

# Basic Study for Understanding and Improvement of Free Learning Semester

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## 1. Introduction

### (1) Necessity and purpose of research

According to the statistical analysis data of the Educational Indicators Laboratory(EIL) of Korea Educational Development Institute(KEDI) in March 2019, the result of the question "The life of the current school is satisfactory" in the elementary school, middle school, and high school students' school life satisfaction is 82.1% of young people, 85.9% of them in 2014 and 88.3% of them in 2017. This means that their school life was satisfactory(Yang, 2019). However a survey of parents showed that children's school life satisfaction was slightly increased or decreased as opposed to students(Yang, 2019). According to the international comparison of the happiness index, the happiness index of Korean students is below the OECD average, and one in five feels suicidal thoughts. According to the "2019 World Happiness Report"<sup>1</sup> published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network(SDSN), the United Nations advisory body of the United Nations, Korea is ranked 47th(2015), 58th(2016), 56th(2017), 54th(2019)<sup>2</sup>. The meaning of this study is that schools emphasize or academic grades or study than students' happiness or personality.

Korea is trying to give more happiness to school life and satisfaction through 'Free Learning Semester' at first system this is just on experimental program on 2013, then expanding to all middle school students in Korea in 2016.

The purpose of this study is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the 'Free Learning Semester' program policy implemented in Korea since 2013 and to suggest what kind of policy is needed to develop into a program satisfying school, parents, and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Yonsei University Social Development Institute, *Report on the International Comparative Study on the Korean Childhood Happiness Index*.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mk.co.kr/news/world/view/2019/03/170008/>

## (2) Research method

This study analyzed the literature and statistics of the schools implemented by the 'free school system' policy, focusing on the policy part, the press release data of the Ministry of Education and the statistical data of the National Statistical Office. As the author resides in Taiwan and is studying Korean education policy, he refers to the existing research data and refers to the problem and actual operation status of the policy through telephone interviews of teachers in middle school and high school administrative office and teaching staff in Korea as needed.

## 2. Process and meaning of 'Free Learning Semester'

'Free Learning Semester System' is allows students to find their own dreams and memories by eliminating the burden of midterm and final exams during one semester of middle school from 2013. Classroom management is a program that changes to discussion and practice, and students switch to self-participating and autonomous learning(Jeng Yang-Duk, Yoon Young-Im, Lee Kang-Taek, 2015).

Was with 42 schools(1.00%) in 2013, and 800 schools(25%) in 2014, 1,500 schools(50%) in 2015, and 100%(Ministry of Education of Korea, 2015).

'Free Learning Semester System' is going to strengthen career education, to innovate teaching and learning methods, and to relieve students' burden(Ryu Jung-seop 2013). Since 2013, students' satisfaction with and participation in the 'Free Learning Semester' program has increased (Ministry of Education of Korea, 2018). In recent years, they have been expanding to implement the 'Free Learning Semester system' in all semesters on middle school.

### (1) Curriculum

If the former teacher is the center of teaching, the 'Free Learning Semester System' is an opportunity the evidence for both teachers and students to learn experiences, practice, experiment, project, etc. And conducts various teaching methods to explore. Also, in the operation of the study with no academic pressure time, the course will be converged or linked, and cooperative teaching - cooperative learning will be conducted. Since the time is also a block-time system, it is possible to operate a flexible timetable(Ministry of Education of Korea 2015).

However, since the midterm and final examinations are not carried out for the contents of the curriculum and the discretionary evaluation of the schools such as the formative evaluation and the self-reflection evaluation suitable for the "free school period" are conducted, it is difficult to present an accurate reference point of the rational evaluation Jung Yoon-Kyung, 2016).

## (2) Organization and operation of career and experiential activities

In order to improve the career capacity of students, basic subjects such as Korean language, English, mathematics, social science and science are reflected in the contents of education for students' career education and achievement. It also uses career counseling and testing tools to help identify student characteristics and competencies. In addition, students can experience 'full-time career experiences' or 'career camps' at the institutions they want themselves to experience indirect experiences, and invite specialists from various fields of society in connection with the local community(Jeong Yang-Duk, Yoon Young-Im, Lee Kang-Taek, 2015).

## (3) Free Learning Semester System Operating Model

The Ministry of Education of Korea presents four models for operating the free semester. Two models are for search of career, a group activity focus model, and a student selection program emphasis model. Career Search Focus Model is organized by morning curriculum, afternoon class is search of career, and selection program is club, and arts and physical education. The basic curriculum is study 22 hours and club activities on Friday from 3rd to 7th.

In order to expand the opportunities for systematic search for medical care, the course of career exploration education was established through the selection of 'Career and Job' to explore its own aptitude and qualities, and in cooperation with parents with diverse social experiences, and conduct career counseling. Mobile apps and career psychology tests<sup>3</sup> are available free of charge. After completion of the career test and consultation, experts from various and fields of society are invited to take a special lecture, take experience career for all day. Finally, write a portfolio to describe career aspirations and job. Career learning, counseling, and

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<sup>3</sup> [www.career.go.kr](http://www.career.go.kr)

experience records are recorded and managed through Edupot<sup>4</sup> (Ryu, Jung-Seop, 2013.7).

#### (4) Student satisfaction

According to the "Social Youth Comprehensive Survey", the school life satisfaction of Korean students(Elementary school, Secondary school) is increasing every year in 2011 (82.1%), 2014 (85.9%) and 2017 (88.3%). In addition, according to a study of the environment in which students are studying, positive responses were found in 2011 (58.6%), 2014 (65.6%) and 2017 (79.1%), (65.9 percent), 2014 (69.5 percent) and 2017 (71.8 percent), respectively (Yang Tae-Jeong, 2019). However, since the change of satisfaction is meaningless in parents' satisfaction with school life, it is necessary to study deeply from the viewpoint of students, parents, and school.

### **3. Actual conditions of the Free Learning Semester System and its activation plan**

#### (1) Lack of awareness

Most researchers are positive about the background and purpose of running 'Free Learning Semester System' some semesters or more and middle school curriculum in order to realize their dreams and talents(Kim Mi-jin, Hong Hu-Jo, 2015). However, there is still a lack of awareness of the 'Free Learning Semester System', so it can be recognized as 'Semester without exams' and 'Semester with external activities through field study'. In addition, since the liberal semester is not reflected in the entrance examination, there is an advantage to run the more Free Learning Semester, but there may be worry and anxiety about 'academic decline'(Jung Yun-Kyung, 2016).

These problems are due to the lack of awareness of the educational system that makes students dream and talent in the entrance-oriented education. Schools need to cooperate with their parents to provide guidance for free-term school operations. Parents' awareness of the Free Learning Semester, as well as the level of student satisfaction with each year as parents and colleagues showcase their expertise and expertise, introduce parent workplaces, and experience students, Satisfaction will rise

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.neis.go.kr/pas\\_mms\\_nv99\\_001.do](https://www.neis.go.kr/pas_mms_nv99_001.do)

together.

## (2) Criteria for Evaluation

The evaluation is process - based evaluation, process - based and performance - based evaluation, and results - based performance evaluation. Most students preferred course-based performance evaluation. The process of self-evaluation and helping students is positive. However, the evaluator lacks a clear standard and understanding of the subject, which can lead to burdens and excessive work of teachers who need to evaluate the narrative type rather than score(Jung Young-Hee, Jun Ki-Lee, Lee Kang-Taek, 2016).

## (3) Limitations of career search

It is the greatest advantage of Education that students observe their talents and aptitudes with interest. It is a positive response to students in order to find their talents and engage them in the interest of academic interest and to work harder. According to a study by the Korea Institute of Vocational Education and Training(2017), there are significant differences in career exploration, career understanding, and career planning and preparation compared to free-time students and non-participating students. However, due to the limitations of various problems such as regional variation, cooperation with external organizations, limit of time students can experience, limit of industry, etc. There is a need to build a large infrastructure.

## (4) Learning Effect

The Free Learning Semester system is not a program that neglects learning because there is no exam. The change way of learning and, for a longer period, to develop self-directed learning skills that enable students to learn on their own. According to the research by Lee Seung-Bum, Chin Ji-Hyoung(2016), self-directed learning ability according to the Free Learning Semester system has changed significantly. This means that students' autonomous selection and learning will lead to career search, club activities and artistic activities The results are positive. Self-directed learning is not a learning process according to the teacher's plan and curriculum, but a learning process in which the curriculum is progressed according to the learner's interests, talents, and interests(Lee Seung-Bum, Chin Ji-Hyoung, 2016). This study requires more cooperation between teachers, parents, and the community, and it is necessary to study more deeply how students can support their diverse learning in a limited environment.

#### 4. Conclusion

Awareness of the 'Free Learning Semester system' is positive. The students' satisfaction with school life is relatively positive, and there is no denying the validity of the vision and purpose pursued by the liberal semester (Shin Chul-Kyun, Kim Eun-Young, Hwang Eun-Hee, Song Kyung-Oh, Park Min-Jung, 2015). However, it may also indicate concerns about policy consistency and sustainability. The reasons for this concern are fear of changes in education policy. The current full-time free learning education policy seems to be a sustainable program because it has a high degree of satisfaction for students and a great influence on creativity and personality education.

Teachers and students have a psychological burden on the 'free learning semester' assessment. Students have to write narratively and the burden of teachers to evaluate it is relatively high. This may lead to teachers' burden and burn-out. Although the evaluation does not reflect the students' career and hope records at high school entrance, it is possible to limit the number of classes that can be experienced in a relatively short period of time and limit the time to find their aptitude. It is doubtful that the limitations of education that can be provided to students every time they discover the true course of their students (Shin Cheol-Kyun, Hwang En-Hui, Kim Eun-Yong, 2015). Evaluating and recording students on this background should ensure that students do not close their eyes on more opportunities and choices in the future.

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