Prevalence and Significance of Problems Encountered by Teachers: Differences Based on School Level

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Abstract. This study investigated the degree of prevalence and significance of problems faced by teachers. Differences based on school level were also tested. Subjects were 748 teachers selected from 179 schools. Data were analyzed using both an F-test and a Scheffe test. As a result, it is confirmed that school level was a variable affecting prevalence and significance in problems faced by teachers. 54% of 50 different problems showed significant differences in prevalence based on school level. 34% of the problems showed statistically significant differences in importance. The difference was greater between elementary teachers and secondary teachers.

Keywords: Prevalence, Significance, Teacher Problems, School Level

1 Introduction

Problems that teachers face in daily school life often become stressors and undermine teacher performance [1, 2, 3, 4]. Therefore, finding such problems and solutions to those problems has been a major research theme in recent years [5, 6, 7]. According to [1], there are four general categories of problems faced by the teachers in Korean schools—(1) guidance, (2) curriculum, instruction and evaluation, (3) conflict with school personnel, and (4) paper work, educational policies, and management. More concrete problems included in the guidance category are such problems as problem children, lack of counseling skills, a generation gap, rudeness of the students, broken homes, corporal punishment, advice on college entrance, relationships with students, and enforcement of irrational regulations. Examples of the problems in the category of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation are low motivation, individual differences, inadequate educational environment, unrealistic curriculum with limping implementation, and validity of evaluations. Conflict problems are categorized further into conflicts among teachers, conflicts with parents, or conflicts with administrators. The category of ‘paper work, educational policies, and management’ consists of problems such as unfair distribution of work, lack of opportunities for growth, and inconsistent enforcement of policies. These descriptions provided by [1] became the basis of this research.

Once the problems have been identified and categorized, the next question to ask would be if those problems are prevalent and significant. Since resources are limited,
those who plan in-service education and support for teachers need to know which
problems are more prevalent and urgent. Though researchers who identified problems
may have assumed that they were significant and prevalent, such assumptions should
be tested. Besides, perceived prevalence and significance of the problem may vary
depending upon context variables such as school level. Therefore, it is necessary to
investigate prevalence and significance of the problems viewed by the teachers
depending upon the context. Based on those needs, this study investigated the
following questions—1) How prevalent are the problems faced by the teachers? 2) To
what degree are the problems significant? 3) To what extent does the level of school
(elementary, middle, and high school) affect the prevalence and the significance of
the problem?

2 Research Method

To answer the questions, a survey was administered by mail in 2012. Participants
were 748 teachers selected from 179 schools considering location and school level.
The survey tool consisted of 50 problems mentioned in previous literature. Teachers
were asked to check the degree of prevalence and the degree of significance
respectively for each problem according to a Likert scale. Data were analyzed using
the F and Scheffe tests to find the differences between school levels.

3 Results

(1) Thirty-four problems (out of 50) were perceived as prevalent (earning a score
higher than 3 on the Likert scale). The most prevalent problems are summarized in
Table 1 with their mean scores.
(2) Forty-one problems out of 50 were considered to be important by the teachers
(earning a score higher than 3 on the Likert scale). The most important problems
viewed by the teachers are summarized in Table 1.
(3) It is confirmed that the level of the school was a variable affecting prevalence and
significance of the problem perceived by the teachers. Fifty-four percent (27
problems out of 50) of the problems showed differences in prevalence and 34% (17
problems out of 50) in significance.

Table 1. Summary of the most prevalent and significant problems perceived by
Korean teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>categories</th>
<th>prevalent problems(mean)</th>
<th>important problems(mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>guidance</td>
<td>maladjusted students (3.92), poverty/broken home (3.76), lack of counseling time (3.66), promoting achievement and advice on university entrance</td>
<td>maladjusted students (4.35), bullying and school violence (4.33), emotional instability (3.90), internet and cellular phone addiction/using cellular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems considered as the most prevalent by elementary, middle, and high school teachers are summarized in Table 2. The most prevalent problems were defined as the ones which earned statistically higher prevalence scores compared to the other school levels in the F and Scheffe tests. Only the problems scoring higher than 3 are presented in the table.

Table 2. Summary of the most prevalent problems perceived by elementary, middle, and high school teachers (mean)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elementary school</th>
<th>Middle school</th>
<th>High school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.59), emotional instability/student who needs special care (3.58), rude student (3.57), internet-cellular phone addiction &amp; using cellular phone in class (3.55).</td>
<td>phone in class (3.88), rudeness of the student (3.84), lack of counseling time (3.83), relationships with students (3.78), poverty and broken home (3.71), corporal punishment (3.58).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low motivation (4.27), teaching underachievers (3.70), individual difference/ impacted classroom (3.69).</td>
<td>low motivation (4.21), individual difference/impacted classroom (3.66), teaching underachievers (3.69), unrealistic curriculum and limping implementation (3.60), education focused on college entrance (3.50).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>burdensome duty and its formality (3.92), high in expectation, but treatment, privilege, autonomy, opportunity to grow are not satisfactory' (3.80), enforcement of inadequate and inconsistent policies (3.63), unstandardized and ineffective duties (3.61), and unfair distribution of work load (3.51)</td>
<td>distrust, interference, impoliteness of the parents (3.74), undemocratic administrator (3.70).</td>
<td>burdensome paper work and its formality (4.15), high in expectation, but privilege, autonomy, opportunity to grow are not satisfactory (3.91), enforcement of unrealistic and inconsistent policies (3.83), unstandardized and ineffective duties (3.75), unfair distribution of work (3.69), skepticism on teaching (3.62),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems considered as the most significant ones by elementary, middle, and high school teachers are summarized in Table 3. The most significant problems were defined as the ones which earned statistically higher significance scores compared to other school levels in the F and Scheffe tests. Only the problems scoring higher than 3 are presented in the table.

Table 3. Summary of the most important problems perceived by elementary, middle, and high school teachers (mean)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elementary school</th>
<th>Middle school</th>
<th>High school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| guidance                      | internet and cellular phone addiction/using cellular phone in class (4.13), lack of counseling time (4.06),
generation gap between students and teachers (3.40), rudeness of the students (4.08),
corporal punishment (3.74), promoting achievement and career advice (3.55), enforcement of irrational school rules (3.24) | internet and cellular phone addiction/using cellular phone in class (4.24), lack of counseling time (3.80),
generation gap between students and teachers (3.25), rudeness of the students (3.98),
corporal punishment (3.64), promoting achievement and career advice (3.66), enforcement of irrational school rules (3.12) |
| curriculum, instruction, and evaluation | teaching underachievers (3.78), low motivation (4.34),
lagging school environment (3.38), enforcement of supplementary/extra curriculum activities (3.27) | low motivation (4.36), education focused on college entrance (3.98), enforcement of supplementary/extra curriculum activities (3.35) |                                                                                  |
| conflict with school personnel | distrust and rudeness of the parents (3.98), irrational requests of the parents (3.75), undemocratic administrator (3.87), differences of opinions on curriculum and instruction with the administrator (3.47) | distrust and rudeness of the parents (3.75), undemocratic administrator (3.60), differences of opinions on curriculum and instruction with the administrator (3.20) |                                                                                  |
| paper work, educational policies, management |                                                                                  |                                                                                  |                                                                                  |
4 Implications of the Study

There are four major implications derived from this study. First, this study found which problems teachers considered prevalent and significant in Korean schools. Furthermore, it clarified where the differences were by separating prevalence and significance of the problem. It seems that prevalence is more varied compared to significance between the levels of school. Second, the finding that the level of school is a variable affecting the prevalence and the significance of the problem implies the need of further research investigating the effects of other variables. Third, the results suggest where teacher education needs to focus. Since the problems investigated were rather concrete, the list of problems found to be prevalent and significant will be a good source of problem based learning, too. And lastly, this research provides data as well as a scale of prevalence and significance of the problems. It can be used for comparison among teacher groups and researchers who examine similar questions in different contexts.

References