interviews and measurement of pedagogical or instructional skills, the types of examinations and content of examination questions need thorough evaluation so that there is a match between the expected skills and the areas being examined as well as an alignment between pre-service teacher education curriculum and the areas being assessed.

Likewise, interviews conducted in a short period of time raise some questions of validity and reliability. It has also been observed that normally, students study and concentrate on studying to be able to pass the examination, sacrificing the real reason of studying to nurture the capacity for the teaching profession.

In this context, the need for an intensive induction program is needed to bridge the gap between the knowledge, skills, and attitudes lacking of an effective and efficient teacher. This should be offered to all newly employed teachers for the “purpose of raising the new teachers’ ability to adapt themselves to school setting” (OECD Report, 2004).

Every year, new teachers equipped with the more recent strategies and methodology needed to implement the curriculum join the teaching force. However, the fact remains that majority are those who have been trained many years ago before the reforms in teacher education have been introduced. These teachers need updating, reorientation, and if needed, a radical paradigm shift to be able to meet the demands of the changing times in education. Expectedly, they have been used to structures, curricula, teaching methods, modes of pupil evaluation and general modes of school procedures that are now in question.

The respondents are very appreciative of the fact that quality speakers and facilitators are provided during the trainings. They acknowledge that it has positively affected teacher education in Korea to the highest extent. The Center on International Education Benchmarking (2015) notes that the Korean government is principally in charge of managing the professional development programs for teachers. These include training for qualifications, in-service training, and special trainings in several areas such as information digitization or curriculum formation.

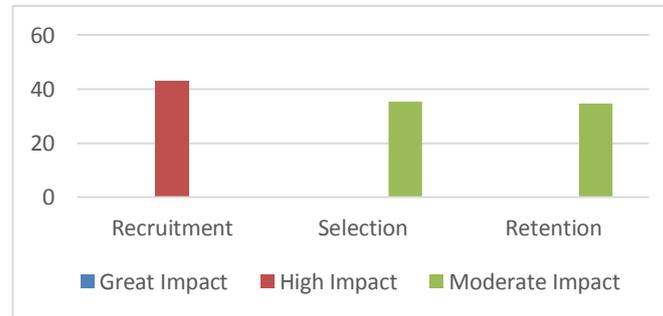
However, there is a clamor for more relevant topics, more appropriate methods to motivate teachers to attend, and varied and more participative strategies. Kim (2000), in his study revealed the same results, that is, teachers are dissatisfied with the content, evaluation, method, and accessibility of the in-service trainings.

There is also a need for a more enhanced system of sending teachers to other schools or universities for training and exposure. Specifically, the allotted time of 4-8 weeks exposure to other schools may not be sufficient to be able to have a thorough grasp of the methodology, skills, and knowledge intended. Allotting more time will give them the opportunity to learn from the teaching strategies and methodologies applied by local and foreign schools or teacher education institutions.

The implementation of the government’s “Long Term Study Program for Teachers” is yet to be seen and felt by teachers. This program aims to provide teachers the opportunities to acquire academic degrees at overseas educational institutions for approximately two years. This will “give the teachers the chance to absorb up-to-date educational theories and knowledge of the advanced countries” (OECD Report, 2004).

For it is true that unlearning what has been learned is difficult, but in the realm of education this is essential. In-service training of teachers, therefore, is very important. Moreso, in the institutionalization of lifelong learning where teachers of the future need to be more “proactive in their own learning and re-learning if they are to be successful in promoting a learning to learn capacity in their own pupils” (OECD Report, 2004).

### C. *Teacher Recruitment, Selection, and Retention*



**Impact of Korea's Teacher Education Innovations to Teacher Recruitment, Selection, and Retention**

The developments and innovations in Korea's teacher education are of *High Impact* to Teacher Recruitment. This perception coincides with the provision of scholarships and the screening of requirements of those entering the teacher education course. The conduct of examinations as a means of screening applicants, however, was given only a rating of Moderate Impact which means that this strategy of recruiting applicants have, to a certain degree, positively and negatively affected teacher education in Korea.

The innovations on teacher selection have *Moderate Impact* on teacher education in Korea that is, reforms and innovations have, to a certain degree, positively and negatively affected teacher education in Korea. The conduct of teacher employment test was given a High Impact rating however, areas on issuance of teaching certificate and giving due credit to educational qualifications are only of Moderate Impact

As regards teacher retention, the results show that the reduction of retirement age from 65 to 62, the formulation of a performance evaluation standard for teachers, setting of a merit-based promotion and reward system, and the giving of feedback to teachers based on performance evaluation results were assessed by the respondents as having a High Impact. Meanwhile, the increase of monetary compensation given to teachers, assistance in their financial needs in the form of loans, housing, etc., provision of vacation and holidays, and recognition of their legal rights as teachers were considered to be of Great Impact.

The recruitment of teachers in Korea is not so much a problem because the teaching profession has remained to be attractive. The teaching profession is one of the most popular career choices and they have been respected in the tradition of East Asian culture (Liu, et. al., 2015). Although it has experienced a little down turn during the 1960s and 1970s, it has regained its attractiveness during the 1990s. As compared to other professions, teaching was considered to be a more stable occupation with an abundance of free time, not to mention its guaranteed tenure.

However, this also caused some issues because of the quality of entrants in teacher education institutions. Professional development begins with selecting qualified teachers (Kang and Ahn, 2014). However, some applicants make use of the teaching profession as entry to other professions, not necessarily possessing the desired behaviors and commitment expected of a teacher. Thus, there have been efforts to include an assessment of the applicants' aptitude and character in terms of their compatibility with

the teaching career in the admission examinations, however, difficulties were encountered in developing an objective and valid instrument.

Closely related to this concern is the issuance of teaching certificates to graduates of teacher training institutions upon completion of the required points without conducting an examination. The issuance of a teaching certificate does not guarantee competence in terms of instructional ability and pedagogical skills. Educational qualifications and other credentials do not have much bearing on the assessment of the applicant's status, relying solely on the result of the examinations.

The reduction of mandatory retirement age from 65 to 62, though it may have both favorable and unfavorable consequences, is perceived to be of High Impact by the respondents. This policy implemented in 1999 was "chosen under a circumstance in which there existed no legal means to oust inappropriate, or incapable teachers from schools" (OECD Report, 2004). In addition, this decision was implemented to activate the teaching profession so as to cope with the fast changing times, which, for quite some time, has been observed to be immobile. Such immobility has caused dissatisfaction among parents and students.

The areas on performance evaluation of teachers, merit-based promotion, and feedback given to teachers on the results of evaluation are related to each other. Though the respondents said it is of High Impact, some issues related to these must be clarified.

In the present system, promotion of teachers is geared towards the administrative track. Many teachers seek promotion towards the administrative position because of the social status that goes with it. Another possible reason that brings this about is the lack of recognition and promotion system to excellent teachers who may not be tailored to become administrators but effective, excellent, dedicated classroom teachers.

Another heated issue at the moment is with regard to the merit-based bonus for teachers, the basis of which is the result of the evaluation of the work performance of the principals, vice-principals, teachers, and other staff. The teacher unions do not buy the idea because they said that it will be a reason for those in charge of evaluation to be lax and not strictly conduct evaluation, worse is, just base it on seniority.

The government proposed a new evaluation system for teachers. Unfortunately, it has received a lot of criticisms and hesitation on the part of the teachers, represented by the Teachers' Union (The Korea Herald, May 5, 2005). Despite oppositions, the government is determined to implement this new evaluation system after its pilot implementation in 66 schools. Finally in 2010, the government announced that the new evaluation system, the Evaluation of Teacher Professional Development, will be implemented.

Seo (2012) mentioned that this new evaluation system seeks to foster teacher professional development and, consequently improve the quality of education. Its features include a multiple evaluations conducted by multiple evaluators including a peer review to be given by 3 teachers and the principal, student surveys, and parents surveys. Using a 5-point Likert Scale, these evaluators assess the different competencies of the teachers.

Though the salaries of teachers in Korea are relatively low as compared to the salaries of those in the private sectors, the respondents are satisfied and they are also contented with the financial assistance, holidays, leave credits, and legal rights accorded to them.

In 2001 (OECD Report, 2004), it was recorded that the annual salary of a public school teacher with a minimum training was US\$25,177 for a primary school teacher, and US\$25,045 for both lower secondary and upper secondary school teacher. The teachers enjoy security of tenure because they can remain in the teaching profession until retirement age for as long as they perform their duties as teachers conscientiously.

In 2016 (OECD Education at a Glance 2016), the lower secondary school teachers with the minimum education requirements receive a starting yearly salary of \$30,401, with the potential to make as much as \$84,529 by the end of their careers. While the starting salary is slightly below the OECD average of \$31,687, the top of the pay scale

salary is much higher than the OECD average of \$51,317. Teachers' salaries are competitive with other professional salaries in South Korea.

In addition, they are classified as public servants. To compensate for the relatively low salary, financial assistance is given to them such as loans for tuition fees, scholarships, etc. Allowances, vacation, pensions, and leave credits are also provided to teachers. All these are forms of incentives to teachers to remain in the teaching profession and perform their duties well.

Moreover, the legalization of the teacher union and the recognition of the varied organizations of teachers serve as one of the vehicles for them to express their sentiments and be involved in some issues and policies. This has greatly increased the teachers' morale and motivation to passionately perform in their teaching career.

#### ***D. Teacher Assignment/Workload***

The reforms on teachers' assignment/workload are perceived to be of ***High Impact*** to teacher education in Korea. The implication is that, the innovations have positively affected teacher education in Korea to a High Extent. Specifically, limiting the number of students per class and the provision of time to check assignments and projects were highlighted to be of Great Impact. This means that these have positively affected teacher education in Korea to the highest extent.

As regards teacher assignment/workload, limiting the number of subject preparations, scheduling meetings, conferences and in-service trainings during class hours, and assigning other extra and co-curricular activities in school were given a High Impact rating. Limiting the number of students per class, and providing time for checking of assignments and projects were rated as Greatly Impacting teacher education.

The responses reveal that the teachers appreciate the government's effort to reduce the number of students per class so as to provide them more time to do other tasks and more opportunities for self-growth. According to statistics (OECD Report, 2004), there has been a marked improvement in the number of students in the classroom from the year 1990 to 2002. In 1990, an average of 41.4 pupils was noted in the elementary schools, 50.2 in the middle schools, 53.6 in the general high schools, and 51.5 in the vocational high schools as compared to 2002 which is 34.9, 36.7, 34.7, and 32.2, respectively. Though the number of pupils per class seems manageable, the government is still continuing its plan to further reduce the teacher-student ration because they believe that the current size of classes impede effective teaching-learning process.

Teachers' workload could be fully understood when amount, intensity and nature of teachers' work were considered together (Kim, Lee, Hong, Hwang, Lee, Kim, 2013). Teachers' workload is considered excessive because aside from class preparation and teaching during class hours, they are also assigned to teach extra after class hours or advise special activities in school. They are also expected to conduct interviews with parents and counsel students. Aside from classroom related tasks, they also perform some administrative chores due to the limited number of staff in schools, one of which is the accomplishment of official records, mostly sent via email. Records show that 65 official documents are sent to teachers for a month, an average of 2.3 documents daily.

The excessive chores assigned to teachers are one of the main reasons why they cannot perform their professional activities such as in-service trainings and other academic-related tasks. The government has made some attempts to resolve this problem and to relieve teachers from this burden.

To remedy this, administrative assistants and computer assistants were assigned in the schools to help teachers in the accomplishment of their tasks and reports. In 2001 and 2002, 3,820 computer assistants were assigned in schools.

## **5. Recommendations**

### **A. Teacher Education Curriculum**

1. The objectives, content, strategies, and evaluation techniques of Korea's teacher education curriculum have to be reviewed again in the light of the future educational thrust of the country involving the teachers themselves who are the main actors in its implementation. Other sectors of the society must also be involved in the process such as representatives from the industry, government, alumni, parents, educational experts, and curriculum developers.
2. Individual teacher education institutions should also undergo a multisectoral curriculum revision/enhancement and align their teacher education curriculum with that of what the Ministry of Education requires and their institutional goals and objectives.
3. The Ministry of Education should identify the specific competencies required of a teacher at this point in the Korean society that will be responsive to its future thrusts and directions. Teacher education institutions as well must identify the competencies distinct of their graduates in consonance with what the Ministry of Education requires.

### **B. Teacher Certification and Development**

1. Continuously improve the teacher employment test especially the types of test given and the choice of questions for the examinations. It must be in conformity with the curriculum designed and inputs given in the pre-service stage.
2. Strengthen the scholarship program for teachers specifically providing them with more opportunities to be trained in other universities both local and foreign. Providing teachers with more exposures to other universities' experiences is a good venue for them to think of innovative ways of enhancing teacher education in Korea.
3. Improve on the quality of in-service training given to teachers in the areas of motivation, content, approaches, resource speakers, and methods of delivery.

### **C. Teacher Recruitment, Selection, and Retention**

1. Offer more scholarships to excellent college entrants to teacher education institutions to encourage the best students to enroll in teacher education.
2. Other criteria in addition to the entrance examination such as interviews must be enhanced to ensure likelihood of success of college entrants to teacher education institutions.
3. Aside from the teaching certificate issued upon completion of the required number of points/units from the teacher education institutions, other criteria must be designed as basis for recruitment such as university grades, exit interviews, instructional ability test, involvement in organizations, leadership roles, and others.
4. Assess the new teacher evaluation criteria/instrument and introduce a corresponding feedback system as well as a reward system to make sure that the results are used according to purpose.

#### **D. Teacher Assignment/Workload**

1. Efforts should still be made to further lessen the number of students in every class to give more opportunities for interaction and practice classroom theories learned as a simulation of actual classroom instruction.
2. Meetings, conferences and in-service trainings should be scheduled within the working hours of teachers at the same time ensuring that quality of instruction does not suffer. Supervised alternative classroom activities must be done in the absence of the teacher.
3. Designate other school personnel in the planning, implementation and supervision of extra-curricular activities to ease the burden of teachers and allow them to focus on more academic activities.

### **6. Conclusions**

Based on the results and findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

There have been numerous innovations introduced to improve teacher education in Korea in terms of teacher education curriculum, teacher certification and development, teacher recruitment, selection and retention, and teacher assignment or workload. The Korean government, through the Ministry of Education put priority to education, specifically equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to bring about lifelong learning and meet the demands of globalization and industrialization.

The teachers and administrators of TEIs are generally supportive and appreciative of the innovations introduced in teacher education. They further acknowledge that though these innovations are of high impact, there is much to be improved and enhanced in the areas studied.

Special attention should be given to the content of the teacher education curriculum and the selection of teachers considering that these were rated as Moderate Impact by the respondents.

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