

# **Taiwanese Model of Teacher Preparation for Early Childhood Education**

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**October 12, 2012**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is intended to present the current model of teacher preparation for early childhood education in Taiwan. Documentary analysis was employed in the study to collect and analyze the obtained data. The main features of teacher preparation policies for early childhood education in Taiwan could be summarized as: (1) The Ministry of Education is the competent authority for teacher preparation; (2) The teacher preparation programs must be approved by the Ministry of Education; (3) The teacher education courses are regulated by the Ministry of Education; (4) Teacher preparation consists of preservice teacher education and teacher qualification test. In addition, teacher preparation procedures in Taiwan and comparisons in teacher preparation practices between Taiwan and other nations were also discussed in the paper.

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## **Introduction**

The importance of early childhood education as the foundation of children's development has gradually been recognized in Taiwan since 1980s. In 1981, the government of Taiwan enacted the Early Childhood Education Act and early childhood education was ultimately given a legitimate status in the educational system. Before 1983, teachers for early childhood education in Taiwan were prepared at most through some normal schools or inservice education programs. From 1983, the Ministry of Education started to approve two-year early childhood teacher education programs in normal junior colleges. The teacher preparation for early childhood education has thus formally been a part of the teacher education system and preservice education has been emphasized (Lin, 1998). In order to upgrade the quality of early childhood education teachers, four-year early childhood teacher preparation programs were established in teacher's colleges from 1990.

For carrying out the Teacher Preparation Act enacted in 1994, the Ministry of Education started to allow other universities besides teacher's colleges to prepare various teachers in early childhood, elementary and high schools (Ministry of Education, 2002). Before this policy, only normal universities and teacher's colleges

could provide teacher preparation courses to those who are interested in becoming a early childhood, elementary, high school, or special education teacher. This new policy seems to be similar to many other countries' approach (Ho, 2000; Wang, 2003).

In 2005, the Amendments to the Teacher Preparation Act required all students who complete preservice teacher education courses to take a teacher qualification test in order to be certified (Ministry of Education, 2005). Therefore, the procedure starting from the set up of teacher education program, then recruitment of teacher trainees, preservice training, basic competence test, and finally awarding a certification, Taiwan seems to develop a somewhat sophisticated system for teacher preparation education. The purpose of this paper is intended to present the current model of teacher preparation for early childhood education in Taiwan. Implications on this model will also be derived and discussed in this paper.

## **Methods**

Based on the aforementioned research purpose, documentary analysis was employed in the study to collect and analyze the obtained data. For analysis, all documents of legislations and regulations related to teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan and references in association with teacher preparation issues were collected.

All documents were subjected to qualitative textual analysis employing the process of constant comparison methods described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Specifically speaking, the analyzing procedure included document reviewing, data categorizing and comparing, finding the commonalities and differences of the documents, data organization and integration, topic presenting, and making generalization and conclusion.

## **Teacher Preparation Policies**

The laws and regulations related to the preparation of early childhood education teachers in Taiwan have established the foundations and policies for preparing preschool teachers. All these laws and regulations are in association, directly or indirectly, with each other. The main features of teacher preparation policies for early childhood education could be summarized as follows.

***The Ministry of Education in the central government is the competent authority for teacher preparation.*** A teacher preparation review commission established by the Ministry of Education are responsible for the review of teacher preparation plans, teacher training institutions, teacher preparation courses, evaluation and guidance of teacher preparation (Ministry of Education, 2005).

***The teacher preparation programs must be approved by the Ministry of***

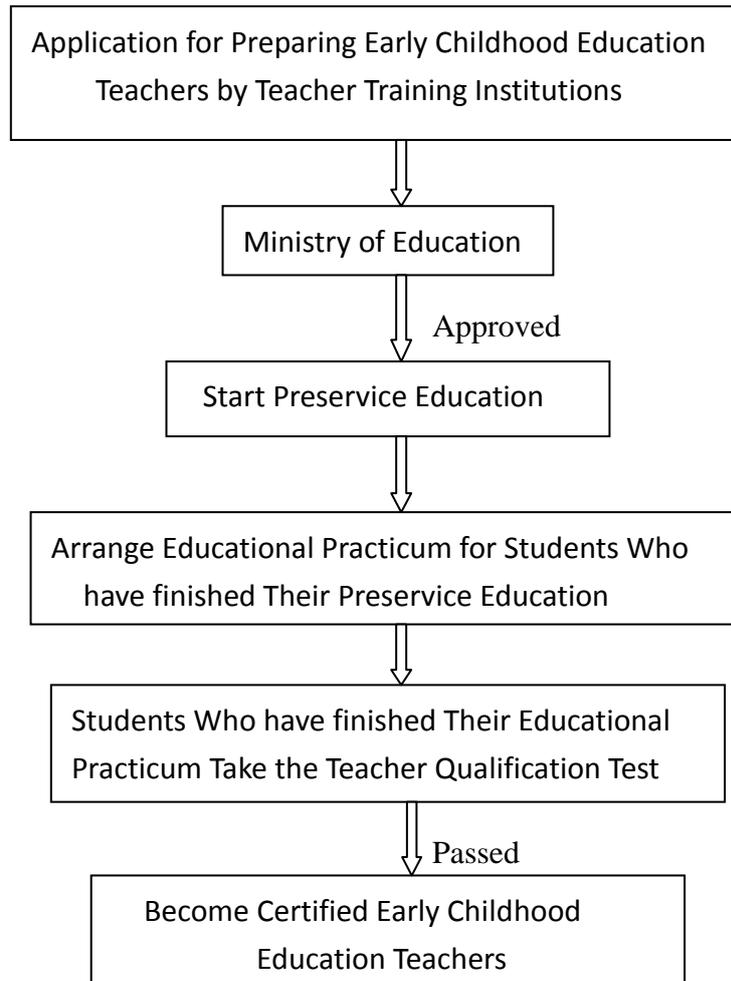
**Education.** According to current requirements, all normal universities, teacher's colleges, and other universities could prepare teachers for early childhood, elementary, high schools, and special education but their teacher preparation proposals must be reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2005).

***The teacher education courses are regulated by the Ministry of Education.*** All accredited teacher preparation institutions must propose their teacher education courses to the Ministry of Education for approval before they start their training programs (Ministry of Education, 2003, 2005).

***Teacher preparation consists of preservice teacher education and teacher qualification test.*** For those who have completed preservice teacher education, they must take the teacher qualification test in order to get certified (Ministry of Education, 2005, 2010).

### **Preparation Pcedures**

Based on the previously presented teacher preparation policies, the training of early childhood education teachers seems to start from preservice education program and terminate at getting certified. From the perspectives of teacher training institutions, the flow chart of preparation procedure for early childhood education teachers could be shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Teacher Preparation Procedure*

From the teacher preparation procedure for early childhood education (Figure 1), the following four critical components seem to be manifested: (1) Application for teacher preparation program; (2) Preservice teacher education; (3) Arranging educational practicum; and (4) Taking the teacher qualification test. The key content of each component will be described as follows.

***Application for teacher preparation program:*** For the purpose of preparing early childhood education teachers, any university must propose its application plan and related data to the Ministry of Education for review. The application plan should include the following information (Ministry of Education, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2011):

1. Target students, method of student screening, and criterion for screening in.
2. Background of the institution: Current colleges, departments, number of teachers and students, faculty/student ratios, the measure of building area, etc.
3. Preservice teacher education curriculum planning: Curriculum planning must include required courses (at least 20 semester credits) and elective courses (at

least 6 semester credits).

4. Educational practicum plan: The schools used for educational practicum must be determined before application.
5. Faculty appointment: At least 5 full-time teacher educators with Ph.D. or associate professorship must be employed for the program. Those teacher educators must have specialities commensurate with their teaching courses.
6. Professional books and journals, instruments and facilities needed must meet the requirements established by the Ministry of Education.

The review process for the application plan consists of two stages as follows:

1. Professional evaluation: Five scholars or experts appointed by the Ministry of Education will evaluate the application plan. Their evaluations may result in one of the following four rating scores: Strongly recommended (5 points), recommended (3 points), unwillingly recommended (1 point), and not recommended (no point).
2. Only those plans with a mean above 3.2 points could be sent to the teacher preparation review commission for final decision.

***Preservice teacher education:*** This is the actual stage of instruction for preservice teacher training. Each university or college would carry out its preservice teacher education program reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education. The following curriculum outline is an example of preservice education for early childhood education teachers developed by Taiwan Shoufu University (2011).

1. Required courses: Take 21 semester credits of the following courses:
  - (1) Basic teaching subject courses: Required 4 semester credits.
    - a. Preschool children's language expression (2)
    - b. Music & eurhythmics for young children (2)
  - (2) Educational foundation courses: Required 5 semester credits.
    - a. Early childhood development and care (3)
    - b. Professional ethics of early childhood educators (2)
  - (3) Educational method courses: Required 4 semester credits.
    - a. Early childhood learning environment design (2)
    - b. Kindergarten curriculum design (2)
  - (4) Teaching materials, methods and practicum courses: Required 8 semester credits.
    - a. Teaching material and methods for kindergarten (4)
    - b. Kindergarten teaching practicum (4)
2. Elective courses: Take 6 semester credits from the following courses:
  - (1) Physical fitness and play for young children (2)
  - (2) Gender education (2)

- (3) Parenting education (2)
- (4) Early childhood behavior guidance & counseling (2)
- (5) Conception of science and math for young children (2)
- (6) Designing and application of teaching materials for early childhood (2)
- (7) Administration and management of programs for early childhood (2)
- (8) Strategy on reading comprehension (2)
- (9) Early childhood social development (2)
- (10) Preschool children's literature (2)
- (11) Early childhood meals and nutrition (2)

Generally speaking, all students, either undergraduates or graduates, could be screened into the preservice teacher education program, if they wish (Ministry of Education, 2005). Although the courses they take from the preservice teacher education program are considered "add-on" to their original study programs, in terms of teacher education, it is a "free-standing" program.

**Arranging educational practicum:** After completing the prescribed coursework of preservice teacher education, students could apply for full-time educational practicum for half a year if they meet one of the following requirements (Ministry of Education, 2011)::

1. They are qualified for graduation from Bachelor program.
2. They are graduate students with a Bachelor's degree and finish all required coursework of their graduate programs.
3. They are college graduates with Bachelor degrees.

All higher education institutions responsible for teacher preparation must establish practicum and career guidance departments for educational practicum and career counseling services (Ministry of Education, 2005). The so-called educational practicum includes teaching practicum, homeroom teacher practicum, administration practicum, and study activities. The teacher preparation universities must develop regulations to implement educational practicum in regard to the following content (Ministry of Education, 2011):

1. The selection principles for practicum supervisors of the teacher preparation institution, educational practicum institutions and their mentor teachers for practicum .
2. The practicum guidance approaches, practicum student number per practicum supervisor, practicum student number per mentor teacher, content of practicum plan, content of educational practicum, items and methods of practicum assessment, and practicum date and time.
3. Amount of teaching time per week, rights, obligations, and contracting in student practicum.

4. The methods to manage the situation that students fail their educational practicum evaluation.
5. Other content related to educational practicum.

In addition, the teacher preparation universities should select appropriate schools and sign contracts with those institutions to provide full-time educational practicum. The educational practicum (must include teaching demonstration) assessments are jointly undertaken, 50% each, by teacher preparation universities and educational practicum institutions (Ministry of Education, 2011).

***Taking the teacher qualification test:*** Those students who finish the preservice teacher education (educational practicum included) will be awarded a certificate of completing teacher preservice education by their teacher preparation universities. Students with a certificate of completing preservice teacher education could take the teacher qualification test. If they pass the test, a teacher certificate will be awarded by the Ministry of Education. To administer the teacher qualification test, the Ministry of Education is responsible to establish the teacher qualification test committee, or commission relevant schools or agencies to carry out this task, if necessary (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The responsibilities of the teacher qualification test committee are to review the test methods, test affairs, test results, and other related matters (Ministry of Education, 2005a). The teacher qualification test is a written examination and is held once a year. Those people with a certificate of completing preservice teacher education in early childhood education could take this teacher qualification test (Ministry of Education, 2010a). The test subjects for early childhood education teachers consist of the following four areas (Ministry of Education, 2010b):

1. Chinese language: composition, reading, phonetics, etc.
2. Educational principles and system: Educational psychology, educational sociology, educational philosophy, educational system, laws, regulations, and policies.
3. Early childhood development and guidance: Early childhood development in physical, language, cognition, social, emotional, personality, and moral areas; early childhood care, education, and guidance.
4. Kindergarten curriculum and instruction: Curriculum theories for early childhood education, curriculum designs, instructional principles and designs, instructional environment planning, and teaching assessment.

In terms of the test results, a perfect score for each of the four subjects is 100. A student who intends to pass the teacher qualification test has to meet the following requirements (Ministry of Education, 2010a):

1. The average score of four subjects must be 60 or above.

2. None of any two subjects all have a score below 50.
3. None of any subject has a score of 0.

All test results have to be reviewed and confirmed by the teacher qualification test committee. The Ministry of Education is in charge of issuing the teacher certificates to those who passed the test.

### **Implications**

From the teacher preparation policies and preparation procedure, the teacher preparation for early childhood education in Taiwan seems to reveal several features. First of all, Taiwanese model for preparing early childhood education teachers is apparently quite centralized since the central government nearly controls all the teacher preparation process starting from identifying which universities can prepare various kinds of teachers to deciding if a teacher can be certified.

Currently, the Ministry of Education has a somewhat sophisticated system of certification, program standards and accreditation which is in place. This process is quite different from the United States which remains to a large extent far more decentralized than in many other nations. In the United States, it is largely the responsibility of the 50 individual states to regulate and control entry, training, testing and licensing requirements for teachers (Ingersoll, 2007). In Japan, its Ministry of Education controls the education system centrally by deciding the curriculum and educational standards as well (Fujita & Dawson, 2007). Taiwanese system seems to have a similar counterpart in Japan. Furthermore, the input from professional organizations to influence the teacher preparation practices is quite apparent in the United States (Council for Exceptional Children, 1995; NAEYC, 1996; Chandler, Cochran, Christensen, Dinnebeil, Gallagher, Lifter, Stayton, & Spino, 2012). In comparison with the United States, the professional organizations in Taiwan seem to be less influential to the policy making of teacher preparation.

Secondly, in terms of preservice teacher education, the Ministry of Education (2003) has some regulations in regard to subjects and credits of educational profession for preservice education of kindergarten teachers to regulate the curriculum arrangements for teacher preparation universities. In comparison with Japan and the United States (Wang, 2003), the flexibility of curriculum development for teacher preparation institutions in Taiwan seems insufficient. On the other hand, students seeking admission to the accredited teacher preparation programs must be already in the undergraduate or graduate programs. This requirement is very similar to Japan and the United States (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990; Wang, 2003; Fujita & Dawson, 2007).

Thirdly, as to educational practicum, the teacher preparation universities in

Taiwan are not only responsible for arranging preservice curriculum and instruction but also managing educational practicum for teacher trainees. It is quite similar to the practices of the United States and Japan. Two countries both usually require completion of a program of practice or student teaching to get certified by preservice teacher preparation universities or colleges (Ingersoll, 2007; Fujita & Dawson, 2007). However, in Germany, the institutions responsible for student teaching are not the original universities which students get their teacher preparation programs. Using an independent institution to be in charge of student teaching might have the potential to provide a more comprehensive and thoughtful practice for practicum. German practice seems to have some implications for Taiwan (Wang, 2003).

Finally, a written teacher qualification test is now applied to all who intend to be certified in Taiwan. In the United States, certification also usually entails passage of written examinations in both pedagogy and content knowledge (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990; Geiger, 2002; Ingersoll, 2007). Compared to the United States, content knowledge is not included in Taiwanese teacher qualification test. However, there is no such teacher qualification examination in Japan but an employed teacher is required to take a wide range of inservice training programs provided by the Ministry of Education, local boards of education and numerous voluntary study associations of teachers (Fujita & Dawson, 2007). To take the teacher examination before certified could also be found in Germany which requires all teacher trainees to take two national teacher qualification tests and strict practicum in order to be certified (Wang, 2003). It is necessary to mention that there is no teacher certification level existing in Taiwan. In other words, early childhood education teachers could only be differentiated between certified and uncertified. In comparison to some other countries like Japan and the United States (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990; Utah State Office of Education, 1993), the teacher certification level system seems to exist. To take Japan as an example, there are three levels of teacher's certificates based on different teacher's qualifications: Advanced certificate, first class certificate and second class certificate. Does Taiwan need a teacher certification level system? It could be a hot topic for policy makers, teacher educators, early childhood education teachers, parents, and the public in the future.

To some extent, preservice preparation practices in early childhood education have been influenced more by policy, legislation, and philosophy than by empirical data (Snyder and McWilliam, 1999). The teacher preparation for early childhood education in Taiwan is no exception. Before the preservice preparation practices could empirically be validated, to suspect of "product reliability" is still warranted reasonable. While a sufficient quantity of early childhood education teachers might be

needed, it is the quality of personnel that would be crucial to program success. Comparative research in early childhood teacher education is scarce. The comparative research that documents the characteristics of effective teacher preparation programs for early childhood education seems important because policymakers and program practitioners need alternative choices between different ways of preparing quality teachers in order to possibly improve the “product reliability.” Taiwanese model of teacher preparation for early childhood education compared with some other countries might have its unique characteristics. Nevertheless, the further investigation of “product reliability” of teacher preparation for early childhood education in Taiwan seems to be needed.

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