

Teachers' perceptions regarding Boarding School Type Junior High Schools in Korea, with Special Reference to Their Achievements and to Future Policy Directions

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Abstract. This paper aims to analyse teachers' perceptions regarding boarding-school-type junior high schools located in Chungbuk Province in Korea, which introduced the school system for the first time in Korea, and to explore possibility of its revitalization and its diffusion nationwide. It is hoped that this study will provide policymakers and academics with policy and theoretical implications beneficial to establishing boarding-school-type schools, and to managing them efficiently.

Keywords: boarding school type school, teachers' perception, Korean junior high school

1 Introduction

Recently, there has been strong interest in Korea in boarding-school-type junior high schools as a means of revitalizing small-sized schools located in rural or mountainous villages. This has resulted in more and more of these schools being established nationwide. The boarding-school-type junior high school is a new type of junior school in Korea. Characteristically, small-sized schools are merged to form one relatively large school. Students reside at the school 24 hours a day, because the consolidated school is geographically more distant from their homes than the older schools. Schools of this type are completely different from other schools in Korea. They are seen as offering a means of addressing the problem of smaller-sized schools' decreasing school-age populations in rural and mountainous areas, and accordingly have been introduced for the first time in Chungbuk Province. Against this background, this paper aims to analyse teachers' perceptions regarding the boarding-school-type junior high schools located in Chungbuk Province, which introduced this school system into Korea for the first time, and to explore possibility of its revitalization and its diffusion nationwide. It is hoped that this study will provide policymakers and academics with theoretical and policy-related suggestions beneficial to establishing boarding-school-type schools and to managing them efficiently.

2 Current situation of boarding-school-type junior high schools in Korea

As schools located in rural and mountainous areas become smaller owing to a shortage of school-age students, the increasing trend is towards multiple classes, where students of different levels study together in the same classroom, to be commonly used. Students are taught by non-graduate teachers, leading to difficulties regarding the normal operation of the curriculum, and to a shortfall in humanistic education arising from a lack of opportunities for forming peer groups. Against this background, revitalizing schools in rural and mountainous areas by fostering optimum-sized schools was proposed, and the system was introduced for the first time in Korea in Chungbuk Province. The number of such schools is increasing. In Chungbuk Province, there are two boarding-school-type junior high schools. One of these is Sokrisan Junior High School, which was inaugurated in March 2011. The other is Goesan Osung Junior High School, inaugurated two years later in March 2013. There are two more schools of the boarding-school type in Korea: Jangsung Baekam Junior High School resulted from the consolidation of Jangsung Buk Junior High School and Jangsung Shinheung Junior High School in Junnam Province; and Miribal Junior High School resulted from the consolidation of three schools, Sangnam Junior High School, Chodung Junior High School, and the Chungdo branch of Milyang Junior High School in Kyungnam Province. Thus, as of October 2015, there are four boarding-school-type junior high schools operating in Korea, and other provinces, such as Kyungbuk Province, Chungnam Province and Chunnam Province, are planning to establish such schools in their regions.

The two boarding-school-type junior high schools in Chungbuk Province, Sokrisan Junior High School and Goesan Osung Junior High School, have a number of things in common. Both were established by government initiative, both have many multicultural students and many low-income and disadvantaged students, and both have many good extra-curricular activity programmes. However, there are differences as well, in that the processes whereby they were established are dissimilar, as are the characteristics of the teaching staff and their levels of dormitory residence.

3 Research design

3.1 Research subject

This research analyses questionnaires received from 69 teachers from the two boarding-school-type junior high schools and other neighbouring schools. More specifically, the questionnaires included in this analysis are from 22 teachers at Sokrisan School, 17 teachers at Goesan Osung School, and 30 teachers at other schools who are familiar with the operation of the two schools under examination.

3.2 Measurement method

The questionnaire constructed to measure teachers' perceptions regarding the operation and performance of the two boarding-school-type junior high schools was validated by five experts, including professors specializing in statistics and other specialists concerned with the operation of junior high schools. It is made up of statements in different dimensions which are aimed at reflecting the interests of school students, teachers, and parents. All questionnaires were scaled on the basis of Likert's seven-point scale (1 = 'do not agree', 7 = 'completely agree'). Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is used to test reliability between the questionnaires, is 0.83, which means that the questionnaires are relatively reliable in terms of statistical significance.

3.3 Analysis method

The data collected for this analysis were analysed using SPSS Version 18.0. Above all, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was produced to test whether the statement items are statistically reliable. Next, a t-test was conducted to compare teachers working in the two boarding-school-type junior high schools with teachers working in the neighbouring schools in terms of perceptions regarding the operation and performance of the two schools at issue.

4 Analysis results

4.1 Teachers' perceptions regarding the two schools in a school dimension

Here, 'school dimension' means whether the school itself makes contributions in some respects. In terms of school dimension, it can be said that the two boarding-school-type schools contribute to providing good facilities to students and also offer better conditions for putting various educational programmes into practice.

4.2 Teachers' perceptions regarding the two schools in a teachers dimension

Respondents viewed the statement 'A boarding-school-type junior high school is beneficial to teachers' career management' most positively, its total mean score being 4.57 (boarding-school-type teachers 4.46; neighbouring school teachers 4.70). Nevertheless, it may be said that on the basis of these responses neither of the two schools is strongly beneficial in lessening the workload of teachers, or helpful in differentiating the workloads of teachers and administrative staff.

4.3 Teachers' perceptions regarding the two schools in a student dimension

What is remarkable in this analysis is that teachers from the two groups exhibit the least difference of perception in relation to the statement 'A boarding-school-type junior high school is beneficial to improving students' after-school work'. On the basis of this analysis result, it is hypothesized that the boarding-school-type junior high schools are helpful for students to do after-school work.

4.4 Teachers' perceptions regarding the two schools in a parents dimension

It was found that the boarding-school-type school is beneficial in terms of parents' satisfaction with the school, and also in terms of parents' participation in school.

5 Conclusions

This paper has attempted to explore teachers' perceptions concerning the boarding-school type of junior high school, which is not yet well-known to ordinary people but nevertheless is likely to be diffused nationwide because it offers advantages over other ordinary schools. For this study, we conducted a questionnaire survey, the subjects of which are teachers who work in the two existing boarding-school-type junior high schools and neighbouring ordinary junior high schools.

The findings and implications of this research can be summarized as follows. First, it may be said that boarding-school-type junior high schools are more effective than ordinary schools, in the sense that they possess good infrastructure and facilities for the effective operation of programmes. Secondly, in the teachers dimension, it is true to say that the school system can provide teachers with better career management opportunities, since if teachers serve in these schools for a certain period of time they will have greater chances of being promoted to a higher grade, thanks to the incentives given to them, than teachers who serve in ordinary schools for the same period of time. However, one problem to be noted is that both kinds of teachers perceive that teachers working in boarding-school-type schools have greater workloads, implying that teachers unconcerned with promotion are likely to avoid working in these schools. Thirdly, in the student dimension, it was found that the school system is beneficial to students in terms of improving their after-school work. Fourth, from a parents' point of view, the boarding-school-type school has positive advantages, in that parents exhibit greater satisfaction with the schools and higher levels of participation in school management. It seems also that their other needs relating to their child(ren)'s schooling are more fully met.

Given that this type of school system is perceived by teachers as positive in many respects, it is necessary to continue to study how it works, what it achieves and what problems and difficulties it faces, and to put forward policy suggestions for solving its associated problems.

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