

## Implications for Korean Education Based on the Analysis of Academic Curriculums in Canada\*

Jong Tae Park<sup>1</sup>, Jihyo Kim<sup>2</sup>, Young Lim Lee<sup>3</sup>, Jong-Hwa Jang<sup>4</sup>,  
Meeran Joo<sup>5</sup>, Eunseo Park<sup>6</sup>, Seong Man Park<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor. Division of Dentistry, Dankook University, Korea (jongta2@dankook.ac.kr), First Author

<sup>2</sup>Professor. College of General Education, Dankook University, Korea (jihyokim@dankook.ac.kr)

<sup>3</sup>Professor. Dept. of Psychology and Psychotherapy, Dankook University, Korea (younglee13@dankook.ac.kr)

<sup>4</sup>Professor. Dept. of Dental Hygiene, College of Health Science, Dankook University, Korea (jihj@dankook.ac.kr)

<sup>5</sup>Professor. College of General Education, Dankook University, Korea (lime0420@dankook.ac.kr)

<sup>6</sup>Graduate Student. Division of Dentistry, Dankook University, Korea (12201029@dankook.ac.kr)

<sup>7</sup>Professor. College of General Education, Dankook University, Korea (seongmanpark@dankook.ac.kr),  
Corresponding Author

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### ABSTRACT

In the case of Korea, the reason why the public is very interested in the education system related to the university entrance exam is that the university entrance exam is evaluated as a big factor influencing life, such as those who graduated from prestigious universities occupying a superior position in society in terms of employment. On the other hand, in Canada, the university entrance policy is not discussed in the public debate. This is because the goal of Canadian school education is to strengthen students' competencies and vocational training for social advancement. Therefore, in this study, the characteristics of Canada's education system and university entrance examination were examined, and through this study, the implications for the improvement of our university entrance examination system were investigated. This study emphasizes the universality of Korea's university education as in the case of Canada at a national quality level.

## 1. Introduction

The college admission system in South Korea reflects many different factors, including the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), student records, essay, recommendation letter, in-depth interview, intensifying the confusion among students preparing for college as well as the general public. Consequently, the need for changes in the education policy and college admission system has been

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publicly discussed with the major debate topics of suitable college entrance systems for the nation and problems arising from changing the system. The reason for South Korea's high public interest in the education system related to college entrance is probably because the entrance to a college is evaluated as an important factor, if not the arbiter, of the life — those who graduate from a prestigious university occupy a superior position in employment and in the society (Seo, 2012).

On the other hand, in Canada, which is selected as one of the top three most livable countries in the world by the UN (Shin, 2012), college entrance policy is not of much public interest. This is because the goals of school education in Canada are to strengthen students' competencies and provide vocational training for social advancement. In regard to the competency-based education in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) stated in 2012 that the goal of school education is not to simply acquire knowledge in subjects but for students to strengthen their competencies and should be discussed at the government level. Accordingly, provincial governments have been actively discussing about the subjects and evaluation of the subjects that can enhance students' competencies (CMEC, 2017). In addition, Canada places more weight on the role of universities as a post-secondary education institution, rather than on the reputation of universities; what really matters is graduating from a higher education institution, not the school's name. In fact, unlike South Korea in where most students want to go to a university, relatively few students wish to go to a university in Canada. As a result of the secondary education in Canada that emphasizes competency enhancement, graduating from a university does not make or break a career. Although it has never been specifically pointed out, the reality of education in South Korea is very different from that of Canada in that Koreans spend excessive money and time for university entrance (e.g. private tutoring). However, it does not mean that Canada's academic achievement rate is lower than that of Korea. In fact, Canada recorded 81% for secondary education degree acquisition and 78% for enrollment rate among those aged between 5 and 29 in 2005, showing a higher number compared to the OECD average of 79% and 62.8%, respectively (Seo, 2012).

Therefore, this study examines the characteristics of the education system and college entrance in Canada in order to cast light upon implications for the improvement of the college entrance system in South Korea. In particular, this study makes a general introduction to Canada and contemplates the overall education system and college entrance system in Canada to make a comparison with the college entrance system in South Korea.

## 2. Canada and Its Education System

In this section, along with a brief introduction to Canada, Canada's overall education system is examined including 1) preschool and primary education; 2) secondary education, and 3) post-secondary education.

### 2.1 Introduction to Canada

Canada is the second largest country in the world and is bordered by three oceans: the Pacific

Ocean in the west, the Atlantic Ocean in the east, and the Arctic Ocean to the north (Federal Government of Canada, 2017). Ottawa, located between Ontario and Quebec, is the capital city of Canada. It is a federal country composed of ten provinces (Atlantic Provinces-Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick; Central Canada -Quebec and Ontario, Prairie Provinces -Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; West Coast-British Columbia) and three territories (North-Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon Territory) grouped into five regions (Federal Government of Canada, 2017). However, the majority of the population reside in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta.

Canada is a federal state made up of provinces and territories, and the federal, provincial and territorial governments all have different roles. The federal government deals with national and international matters such as national defense, immigration, international and foreign policy, human rights and international trade (Federal Government of Canada, 2017).

Quebec, the largest province in Canada, accounts for 15.5% of the total area of Canada (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015). According to the 2016 census released by Statistics Canada, Canada has a population of 35,151,728 of which 8,164,361 reside in Quebec, Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017).

## *2.2 Overall education system in Canada*

Education in Canada is managed by the provincial government, not by the federal government. Canada's Constitution Act of 1867 clearly stipulates the role of federal and provincial governments in education: "[I]n and for each province, the legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education" (Federal Government of Canada, 2017).

According to the division of roles, each provincial government is in charge of secondary education with independent characteristics, despite some differences between provinces, and the federal government is responsible for post-secondary education, vocational education, and bilingual education (Canadian Council of Ministers of Education, 2017). In other words, the Ministry of Education of each province determines its educational system, curriculum, semester and school age considering the context. In most provinces, education up to high school is free (in Quebec, free education up to college, if CEGEP or publicly funded). Since most schools are subsidized by the government, universities in Canada have lower tuition, though different for each province, compared to American universities (Shin, 2012). In Quebec, different tuition fees are applied to Canadian residents of Quebec, Canadian non-residents of Quebec, and international students. The tuition fees, excluding other fees, for students admitted for the fall semester of 2017 are CAD 2,400 to 5,000 for Canadian residing in Quebec, CAD 7,400 to 16,000 for Canadians who do not reside in Quebec, and CAD 16,000 to 40,000 for international students from Korea and other countries. In general, the educational system is divided into four stages (names may differ in different provinces): preschool education (kindergarten or preschool), primary education (elementary), secondary education (secondary), and post-secondary education (college or university). and up to secondary education is designated as compulsory education. Although the school system differs from province to province, it is generally composed of two years of kindergarten education (junior kindergarten & senior kindergarten), six years of primary education, six years of secondary education (five years in Quebec), and three

to five years of post-secondary education (college and university, or two years of college + three years of university as in Quebec) (CMEC, 2017).

### *2.2.1 Preschool and primary education*

Although preschool education in Canada varies slightly from province to province, it is usually two years prior to primary education (in Quebec, some students choose to take one elective year of kindergarten before entering primary school at the age of six). According to CMEC (2017), about 95% and 40% of those eligible are enrolled in Senior Kindergarten and Junior Kindergarten, respectively, throughout Canada.

In general, primary education consists of six to eight years of courses upon the completion of preschool education. Primary education in all provinces consists of six years, excluding Ontario and Manitoba (8 years), and British Columbia (7 years) with the school year starting in September and ending in June of the following year. The curriculum of primary education consists of foundational education requirements such as language (including English or French as a second language), mathematics, social studies, science, health and physical education, and arts (CMEC, 2017).

### *2.2.2 Secondary education*

Secondary education in Canada is designed to prepare students for employment through vocational training courses or continuing their studies in a university. Although there is a slight difference in the school age from province to province, primary and secondary education up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade is provided free of charge. CEGEP, which is originated from the French acronym for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, is a 2-year college course in Quebec offering general courses for university preparation and vocational preparation courses for employment (Statistics Canada, 2017). Upon successful completion of secondary education, students can apply for college admissions in any province. In Quebec, students must complete up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade or one year of the 2-year course, CEGEP, before applying to a university outside of Quebec. Most educational institutions are public, though there also are private schools (usually Catholic or Protestant) established through self-censorship of each province. Indeed, government-funded secondary education accounts for 93 percent of all secondary education institutions in Canada (CMEC, 2017).

Secondary education has a credit system for each subject, and students graduate when they successfully complete all the subjects required for graduation. In addition, courses for both students who wish to continue their studies after graduation and others who seek for a job are in operation (Shin, 2012).

### *2.2.3 Post-secondary education*

In general, Canada's post-secondary education is divided into university, college, and career college (Shin, 2012). There are currently more than 90 universities across Canada (85 of which are state universities), and more than 250 colleges and other educational institutions similar to a college.

Colleges, which have relatively less strict admission requirements compared to universities, are efficient in practical, technical, or vocational education and grant degrees, unlike career colleges. According to Statistics Canada, the total number of students enrolled in a post-secondary education institution in Canada, as of November 2016, was 2,054,943, of which 1,559,103 are full-time students (University: 1,004,652, College: 554,454) and 495,840 are part-time students (University: 301,461, college: 194,379) (Statistics Canada, 2017). The table below summarizes the education system of each province in Canada.

**Table 1.** Education system by province in Canada

Name of province		Grade														University
		Preschool	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Alberta	Alberta	Junior Kindergarten 1 year + Senior Kindergarten 1 year	Primary education					Secondary education (middle school 3 years + high school 3 years)								
	New Brunswick		Primary education					Secondary education (middle school 3 years + high school 3 years)								
	Prince Edward Island		Primary education					Secondary education (middle school 3 years + high school 3 years)								
	Nova Scotia		Primary education					Secondary education								
	Quebec		Primary education					Secondary education (5 years)			CEGEP (2years)					
	Saskatchewan		Primary education					Secondary education								
	British Columbia		Primary education (7 years)					Secondary education								
	Ontario		Primary education (7 years)					Secondary education								
	Manitoba		Primary education (7 years)					Secondary education								
	Newfoundland		Primary education (6 or 8 years)					Secondary education (4 years for 8 years of primary education)								

(Supplemented and modified from Shin Taejin, 2012, p. 338)

### 3. General College Admission System in Canada

Unlike South Korea, which has a unified federal college admission system and exam (CSAT), students in Canada are admitted solely based on their records. Obviously, the admission systems and criteria are different in different provinces and universities (Shin, 2012).

The reasons for admitting students solely based on their academic records can be deduced from the goals of high school education in Korea and Canada. Jeong Munsook (2012) argues that Canada views high school education as a process of cultivating basic skills for life, not as a means of entering a college. Consequently, despite the autonomy of colleges in student admissions, strict criteria are applied to successful completion of the last stage of secondary education or the last

stage of the compulsory education program (generally similar to middle and high school courses in Korea). As such, in order to graduate from a high school, students in some provinces must pass standardized provincial tests for major subjects selected by the province (e.g., British Columbia: 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Grades, Alberta: 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Ontario: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Quebec: 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Grades). Since high school courses are different from province to province, each province has different subjects and conditions for the tests. In many cases, students cannot obtain a high school diploma because they fail the provincial tests. In addition, since provincial tests are included in academic records and reflected in college admissions in some provinces (e.g., British Columbia: 20% for 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Grades and 40% for 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Alberta: 50% for 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, and Quebec: 50% for 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> Grades), they are very important for students (Park, 2012; Jeong, 2012).

The basis of autonomous admission system by college or province in Canada can be also inferred from the system for post-secondary education or colleges throughout Canada. As mentioned earlier, the majority of universities in Canada are public universities funded by the government. Although there are universities with a high entrance competition rate, the prevailing opinion is that the performance of universities across Canada is almost the same. Another element is the openness in admission to universities in Canada (Jeong, 2012). Students choose to go to a university to acquire specialized knowledge in a specific field; it is not a mandatory choice that students need to make after graduating from a high school. As such, the door to a university is wide open for those who choose to graduate from a career college or college and wish to continue learning in a university in the future (Jeong, 2012). Colleges and technical institutes strictly manage their curriculum and education system, allowing students to go to a university and receive more in-depth education after completing the curriculum at their will.

Another difference between Korea and Canada is the fierce competition to survive or graduate from a university in Canada. In other words, admission to a university in Canada is relatively easy but graduating from it is quite difficult, making the competition for admission with a high school GPA somewhat meaningless. In order to pass college courses, students need to have academic ability and personal integrity which can be assessed through students' high school records. Therefore, universities select students based on their high school records by giving opportunities to students with good academic records as well as those who have a potential (Jeong, 2012).

Canada and Korea have the same method for university application. In general, students select a university and major and submit an application for the university to proceed with the admissions process. Since the academic year for universities in Canada starts in September, applications are usually submitted in between November and February, and results are notified in between March and May.

#### **4. Comparison with South Korea's college entrance system and its implications**

The current college entrance system in Korea, in which students are recruited through early and regular admissions, has undergone major changes since 1994, such as the abolition of achievement test, implementation of the CSAT, revival of university examination, consideration of comprehensive

student records and essay for admission between 1997 and 2001, and diversification of the means of early admissions. The college admission system implemented in 2002 expanded the autonomy of universities in recruiting students, diversified admission types, increased the scope of specialization, and emphasized selecting students based on various factors, such as special talents and experiences, rather than focusing on test scores. Also, it strengthened early admission and special admissions and implemented various screening materials such as recommendation letters and interviews. However, due to 'inflated high school grades', only 8.21% of colleges and universities reflected student records in regular admission in 2004. With the notion that school education is only for student records and not enough for the CSAT, reliance on hagwons has deepened. Universities fell short of making enough efforts to develop a specialized method for admission considering the goals and type of each university, recruiting students through general admissions by adding the CSAT and GPA scores while disregarding the different aptitudes and abilities required for each recruitment unit (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004). Since then, changes have been made to the college entrance system: the pilot operation and introduction of the admission officer system in 2007, comprehensive student record screening in 2014, and High School Education Contribution University Support Project in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2014; 2017). However, as excessive complexity and frequent changes to the college admissions process caused persisting problems, a social opinion was voiced to simplify the college admissions process. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (2014; 2017) announced plans to simplify the college admissions process and develop a college admission system with the goal of establishing a comprehensive support system for college admissions that requires universities to have no more than six admission methods, supports application submission, and provides information on college admissions.

Nonetheless, despite such institutional changes, academic performance is still considered as the most important element of the college entrance system in South Korea, leading to unending adverse effects of excessive competition for college entrance and promotion of private education (Kim, 2009).

Canada's overall education system and its college entrance system, in general, were examined by comparing them to South Korea's college admission system which requires excessive competition for college admission,

First, the biggest difference was observed in the perception of the goals of high school and college education (Jeong, 2012). In Korea, which has a high college admission rate, high school education is regarded as a mere step to enter a college according to academic level or rank. Consequently, high school students in South Korea have to face fierce competition throughout their entire high school years, growing high dependency on private tutoring to win the competition. In contrast, in Canada, high school education is considered as a process of cultivating fundamental life skills, rather than as a means of entering a university, and university education as an extension of the process in which one chooses and acquires specialized knowledge (Shin, 2012; Jeong, 2012).

Second, unlike Korea, high school education in Canada uses an absolute evaluation method. In other words, unlike the relative evaluation method, which ranks students based on competitions with others, an absolute evaluation method eradicates unnecessary competitions by focusing on academic achievement through one's own efforts. South Korea needs to consider Canada's absolute evaluation, in lieu of its current relative evaluation method, when recruiting students based on their

academic achievement (Jeong, 2012).

Third, another prominent difference is the openness in college admissions in Canada. Unlike their counterpart in Korea, not all of the high school students in Canada wish to go to a college; they choose college education as a course to acquire specialized knowledge according to their own needs. In Quebec, students can advance into society through the 2-year course, CEGEP, designed for technical and occupational skills; getting a job does not require a college diploma. It has many implications for South Korea's education system, in which college education is considered mandatory for employment and social advancement (Jeong, 2012).

Lastly, it was observed that the education system and education goals in Canada underline the importance of academic evaluation based on long-term, rather than short-term. In other words, students determine their own learning goals through continuous evaluation, instead of making college admission the only goal for their education. The perception of evaluation method in Canada presents important implications to South Korea's college entrance system which requires its high school students to go through intense competitions for college entrance. In other words, it suggests that secondary education or pre-college education should lead to social advancement and career exploration, rather than being a mere means for college admission.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is difficult to say that one country has a better education system than another. However, the college entrance system in Canada highlights the need of South Korea's education system to make its goal of providing quality education to students preparing for college entrance clear.

As specified above, the university entrance system in Canada is considered to have a structure which is based on students' academic ability and records, unlike South Korea's competitive structure that extremely prioritizes academic performance. This is why the college admission system in Canada is much simpler than that of South Korea. In Canada, although students with academic abilities are eligible for admission, not all of them succeed in college; universities in Canada give a chance to everyone with academic abilities, but this does not mean they will successfully complete the university courses. This can also be inferred from the difference in the average college graduation rate between Korea (95%) and Canada (less than 75%) (Jang, 1999). This is because, the academic performance in a university depends on one's efforts and abilities, without having to go through fierce competitions (Jeong, 2012). Therefore, changing the college admission system while emphasizing the universality of quality throughout the nation, as in the case of Canada, is highly expected to reduce excessive expenses on private education and end fierce competitions among young students in South Korea.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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