

## Development of Survey Questionnaire on Teachers' Cognition for Continuity between Elementary and Secondary English Education\*

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### Abstract

*This study tried to determine how teachers viewed continuity in the English curriculum between elementary and middle school. To achieve this goal, the authors implemented a survey toward 103 teachers and analyzed their quantitative and qualitative responses. While most participants comprehended the English curriculum at their own school level, only a few teachers understood English curricula at other school levels. The study revealed that middle school teachers had only a vague understanding of classroom activity as they had not usually utilized such activities in their daily teaching. Furthermore, the teachers thought negatively about continuity in activity, difficulty, and amount of learning. The results led this study to suggest 35 new questions designed to examine seven factors involved in English teachers' cognition of continuity of the English curriculum.*

**Keywords:** Korean National English Curriculum, Continuity of Curriculum, Teachers' Cognition, Designing Survey Questions, English Education in South Korea

### 1. Introduction

The public school system of South Korea consists of twelve grades at three school levels (six grades in elementary school, three grades in middle school, and three grades in high school), with organization of the English curriculum divided into two main parts: the 'Secondary,' under the control of the Secondary Education Department, includes middle school and high school curricula, and the 'Elementary,' controlled by the Elementary Education Department, contains only the elementary curriculum[1]. Because the management of curriculum development is separated by school level, interrelation of the English curriculum between elementary and middle school is loose compared with connectivity between middle and high school [2-5].

This situation has caused problems related to the continuity in elementary and middle school English curricula, as many studies have indicated. Lee *et al.*, [2] mentioned that activities and teaching methods differed as each curriculum pursued a different goal. Analyzing goals and activities suggested in The National English Curriculum 7th Version revised in 2009 led to the understanding that the elementary curriculum focused on increasing basic communicative competence related to themes from daily life, while the middle school curriculum stressed development of literacy abilities required in achieving higher academic goals.

Yoon [6] claimed that more than half of the middle school first-graders encountered difficulties and felt burdened when they studied English, as there was a significant gap in

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goals between elementary and middle school curricula. Therefore, it is important to consider how to secure continuity of the English curriculum from elementary to middle school so as to increase the efficiency of English education in South Korea.

This study focuses on teachers since they are the main players in implementing and utilizing the National English Curriculum and the observers who can most closely monitor authentic reactions and feedback from students. Galton[7] and Williams and Howley[8] stressed teachers' roles in applying the national curriculum in learning and teaching. This study investigated teachers' knowledge of the continuity in the English education curriculum. Moreover, based on the survey results, this study suggested 35 creative survey questions that could be applied to conduct surveys in similar subjects.

## 2. Outline of Pilot Test

This study investigated how elementary and middle school English teachers think about continuity in the English curricula. To meet the goal, a 15-question survey had been implemented for a month from March to April 2013. Seven of the questions were yes-no questions; the remainder were open-ended follow-up questions placed after each yes-no question to find out the reasons behind the quantitative responses.

For conducting the survey effectively, the researchers set school inspectors as the main contact point and utilized their human network to distribute and collect survey sheets. Elementary and middle school teachers from various regions participated in the survey. Among the 103 respondents, 49 were elementary school English teachers and 51 were middle school English teachers; three were none-response. After collecting all the survey sheets, the researchers coded all the responses into a data file to analyze them creatively with SPSS 13.0 program and Nvivo. By utilizing Frequency Analysis for quantitative responses and Keyword Analysis for qualitative responses, the results were obtained.

## 3. Results and Discussions of Pilot Test

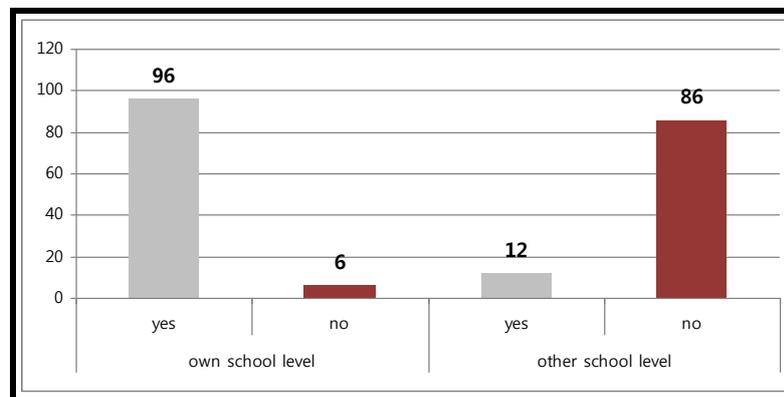
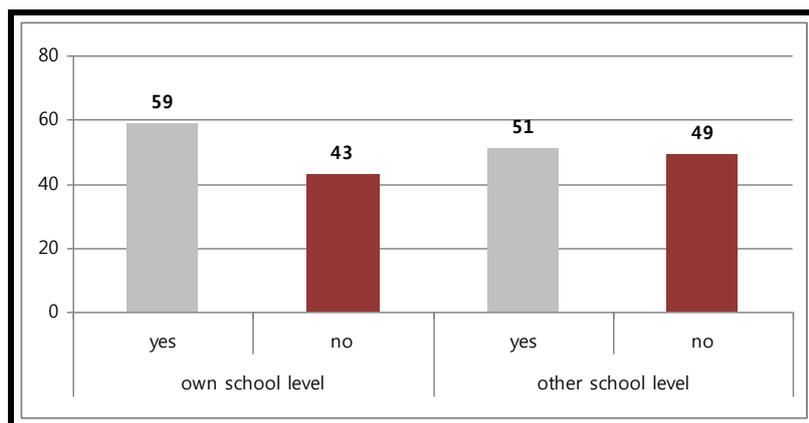


Figure 1. Understanding for English Curricula

Figure 1 shows the number of participants who understood the English curricula of their own school level and of other school levels. The result was that while almost of the participants (96) understood their own school level English curriculum while many did not grasp the curricula of other school levels (86). In other words, among 49 participating elementary teachers, 47 understood the elementary school curriculum, whereas only two teachers understood the middle school level curriculum. Similar to the elementary school teachers, 47 middle school teachers comprehended their own level's curriculum, but only 10 teachers comprehended the elementary school curriculum.



**Figure 2. Understanding for Activities in English Curricula**

Figure 2 shows the number of the participants who comprehended activities in their own school level and in other school levels' curricula. Fifty-nine respondents said they knew activities in their own level and 51 knew activities in other levels. These results are remarkable because the response tendencies differ completely with the aforementioned results.

Figure 1 presents a clear discrepancy between teachers' understanding of their own and other school levels' English curricula. However, Figure 2 shows balanced responses not only between whether or not they understood their own level's activities but also between 'own level' and 'other level'. Considering that the activity is one of the elements included in a curriculum, these results were at odds with the preceding results. In other words, a middle school teacher who did not know the elementary school English curriculum answered that he comprehended activities in the elementary school English curriculum.

Among the responses from the 46 teachers who checked 'yes' to understanding activities in other levels, 'activity-centered' (25) was the most frequent word given in response to the open-ended follow-up question. Summarizing the opinions, middle school teachers vaguely knew the elementary English curriculum contained many communicative activities and they chose 'yes' even though they did not exactly comprehend actual elementary school activities.

In addition, 41 teachers answered that they did not understand middle school activities, citing 'no use' (22) as the most frequent word of explanation. Although the National English Curriculum for middle school, which was already designed to sustain continuity between elementary and middle school, suggested diverse communicative activities, teachers did not focus on using them because they were required to teach reading and grammar, based on students' and parents' strong needs for achieving good scores in high school. This phenomenon implies that the teacher's cognition is the most important element to secure continuity in actual English classes.

#### **4. Constructing Survey Questionnaires**

Huggins and Knight[9] conducted a study that dealt with curriculum continuity and transfer. They presented ratios of the respondents, primary and secondary school students, with regard to experience; learning and teaching methods; and changes in ratings of achievement, enjoyment, progress, and schoolwork. Some of the survey categories and elements in their study were adapted in process of designing this study's survey questions.

For retaining reliability and validity, a pre-survey was given to 150 elementary and middle school teachers. After gathering answers from participants, all the data was analyzed by factor analysis adopting VARIMAX orthogonal factor rotation method and the 35 questions were divided into seven categories. Each category was named by means of a discussion among three experts.

**Table 1. Questions in Factor 1**

<b>Factor 1 : education system related to continuity</b>		reliability $\alpha=.689$
1	It is necessary to revise curricula of teacher training institutes (colleges of education) to sustain continuity in the National English Curriculum.	
2	I think KSAT (the national university entrance examination) affects continuity of English curriculum between elementary and middle school.	
3	If a national university entrance examination that emphasises communication abilities (speaking, writing) is implemented, continuity of English curriculum will be more coherent between elementary and middle school.	
4	If English class hours increase, continuity of English curriculum will be more coherent between elementary and middle school.	

The first factor consisted of four questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.689$ , which represented fine consistency. The experts agreed to call this factor ‘education system related to continuity.’

**Table 2. Questions in Factor 2**

<b>factor 2 : differences between elementary and middle school English curricula</b>		reliability $\alpha=.797$
5	Difference between elementary and middle school English classes is a huge aspect of teaching methodology.	
6	Difference between elementary and middle school English classes is a huge aspect of educational goals.	
7	Difference between elementary and middle school English classes is a huge aspect of education contents.	
8	Difference between elementary and middle school English classes is a huge aspect of teaching and learning activities.	

The second factor consisted of four questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.797$ , which represented fine consistency. The experts agreed to call this factor ‘differences between elementary and middle school English curricula.’

**Table 3. Questions in Factor 3**

<b>factor 3 : cognition about continuity</b>		reliability $\alpha=.695$
9	I think I know well the meaning of the words ‘continuity of curriculum’.	
10	I tend to be concerned about problems in continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school.	
11	I think continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school is an important problem.	
12	I think it is necessary to recognise English curricula of other school levels.	
13	When I was a teacher candidate, I was concerned about problems in continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school.	

The third factor consisted of five questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.695$ , which showed good consistency. The experts agreed to call this factor ‘cognition about continuity.’

**Table 4. Questions in Factor 4**

<b>factor 4</b> <b>: willingness to sustain continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula</b>		reliability $\alpha=.749$
14	From the teacher’s point of view, it is necessary to improve continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school.	
15	From the student’s point of view, it is necessary to improve continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school.	
16	For retaining continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school, it is good to adopt textbooks made by the same publisher.	
17	I am willing participate in a task, when I am asked to do something to improve continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school.	
18	It is necessary to teach English considering middle school English curriculum in higher grades in elementary school compared with lower grades.	
19	I intend to participate in a teacher training course that offers information about English curricula of other school levels.	

The fourth factor consisted of six questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.749$ , which presented fine consistency. The experts decided to call this factor ‘willingness to sustain continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula.’

**Table 5. Questions in Factor 5**

<b>factor 5</b> <b>: differences in continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula</b>		reliability $\alpha=.743$
20	Commonly, when elementary school students enter middle school, I think they lose their interest in English study.	
21	Commonly, when elementary school students enter middle school, I think they encounter difficulties in English study.	
22	I think that the difficulty level of the English curriculum for the 1st grade of middle school jumps up drastically compared with the English curriculum for the 6th grade of elementary school.	
23	I think that the amount of study in the English curriculum for the 1st grade of middle school jumps up drastically compared with the English curriculum for the 6th grade of elementary school.	
24	A number of elementary students depend on private education institutes to prepare middle school English.	

The fifth factor consisted of five questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.743$ , which meant fine consistency. The experts agreed to call this factor ‘differences in continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula.’

**Table 6. Questions in Factor 6**

<b>factor 6 : satisfaction for continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula</b>		reliability $\alpha=.693$
25	I think that the continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school is coherent.	
26	I am generally satisfied that the continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school is coherent.	
27	I think that continuity of English curricula among grades in elementary and middle school is coherent.	
28	English curricula are well reflected in English textbooks of elementary and middle school.	
29	English curriculum for the 6th grade of elementary school is suitable for preparing for English class in the 1st grade of middle school.	

The sixth factor consisted of five questions, and reliability among the questions was  $\alpha=.693$ , which showed good consistency. The experts agreed to call this factor ‘satisfaction for continuity between elementary and middle school English curricula.’

The last factor consisted of six questions. Since answers to these questions differed by whether respondents were engaged in elementary school or middle school, it was not necessary to verify reliability among the questions. The experts decided to name this factor ‘questions which draw different answers by the level of school.’

**Table 7. Questions in Factor 7**

<b>factor 7 : questions which draw different answers by the level of school</b>	
30	I know the English curriculum of elementary school well.
31	I know the English curriculum of middle school well.
32	Elementary school English education has different attributes compared with middle school English education.
33	Elementary school English education should be regarded separately from middle school English education.
34	I think that Enhanced Departmental System improves efficiency of English education in elementary school.
35	Commonly, when elementary students become middle school students, they are able to adjust to English class.

Based on the results from the pilot test, it was possible to construct the main survey consisting of 35 questions. All the seven factors of the survey showed fine consistency among the questions in each category as it took following five steps to construct the questionnaire; 1) collecting opinions from elementary and middle school teachers by following Dephi technique, 2) analyzing the opinions by eliciting keywords, 3) designing each questions based on each keyword 4) taking a pre survey toward 150 teachers and 5) sorting factors and verifying reliability.

## 5. Conclusions

This study tried to determine how teachers thought about continuity with creative methods in the English curriculum between elementary and middle school. For achieving the goal, the authors surveyed 103 teachers and analyzed their quantitative and qualitative responses. Most of the participants comprehended the English curriculum of their own school level, but only a few teachers comprehended other school levels' English curricula. In terms of understanding activities, the study revealed that middle school teachers' cognition of the activity was vague as they usually did not utilize activities in their daily teaching. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs regarding continuity in activity, difficulty, and amount of learning were all negative.

Based on the results from the pilot test, this study constructed a survey tool that consisted of 40 questions to investigate teachers' beliefs about the continuity of English curricula between elementary and middle school. After making all the questionnaires, by implementing a pre-survey to 150 elementary and middle school teachers, this study tried to make the tool reliable. Moreover, by analyzing the questions using factor analysis, it was possible to suggest seven categories.

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