

EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCE-BASED CREDIT-BEARING COURSES ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' CAREER ADAPTABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT SKILLS IN KOREA¹

HwaChoon Park, & Cheonsoo Park

Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (South Korea)

Abstract

Several universities in South Korea started to provide experience-based course-bearing courses for college students. This new curriculum was launched in 2017 to help college students develop their career adaptability and job competencies. The application process includes developing course topics, designing the whole course process, planning specific course activities, proposing their course designs and presenting to the committee, and interviews by the committee. Once their application is accepted, students can implement their courses for a semester. They can obtain 3 credit hours to 12 hours per semester. Students who are at the junior level are recommended to apply this course system. A professor is voluntarily assigned to the student whose proposal is accepted as an advisor besides an academic advisor. We examined the theoretical and empirical support for career experience at the college level. Specifically, this study sought to explore the value of experience-based career experience courses, what changed on students' attitudes toward their careers after attending experience-based career experience courses, and how do students perceive experience-based career experience courses. Five college students from five different colleges who participated in the courses were interviewed. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed, using coding and theming. The results of the interviews revealed that experience-based course-bearing courses were effective in developing students' career adaptability and employability skills such as interpersonal skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, problem-solving skills, initiatives, critical thinking skills, and team-work skills for future careers.

Keywords: *Experience-based course-bearing courses, career adaptability, employment skills, work-based learning at college.*

1. Introduction

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the change of the students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes after they participated in the credit-bearing career experience curriculum at colleges and universities. To achieve the research purpose, several students who had participated in the project were interviewed as sample cases.

2. Method

The qualitative research method was implemented to explore the participants' views on the curriculum experience. Interviews were conducted and then the content was analyzed to identify the educational effects of the curriculum.

2.1. Participants

A total of five college students participated were selected as participants in this study. Three were male and the other two were female. Each participant was recommended by an administrator in the department of the credit-bearing career experience curriculum in five different universities, which had implemented the curriculum. They were recommended because they had taken the curriculum recently and had good grades in the curriculum courses. Each participant is described based on his or her educational and career experiences career. Demographic and sociological background information of each participant is presented in Table 1.

¹This work was based on the findings of the research project done by Lee, M., Park, H., Go, Y., & Moon, C. (2019). *2019 대학 진로체험학점제 효과분석과 발전방안* [A research on development plan and effectiveness of career experience credit system in universities]. Project No. 기본연구 2019-37, 한국직업능력개발원 [Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education & Training]. Sejong: South Korea. Corresponding author: HwaChoon Park, hcpark@krivet.re.kr

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants.

Participant	Age	Gender	Major	Total credits earned through the project
Student A	23	Female	Digital media	6
Student B	25	Male	Information security	12
Student C	24	Male	Mechanical engineering	12
Student D	24	Female	Education	6
Student E	26	Male	Economics	12

2.2. Data

Interviews. Interviews were conducted with the five participants. Semi-structured questions were developed by the first author based on the relevant literature. Next, the initial questions were reviewed and edited by three other researchers who were involved in other series of this study twice. After the first author of this study and the other researcher agreed to the questions, final questions were selected. The sample interview questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample Interview Questions.

Domain	Question
Motivation and preparation	Explain why you decided to take the course?
	Who recommended the course?
	Explain who and how prepared for application for taking the course?
	While you planned the application, what difficulties you had? What did you learn from the planning phase?
Participation	Explain how much you committed to the course?
	Talk about the administrating system-procedures for registration, the course process, the evaluation methods, and so on.
	What are the benefits or achievements of taking the course experience credit system?
Post-participation	What did you learn from taking experience-based course-bearing courses?
	Will you recommend experience-based course-bearing courses to other fellow students and junior students?
	What changes have been there in terms of your career plan after you took the course?
	How did the course taking influence your career planning?
	How satisfied are you with experience-based course-bearing courses?
	How does the course taking help you with preparing for employment in the future?
What attitudes or abilities were developed from the course taking experience?	

2.3. Data analysis

First, data were collected via interviews and then the interviews were analyzed, employing a qualitative case study approach. Deep interviews were conducted until sufficient data were available to understand the overall context of the cases. During the interview process, we made the interviewer's notes and recorded the contents at the same time. The recorded data were transcribed. At this time, the contents which could identify the participants were coded and processed so that outsiders other than the researcher could not identify any private information of the participants. We repeatedly listened to and read the recorded material and transcripts, and analyzed the themes for all cases. After classifying the contents, the concepts and interpreted themes were categorized. Semantic units were examined in the participant's career experience unit system, classified and compared.

Specifically, the themes of the interview contents were categorized based on the theory of career constructivism by Savickas (2002). Employability skills were also considered in terms of skills, values, and attitudes in the workplace that college students can develop through experience-based course-bearing courses based on Park and Hill (2016) pointed out such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, initiatives, and dependability.

3. Findings

Several themes were found that appeared in common among interviews. After taking the credit-bearing career experience curriculum while attending university, the participants expressed their changes in their perceptions of the course and in their career planning. Selected themes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes Categorized based on the Interview Contents.

Theme	Sub-topic	Semantic unit		
Changes of career adaptability	Choice of an employment type after graduation	-Starting up a firm or seeking a job to be employed -Seeking companies or industries		
	Preparation for employment	-Portfolio development: step-by-step documentation of the course projects done		
	Awareness of start-up	-Practical experience related to start-up		
	Course-taking plan for career-related courses	-Planning of course taking -Taking courses that would be useful for employment		
	Understanding and exploring fields other than the major	-Perceiving other fields and developing skills for integrating other fields with major		
Development of employability skills	Problem-solving skills	-Improvement of self-efficacy of problem-solving -Developing confidence towards problems		
	Attitudes toward school work	-Improvement of self-directed learning behaviors -Being more responsible for course-taking		
	Communication skills	-Presentation skills (including interview skills) -Writing skills (developing reports)		
	Interpersonal skills		-Developing positive interpersonal skills -Visiting professors more often -Discussing topics and exchange opinions with team members	
		Entrepreneurship		-Managing administrative work with staff -Preparation for start-up competitions -Participation in start-up competitions -Planning of the next project -Participating in academic and practical conferences -Making publications via multimedia
			Job experience	-Experiencing the real tasks in the workplace -Understand contemporary issues and trends in the workplace -Meeting a mentor from the workplace
	Management of job quality	-Making trials and efforts to produce a better quality of the job and school assignments		
	Integrity	-Processing administrative work clearly and fairly based on rules and policies -Completing projects on time		

Changes in career adaptability. Most of the interview participants stated that they had experienced some obvious changes such as attitudes, perceptions, and plans for career planning after attending the credit-bearing career experience courses. For example, they started to plan the next course to take very specifically considering their career, major, and prospective trends. The main sub-themes are (1) choice of an employment type after graduation, (2) preparation for employment, (3) awareness of start-up, (4) course-taking plan for career-related courses, and (5) understanding and exploring fields other than the major. These sub-themes are parts of career adaptability according to Savickas (2002). Student A expressed:

I want to be a programmer. There are so many kinds of programmers. There are also a system program and a web. I have never done any project before and had no interest in block-chain at all, but now I have become interested in block chain and relevant apps. So I have a goal for block-chain platform developers.

Second, most participants expressed that credit-bearing career experience courses helped them prepare for employment. In particular, writing a report of the course project to the course advisor (professor) and the supervising administrative staff during and after the project helped the participants to document their achievements, resulting in an excellent project portfolio for employment. Student B described the following.

I found it very advantageous in terms of including the project reports in my resume, and when I re-entered graduate school, it helped me develop a portfolio to introduce myself to the interviewers. I am sure that it was very helpful for me to get a good grade on the entrance exam to a graduate school.

Third, most respondents stated that they were motivated to think about starting up a business during the course-taking. The course-taking helped them understand the advantages and difficulties of starting up a business and then they could make a decision of either starting up a business or seeking employment. Student D pointed out the following:

What I had not decided my career plan and further after school activities very specifically yet before I took the course. However, after I took the course, I started to think specifically about start-ups, internships, and the companies that I can apply for a job considering my major and my abilities. For I am minoring entrepreneurship in addition to my major, which is related to start-ups, I began pondering how I can connect my education experience and start-up.

Developing employability skills. Most participants stated that positive changes in employability skills, which are parts of work ethic, work values, and attitudes toward work (Park & Hill, 2016), occurred after they took the courses. Sub-themes include improving (1) problem-solving skills, (2) attitudes toward school work, (3) communication skills, (4) interpersonal skills, (5) entrepreneurship, (6) job experience, (7) management of the quality of work, and (8) integrity. Participants expressed the followings:

I learned that school work is very important since I pay a lot of money for tuition. I began to work harder on school assignments.

I had to visit professors more often to receive advice. Also, I contacted with office administrators to receive course fund and make reports many times. In addition, I had many presentations before professors and at competitions, explaining what I was doing with the project. This kind of series made me develop my interpersonal skills, presentations skills, and confidence.

4. Conclusions and discussion

It was concluded that students who attended the credit-bearing career experience curriculum in universities had positive changes in their career adaptability and employment skills. Specifically, they understand the real workplace issues and perceived necessary knowledge and skills that are needed in the contemporary workplace. Thus, the credit-bearing career experience curriculum was found to be very effective for students to develop their career adaptability and employment skills. This will also be helpful for graduates' transition from universities to the labor market. In 2019, a total of five universities implemented this kind of curriculum, and in the future, more universities will employ this system in Korea. This initiative is expected to bring positive effects to improve career education for undergraduate students in universities.

References

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