

# Analyzing Policy Agendas of Local Education Offices : Similarities and Differences

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**Abstract :** It is one of the main important tasks for local education offices to ensure regional characteristics reflected in their educational policy agenda. This article provides the analysis of key words in the policy agendas of the 17 local education offices in South Korea. Using text analysis as a research method, this study aims to answer the following research questions : 1) How is the local education autonomy being actualized in the policy agendas given the key word analysis data? 2) What are some implications for the development of local education autonomy which reflects regional characteristics? Findings suggest that the local education offices have been operating diverse planning with most commonly addressed key words such as ‘safety’, ‘career’, and ‘local’. Local education autonomy can have more regional characteristics with the following conditions : ① reinforcing local education autonomy and decentralization, ② building capabilities of policy planning ③ preparing legal and support, ④ institutionalizing community involvement, ⑤ providing regional information and education.

**Keywords :** local education administration, educational autonomy, regional characteristics.

## INTRODUCTION

Local education autonomy needs to be actualized with implementations of policy agendas that reflect local characteristics. In Korea, local education autonomy system has been developing since 1991 with the enactment of the Local Education Autonomy Laws (LEAL) which emphasize independency, professionalism, and neutrality of education. However, local education system still lacks in various aspects and it is rare to find local education administration which reflects local characteristics. One of the main reasons is because of concentrated power on the central government, and lack of local administration officers’ capabilities of policy development and planning (Pyo, 2011). Local education administration system is a hierarchical organization which impedes localized service for regional conditions of metropolitan/province, city/village or combinations of both (Jon, 2001). Song(2017) explained how the LEAL were incompletely enacted and there still is a lack of understanding educational autonomy itself and a lack of its outcome.

The Moon Government enforces local autonomy decentralization with total decentralization and constitutional reform. The central government proposed related initiatives such as ‘enforcing innovative decentralization of autonomy and actualizing participation of citizens’, ‘strengthening

fiscal decentralization for the self-reliance of local finance’, ‘recovering democracy of education’ with emphasis on decentralization and local development. Also, He announced to strength democracy and accountability of education and educational governance reform including reorganizing the Ministry of Education. With these strong decentralization initiatives of the new leader in Korean government, it is necessary to review the related issues and propose the new directions to further develop local education autonomy.

The educational autonomy with regional characteristics relates to the ‘regionalizing education’, which can strength educational excellence providing local schools and the region with the freedom of education and accountability for the results, and this preconditions decentralizing educational goals and policy making process(Oh, 2013; Do & Choi 2004). In this paper, the authors review the literature of Korean local education autonomy, particularly, that reflects the regional characteristics of local education, and also analyze policy agendas of the 17 local education offices to review the differences and similarities of local education practices. By this review and analysis, we aim the answer the following research questions:

1) How is the local education autonomy being actualized in the policy agendas given the key word analysis data?

2) What are some implications for the development of local education autonomy which reflects regional characteristics?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a few study on local education conducted on local education autonomy that emphasize the importance of regional characteristics. In this section, we will review three sections of the related literature: decentralization and autonomy, legal and institutional change, cooperative governance. First, literature on educational decentralization and autonomy in Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and Hong Kong have begun to localize and materialize the ideas of school-based management since early 1990s(Ho, 2006). The definition of educational decentralization and autonomy vary and depending on researchers' perspectives, they reinforce and precondition each other(Ju, 2003). For instance, autonomy in education can be categorized into teacher autonomy, school autonomy, and local autonomy depending on the level of educational autonomy practices (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015). However, this study takes local autonomy for Brown's(1990) definition of decentralization, the authority transferred from higher level government to a lower organizational level. Local educational autonomy system can be defined as enlarging citizens' participation in education and seeking and implementing educational policy according to the local educational situation through the decentralization of educational administration(Yoon et al.2015).

In Korea, particularly, decentralization of education autonomy has been strengthened with legal and institutional changes over the past decades. The most prominent change was the way of selecting educational superintendents from appointment to election system in 2006. Although it was criticized for its high cost at first, this change raised the participation level of citizens in educational autonomy(Rah et al, 2017). However, there has been issues on policy conflicts between central and local government in education mainly due to the ambiguous authority and responsibility of educational administration between the central government and local education offices(Cha, 2017). Currently, there is an attempt to change constitution, either to classify central and local tasks of educational administration or to hand over central responsibilities to the local government(Hwang et al, 2018. 07.10).

Lastly, Korean researchers reviewed topics related to cooperative governance, the ideal relations between local educational and general administration. In this context, governance means a new way of governing

that differs from the traditional way of government. In other words, the focus of governance is shifted from the dichotomous relations of government and market to the interdependent and cooperative relations amongst government, market and community(Stoker, 2000; Ansell & Gash, 2007). Shin(2011) defined cooperative governance of local education as governing through modification and collaboration with the participation of market and civil society by breaking the traditional governmental agents of educational administration such as local education office.

## METHODOLOGY

We employed text analysis in order see how local education autonomy is being actualized in policy agendas. Content analysis means "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p.14). This methodology enables researchers to shift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. First, the policy agenda documents were collected from the website of 17 local education offices. The document is consisted of general overview, direction, tasks, strategies, detailed plans and explanations. Second, we categorized key phrases of the documents based on the three tiers of the contents. The first tier has the phrases of strategies or policy; the second tier with the phrases of main policy tasks forced, the third tier with phrases of detailed assignments for the tasks. Lastly, we conducted word frequency test of phrases in each tier using R and Tagxedo programs in order to see differences and similarities in all regions.

## FINDINGS

We found that there were diverse words used and shown in the policy agenda. This means that each local education office have different policy and task assignments depending on their educational situations. Table 1 is the results of key word frequency analysis of the third tier phrases collected from the policy agenda of 2017. Table 1 shows the top five the most found key words by regions. The most found word by region is 'innovation' in Gyeonggi, 'career' in Ulsan, and 'safety' in Chungbuk. Although some words, such as 'safety', 'career' and 'happiness' are found in many regions as key words, the words varied in regions.

<Table 1> The 3<sup>rd</sup> tier key word analysis of policy agenda 2017

Region		Key word analysis of policy agenda 2017				
		1 <sup>st</sup> rank	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank	3 <sup>rd</sup> rank	4 <sup>th</sup> rank	5 <sup>th</sup> rank
Seoul	keyword	safety	innovation	local	participation	career
	frequency	18	15	15	10	10
Busan	keyword	happiness	customize	curriculum	experience	participation
	frequency	10	10	9	8	8
Deagu	keyword	experience	career	capability	information	happiness
	frequency	15	13	13	12	12
Deajeon	keyword	linkage	customize	experience	career	safety
	frequency	12	10	9	8	7
Incheon	keyword	safety	prevention	citizen	local	career
	frequency	15	10	10	9	9
Ulsan	keyword	career	experience	information	safety	counsel
	frequency	33	25	21	20	14
Sejong	keyword	safety	growth	participation	capability	curriculum
	frequency	12	9	8	8	7
Kwangju	keyword	experience	kindergarten	record	history	curriculum
	frequency	8	8	8	8	7
Kangwon	keyword	local	participation	curriculum	experience	safety
	frequency	7	7	6	6	6
Gyeonggi	keyword	innovation	curriculum	safety	career	experience
	frequency	43	43	40	37	33
Jeonnam	keyword	future	customize	participation	autonomy	core competencies
	frequency	4	3	3	3	3
Jeonbuk	keyword	safety	extra curriculum	transparency	information	innovation
	frequency	9	7	6	5	5
Kyeongnam	keyword	local	happiness	class	expert	capability
	frequency	19	18	15	15	14
Kyeongbuk	keyword	happiness	customize	safety	consumer	field
	frequency	11	11	7	6	6
Chungnam	keyword	safety	country	health	local	communication
	frequency	8	6	6	5	5
Chungbuk	keyword	safety	extra curriculum	kindergarten	school lunch	curriculum
	frequency	20	15	14	14	13
Jeju	keyword	profession	autonomy	customize	health	career
	frequency	8	6	6	5	5

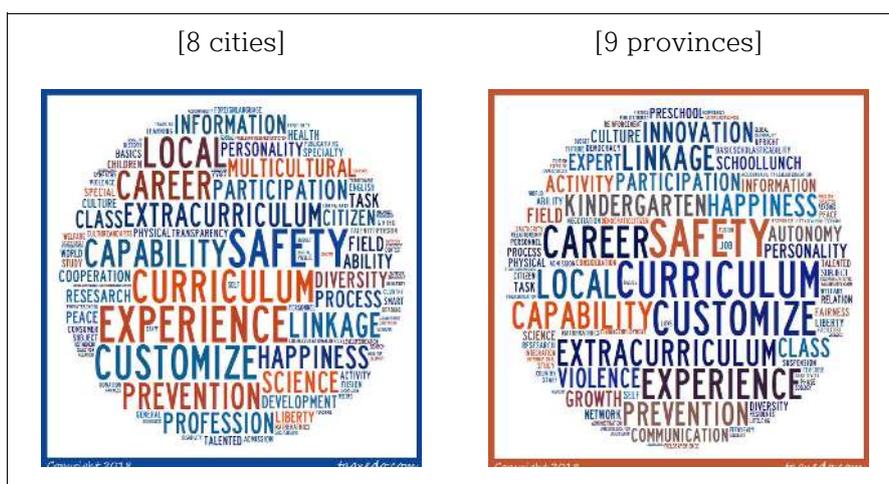


[Figure 1] Word clouds of key words 2017 data (cities)



<Table 2> Key word analysis of policy agenda (cities vs. provinces)

Region		Key word analysis of policy agenda 2017				
		1 <sup>st</sup> rank	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank	3 <sup>rd</sup> rank	4 <sup>th</sup> rank	5 <sup>th</sup> rank
cities	keyword	safety	customize	career	curriculum	local
	frequency	86	55	54	54	54
provinces	keyword	safety	curriculum	career	customize	experience
	frequency	105	83	73	71	70



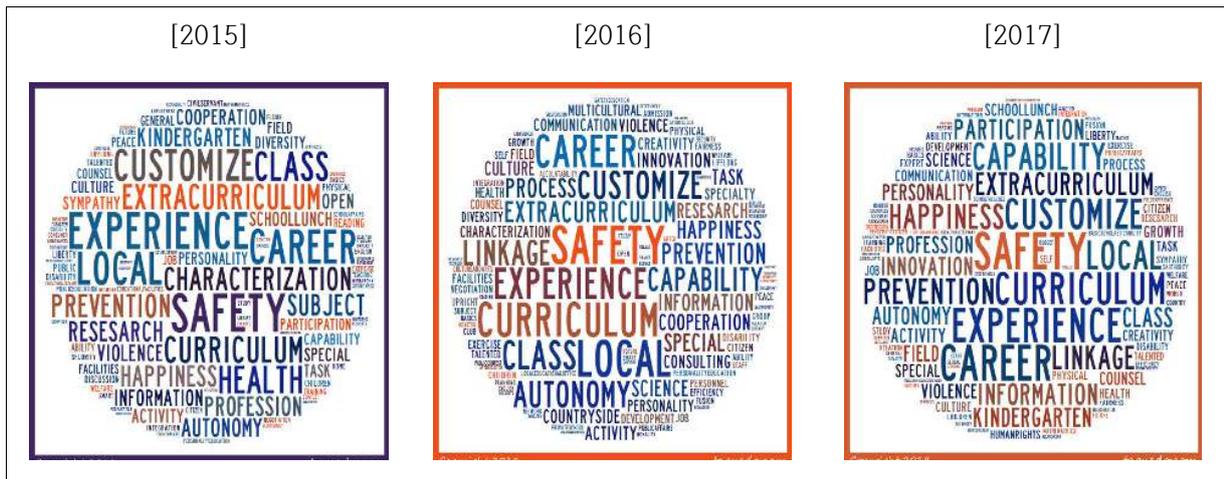
[Figure 3] Word clouds of key words 2017 data (cities)

Lastly, key words analysis was conducted by year to see if there is any trends in the policy agenda. The data shows that the most shown words are ‘safety’, ‘career’, and ‘local’ from 2015 to 2017. We found that the most frequently shown in the three years is ‘safety’ in the three years in a row. It is most likely because of the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster 304 people,

most of whom were school children on school trip, were killed. The second mostly found words are ‘career’ in 2015 and 2017 and ‘local’ in 2016. The third mostly found words are ‘experience’ in 2015 and 2017 and ‘curriculum’ in 2016.

<Table 2> Key word analysis of policy agenda (cities vs. provinces)

Year		Key word analysis of policy agenda				
		1 <sup>st</sup> rank	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank	3 <sup>rd</sup> rank	4 <sup>th</sup> rank	5 <sup>th</sup> rank
2015	keyword	safety	career	experience	local	class
	frequency	135	128	127	122	112
2016	keyword	safety	local	curriculum	career	experience
	frequency	186	164	147	139	126
2017	keyword	safety	career	experience	curriculum	local
	frequency	191	160	147	139	129



[Figure 4] Key word analysis of policy agenda by year (2015-2017)

## DISCUSSIONS

From the key word analysis of policy agendas, we know there has been diverse trials to suggest vision and plans for the development of regional education. With the Moon government's initiatives of decentralization, educational autonomy needs to be reinforced. The role of local education offices include actualizing national educational policy, planning and implementing localized educational development(Oh, 2013). In order to meet the needs of local specialty and demands of new educational environment, local education office require capabilities of policy planning and development.

At glance of word analysis by years, we found that the incident of Sewol ferry influenced the policy agenda of all local education offices. Since incident on the 24th April 2014, citizens' and concerns were raised on the safety of educational environment, such as disaster and diseases. School safety became educational problem and social issue that needs to be resolved. The central government required the educational government at all three levels of educational system(Ministry of Education, local education offices, schools), to plan school safety prevention. It is likely for the local education offices to keep safety as the first priority not only because of the incident itself but also for the newly made legal requirement.

Although the educational superintendents are now elected by the citizens, educational autonomy can be further developed with the community involvement. We suggested institutionalizing community involvement including operation of school committees with the community as well as budgeting for community involvement activities. Moreover, it would be helpful for the local education offices to be

able to access educational administration information and statistics at ease. This may include the regional input of education, citizen's opinions, and educational satisfaction. Providing such information will lead to evidence-based educational administration that is tailored for the different educational conditions in their regions.

## CONCLUSION

This study analyzed key words in policy agenda of local education offices in order to find out how the local education autonomy is being actualized. The text analysis results suggest that there are diverse attempts to characterize the educational administration at local level. We found that school safety became the key word of all local education offices in the past three years. Educational policy agenda may be influenced by an incident that cause all citizens to be concerned. Because the results were driven by analysing the policy agenda, and the actual implementation of the policy may look different. We made several suggestions in order to advance local education autonomy in Korea. They include reinforcing decentralization, building capabilities, legal support, community involvement, and utilizing regional information.

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