

THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL-SPECIALIZED CAREER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS ON KOREAN STUDENTS' CAREER MATURITY AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the Local-Specialized Career Experience programs (LSCE) in South Korea on adolescents' career maturity and community awareness. In 2015, the Korea Congress passed the Career Education Act (CEA), and the CEA was launched on December 23, 2015, which governs the Republic of Korea (South Korea) K-16 career education policy. To achieve the CEA goals, the Korean Ministry of Education established an infra-structure for K-16 students to explore and experience various careers as part of experiential learning. One is Local-industry based career exploration and experience project. The Korean Ministry of Education and 17 local educational departments support the LSCEP to provide secondary school students with the career experience opportunities with collaboration with key local industries and career experience centers as a consortium. Before and after they participate in the programs, students' career maturity and community awareness were assessed to examine the effects of the LSCEP on the study variables. A total of 4,638 secondary school students who participated in the LSCEP in 2019 provided usable data for this study. The independent sample t-test was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the values of the variables after experiencing the programs scored higher than those before. The results of the study suggested that the LSCE programs can promote adolescents' career maturity and community awareness.

Keywords: *Career exploration, community-school-consortium based career education, career maturity, community awareness.*

1. Introduction

The paradigm of contemporary career education in South Korea is changing to work- and experience-based education that emphasizes direct work experience and career experience (Jyung et al., 2015). Students in their adolescent stage can expect to improve their career preparation capabilities through proper career experiences (Jyung et al., 2015). The relevant competence is indicated by career maturity (Jung, 2016). The Local-industry based career experience programs are a project which is supported by the Korea Ministry of Education and local departments of education from 17 cities. The project is implemented by consortiums consisting of local public and private sectors from 17 cities and provinces across South Korea to provide elementary through high school students with career experience programs to help them better understand core industry values in their community (Park et al., 2019). Students who participate in these programs expected to increase their career maturity and raise their awareness of their community. The Local-Specialized Career Experience Programs were into practice in 2016 as a pilot project and have been promoted step by step since then (Park et al., 2019). The main goal of the 2019 project was to increase the quality of each program and advance the overall operating system of the consortiums (Park et al., 2019). The 2019 phase aimed for autonomous operation based on the growth of the quality and quantity of career experience programs in each consortium (Park et al., 2019). In addition, the 2019 project was to examine the operation status of various types of career experience programs and suggest the directions and policies for future career experience programs (Park et al., 2019). Thus, this study was to examine the effects of the Local-Specialized Career Experience Programs (LSCEP) in South Korea on adolescents' career maturity and community awareness. Specifically, the degrees of participants' program satisfaction, career maturity, and community awareness were compared between pre-and post-participation in the programs.

¹This work was based on the findings of the research project done by Park, H. et al (2019). *2019 진로체험지원센터 운영 3. 지역특화 진로체험 프로그램 운영 지원 및 컨설팅*[Support and consulting of Local-specialized career experience programs]. Project No. 2019-18-3, 한국직업능력개발원[Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education & Training]. Sejong: South Korea.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The sample of this study consisted of secondary school students who participated in the LSCE programs in South Korea from April to October in 2019. A total of 4,638 were used as a final data set. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants (n=4,638).

School Type	Grade	Pre-Male	Female	Post-Male	Female	Total
Middle School	1	682	650	682	650	2,664
	2	160	176	160	176	672
	3	142	138	142	138	560
Sub total		984	964	984	964	3,896
High School	1	94	110	94	110	408
	2	47	72	47	72	238
	3	25	23	25	23	96
Sub total		166	205	166	205	742

2.2. Measures

Career maturity. To measure career maturity, 10 questions developed by the Korea Education Longitudinal Study (the KELS) were used, consisting of two factors: Factor 1 for measuring one's self-understanding and Factor 2 one's level of preparation and planning for career decisions (Kim et al., 2014). Examples include, "I know what I am doing well" (self-understanding), and "I think about what I should do now to achieve my future goals (career planning)." All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Reliabilities (Cronbach's α) of the scales of career maturity, self-understanding, and career planning were .94 ($M=3.95$, $SD=.72$) .90 ($M=3.95$, $SD=.78$), and .89 ($M=3.95$, $SD=.74$), respectively.

Community awareness. To measure participants' community awareness, the authors developed three items: "I know that there are various occupations in the community I belong to. I think that the industries in my community are developing because of various workers. If I do my best, I expect that I will be able to commit to my community development". The three items used a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The reliability coefficient α was .85 ($M=3.98$, $SD=.76$).

2.3. Data analysis

First, a crosstabs analysis was performed to identify the distribution of participants by the program type and the time type spent. Next, an independent *t*-test was performed to examine the difference between the pre- and post-participation for participants' career maturity and community awareness through the local specialized career experience programs. Finally, the effect size, Cohen's *d*, was calculated.

3. Findings

In the distribution of time types, middle school students and high school students participated in the day-time program the most (middle school students = 90.2%; high school students = 92.2%; total = 90.6%), the series-based continuous type (5.5%), the in-stay type (3.9%). Next, for the distribution of participants by the type of the program content, the results revealed that most students participated in the workplace experience type and the department of higher education experience type, 52.2%, and 22.1%, respectively. Specifically, for the middle school students, 56.7% participated in the workplace experience programs, 17.8% did the experience programs of the department of major in higher education institutes, 9.2% participated in the career-camp programs, 9.1% did the field-trip programs, 7.1% did the real job-related-task experience programs, and 0.1% participated in the lecture-and talk-based programs. For the high school students, 45.0% of the students participated in the experience programs of the department of majors in higher education institutes, next 28.6% participated in the workplace experience programs, 12.1% did the career-camp programs, 11.3% the field-trip programs, and 3% participated in the lecture- or talk-based programs. No high school students participated in the real job-related-task experience programs.

Table 2. Distribution of the Participants' by the Program Types (n=4,638).

Program Type	Middle		High		Total (%)	
	n	%	n	%		
Time	Day-time	3,516	90.2	684	92.2	4,200 (90.6)
	Series-based continuous	198	5.1	58	7.8	256 (5.5)
	In-stay	182	4.7	0	0.0	182 (3.9)
Content	On- the- job work experience	2,210	56.7	212	28.6	2422 (52.2)
	Real job-related-task	276	7.1	0.0	0.0	276 (6.0)
	Field-trip	356	9.1	84	11.3	440 (9.5)
	Department of majors	692	17.8	334	45.0	1,026 (22.1)
	Career-camp	358	9.2	90	12.1	448 (9.7)
	Lecture- or talk-based	4	.1	22	3.0	26 (.6)

The scores of the post-survey of the program experience in Career maturity ($t = -9.75, p < .001, d = .29$) and community awareness ($t = 14.45, p < .001, d = .42$) of the participants were higher than those of the pre-survey. The scores of both self-understanding ($t = -7.19, p < .001, d = .21$) and career planning ($t = -11.41, p < .001, d = .34$) increased after participating in the local-specialized career experience programs.

Table 3. Independent t-test and Effect Size (n=4,638).

Variable		Total (n=4,638)		Pre (n=2,319)		Post (n=2,319)		t	d
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Career Maturity	CM	3.95	.72	3.84	.69	4.05	.73	-9.75***	.29
	SU	3.95	.78	3.86	.77	4.03	.78	-7.19***	.21
	CP	3.95	.74	3.82	.72	4.07	.74	-11.41***	.34
Community Awareness		3.98	.76	3.82	.74	4.14	.75	-14.45***	.42

*** $p < .001$. CM = career maturity, SU = self-understanding, and CP = career planning.

4. Conclusions and discussion

It was concluded that the understanding of participants themselves in terms of career maturity as well as their community has increased through the local-specialized career experience programs. The results of this study imply that the local-specialized career experience programs have increased the effectiveness of the quality of the programs and the goals of the project. In the future studies on career experience programs, it is necessary to examine the effectiveness of other career experience programs and compare their effectiveness with those of the local-specialized career experience programs.

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