

# ***The Status of Career Development in South Korea: Qualifications for Career Professionals***

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## **Introduction**

The population of South Korea is 50,617,045 (World Bank, 2015a). South Korea is in a unique geopolitical situation, faced with North Korea and surrounded by China, Japan, and Russia. During the Korean War (1950-1953), 2.2 million Koreans—including soldiers and civilians—died or went missing (CNN, 2013), and 40% of the South Korean manufacturing industry was destroyed along with numerous roads, railroads, bridges, ports, and industrial facilities (National Archives of Korea, n.d.). In 1962, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of South Korea was about 110 USD, which was the 16<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world. In 2015, the nation's per capita GNI reached 27,450 USD ranking it the 30th highest in the world. It became one of OECD countries in 1996 (OECD, 1996) accelerating its transition from a recipient country to a donor of official development assistance (Marx & Soares, 2013). The role of government in every section of South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has been crucial in its rapid growth in all area of the nation from 1960s to 1980s (Economy of South Korea, 2017) coupled with the diligence of South Korean (hereafter, Korean) people (Numan, 2014).

Career development did not gain attention in Korea until the late 1990s. Most Korean students had little guidance for their future careers because a high-stake test-driven educational culture dominated the country. It is a prevailing belief that entering a highly regarded university will guarantee the success, regardless of one's interests. In order to support individual career development offering career assessments and occupational information, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor launched CareerNet ([www.career.go.kr](http://www.career.go.kr)) through the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) and WorkNet ([www.work.go.kr](http://www.work.go.kr)) in 1999 and 1998, respectively.

In 2000, the Korean government began offering the Vocational Counseling license (see the Credentials section for more information). In 2006, the Korea Employment Information Service (KEIS) was formed to modernize employment support services by collecting and providing employment information, developing and offering career assessments, publishing an occupational dictionary and guides, and supporting and evaluating employment services, and managing WorkNet, among other responsibilities. The role of KEIS has been critical over the last 10 years, advancing employment services throughout the county and managing Worknet effectively by integrating with the National Employment Insurance.

Korea has begun implementing the National Competency Standards (NCS) which resulted from the National Qualifications Framework Act of 2007 (Ahn, 2013). More recently, the Career Education Act (2015) was enacted and came into effect in 2016. The Act defines career education, career counseling, career experience, and career information. Importantly, it mandates that primary and secondary schools must have Career Education Teachers.

### **Career Development by Settings**

#### **Elementary, Middle, and High Schools**

Completing elementary school education and middle school education is compulsory for Korean citizens like many other countries. Elementary school consists of six grades; middle school consists of three grades; and high school consists of three grades (Education in South Korea, 2017). There are about 6,000 elementary schools and 5,500 middle and high schools. Addressing career development in a school setting in an organized manner is a recent phenomenon in Korea. For example, over the three years from 2012 to 2015, the percentages of schools that allocated funds for career education increased from 38.5% to 73.3% (elementary schools), 65.3% to 97% (middle schools), and 73.3% to 97% (high schools). As of 2015, 80.4% of middle schools and 53.8% of high schools are offering a course called *Career and Occupation*, which were 50.8% and 48.3%, respectively in 2012. The percentage of schools that have a dedicated space for career education accounted for 4% for elementary schools, 47% for middle schools, and 45.7% for high schools. (Ministry of Education and KRIVET, 2015).

The Korean government has an aggressive plan to facilitate career development in the K-12 setting. According to the Enforcement Decree of Career Education Act (2015), all elementary, middle, and high schools must have at least one teacher who is dedicated to teach and facilitate career development of students. Figure 1 depicts a planned career education system throughout different levels of education in Korea (Ministry of Education, 2016).

<b>Elementary School</b> (Career Recognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relating career education to existing subjects</li> <li>• Experiences through field trips, speeches, and discussions</li> <li>• Prepare students for a "free semester"</li> </ul>
<b>Middle School</b> (Career Exploration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on career exploration</li> <li>• Relating career education to existing subjects</li> <li>• Provide effective career experience programs</li> <li>• Implement a "free semester"</li> </ul>
<b>High School</b> (Career Planning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education on career and education planning (general high schools)</li> <li>• Career experiences related to college programs of choice (general high schools)</li> <li>• Career and vocational education (specialized high schools)</li> <li>• Internship / field training / supporting employment (specialized high schools)</li> </ul>
<b>University</b> (Career Choice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage universities to adopt career education as a regular class</li> <li>• Provide student-centered one-stop career services</li> <li>• Strengthen internship and field training</li> </ul>

*Figure 1.* Career education system by school level. Adapted from “The 2nd Edition Career Education 5-Year Plan,” by the Ministry of Education (2016).

The Ministry of Education provided revised guidelines to elementary, middle, and high school curricular with two categories: *subjects* and *creative experiential activities* with specifically allocated hours for each subject (Ministry of Education Notice No. 2015-74, 2015). Creative experiential activities, accounting for approximately 10% or more of the total lesson hours, include free, community, voluntary, and career activities. Career activities include self-understanding, career exploration, and career planning among others. The goals for career activities within the creative experiential activities framework are listed in Table 1. (Ministry of Education Notice No. 2015-74, 2015). Activities related to career should be performed in collaboration among the homeroom teacher, subject teacher, club teacher, counseling teacher, and career and guidance teacher with a possibility of collaborating with parents and specialist in the community who have expertise.

Table 1  
Goals for Career Activities

School Level	Goals
Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a positive self-concept</li> <li>• Understand the importance of work</li> <li>• Explore the world of occupations</li> <li>• Develop basic qualities related to career</li> </ul>
Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen positive self-concept</li> <li>• Explore career paths</li> </ul>
High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect one's dream and vision to career and education options</li> <li>• Establish a healthy work ethic</li> <li>• Plan and prepare for career</li> </ul>

**Elementary schools.** Traditionally, homeroom teachers have been responsible for career guidance for elementary school students relating school subjects to career development. At the same time, over the last 10 years, the KRIVET and the Ministry of Education have pilot-tested and distributed guidelines on integrating career education materials into the K-12 curriculum (CareerNet, n.d.). The counselor's role in career and guidance has been nearly non-existent in Korea. As of 2015, only 5.2% of elementary schools (97 out of 5978 elementary schools) have counselors, whose primary mission is to prevent violence at schools, which is far from career guidance and education. However, starting in 2016, senior level teachers have begun to be appointed to be Dedicated Career Teachers [진로전담교사] after completing a 60-hour training program via face-to-face (30 hours) and online (30 hours). They learn about career education policy, the “free semester” at the middle school level, curriculum development and implementation for the career focus semester (year), career assessment and career counseling, and operation of creative experiential activities related to careers (Chungnam Office of Education, 2016). It is not clear how effectively Dedicated Career Teachers work in an elementary school setting considering this is a new initiative combined with the newly revised curricular of 2015. However, it is certain that 60 hours of training is not enough; and repurposing the use of senior level teachers for career-related activities is a short-term solution.

**Middle and high schools.** Having a “free semester” in middle schools is a new practice that has begun in all 3186 middle schools in Korea starting in Fall 2016. During the free semester, students are not given mid-term or final examinations but engaged in career exploration, club activities, art, and physical education for more than 170 hours (Kim, Y. L., 2016). The principal of a middle school decides which of the semesters will be used as a “free semester,” through consultation with teachers and parents. All middle school students need to choose a free semester between their first year and the first semester in the second year. Records for each of the students are kept, not in scores, but descriptions regarding the types of activities involved and the students' potential (Lee, 2016). The Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education decided to extend the free semester by one more semester; therefore, middle school students in Seoul will have year-long free semesters (Kim, Y. L., 2016). However, due to the intense test-oriented culture focused on the national college entrance exam, some parents and the private education industry feel that it is

a good time to dedicate more time to cover contents as students do not take exams (Kim, Y. L., 2016). It is imperative for schools to actively inform all stakeholders about the purpose of the free semester and regulate the private education market, if necessary, while assisting students with systematic career interventions.

Career development of middle and high school students is guided by teachers who have completed Career and Guidance Counseling Teacher [진로진학상담교사] training (Ministry of Education, 2013). In 2011, the Korean government started selecting existing teachers who had been teaching various subjects and provided 570-hour training to be qualified to work as a Career Guidance Counseling Teacher, which is also referred to as Dedicated Career Teacher [진로전담교사]. During the training, they learned about such topics as career assessments, career experiences, career development program development, career portfolios, methods of career and guidance counseling, occupational and world of work information, and teaching careers and occupations (Ministry of Education, 2013). As of December 2015, 95% of middle and high schools have at least one Career and Guidance Counseling Teacher (Ministry of Education and KRIVET (2016). The duties of Dedicated Career Teachers are as follows (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2016):

1. Oversee the school's career education
2. Establish the operation plan for career education and operate the program
3. Teach *Careers and Occupations*, and facilitate career activities that are part of *creative experiential activities* (10 hours or less per week)
4. Provide career counseling related to career and education paths (eight hours or more per week)
5. Plan for and implement career activities that are part of *creative experiential activities*
6. Provide personalized career and education guidance for the school level
7. Facilitate a career planning process of students who will enter college after gaining employment
8. Support for career and learning plans
9. Instruct the development of career portfolios
10. Use psychological assessments related to careers by using such a system as CareerNet
11. Plan for and implement career exploration activities in and out of school
12. Plan for and implement career education training for teachers within the school
13. Provide career education training and consulting for parents
14. Maintain a network with the local community and related organizations through such activities as providing career education
15. Perform other assigned tasks related to career education by the principal

According to the 2015 School Career Education Survey Results (Ministry of Education and KRIVET, 2015), 84.3% of middle school students and 87.7% of high school students took the *Career and Occupation* subject, 78.1% of middle school students and 80.7% of high school students took career assessments. The study also indicated that the percentages of students who responded that they have a career goal increased by 9.9% for elementary schools, 10.2% for middle schools, and 14.8% for high schools comparing 2013 to 2015. In addition, the level of satisfaction

of students with career activities has increased as well by 2.8% (elementary and middle schools) and 4.6% (high schools) comparing 2014 to 2015. Moreover, students are more satisfied with their school life by 4.4% (elementary schools), 6.4% (middle schools), and 7.8% (high schools) comparing 2014 to 2015 (Ministry of Education and KRIVET, 2016).

Despite of the positive results, challenges exist. For many career teachers, the workload is very high, and some are considering early retirement due to mental and physical challenges (Kim, S. I., 2016). It seems to be unrealistic to have only one teacher responsible for career development of all students in a given school. Although there are supporting staff who are retired teachers, volunteers, and parents who assist Dedicated Career Teachers, only 654 supporting staff had been hired as of 2015, accounting for 11.8% of middle and high schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). Due to the limited staff resources, career assessment and career experiential activities are performed in a classroom setting; thus individual attention is scarce (Ministry of Education, 2016). A lack of cooperation from subject teachers is also a bottleneck for integrating career education into all possible subjects. This is especially true in schools that are highly oriented towards college entrance (Kim, S. I., 2016). In addition to these challenges, the competencies of Dedicated Career Teachers vary from one school to another, and there is a limited pool of highly trained career professionals (Ministry of Education, 2016).

To address this skills gap, the Ministry of Education selected 10 graduate schools that will offer a graduate program in career guidance and counseling for current primary and secondary teachers. They are Kunkuk University, Kookmin University, Catholic Kwandong University, Chungnam University, Korea National University of Education, Soonchunhyang University, Kongju University, Inha University, Keimyung University, and Jeonbuk University (Kim, M. J., 2016). Some universities such as Catholic Kwandong University and Konkuk University started recruiting students for the Spring 2017 semester. Students need to complete 30 credit hours (equivalent to 15 courses) to graduate. In the case of Catholic Kwandong University (2016), the following courses are available (\* indicates mandatory courses):

- Principles of Career Education\*
- Theories and Practices of Career Guidance\*
- Career Experiences and Community\*
- Practice of Assessment on Career Traits for Adolescents\*
- Exploration of World of Work and Occupational Information\*
- Development and Management of Career Guidance Program\*
- Career Counseling and Guidance for Parents\*
- Career Guidance for Students with Special Education Needs\*
- Occupational Psychology and Ethics
- Special Topics in Career Counseling
- Exploration of Information for Choosing a School\*
- Case Studies in Career Counseling
- Theories in Career and Occupation Teaching\*
- Methods of Career and Occupation Teaching\*
- Teaching and Learning for Career Teachers\*

Aside from the Dedicated Career Teacher system at middle and high schools, each of all 17 provincial Office of Education has an Employment Assistance Center that aims to help high school students attending vocational high schools gain employment upon graduation. Multiple Job Consultants [취업지원관] funded by the Ministry of Employment and Labor are placed in the centers and they provide employment assistance; manage business/industry relationships; and offer employment training programs for students, parents, and teachers (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, n.d.).

### College/University Students

Compared to primary and secondary settings, the Ministry of Education has little or no influence over career development. There is neither a mandate nor a specific guideline for career education in the higher education setting set by the Career Education Act (2015). Article X IV of the Career Education Act (2015) noted that the head of higher education institutions *can* provide career education, and the Minister of Education *can* provide necessary assistance for career education of higher education institutions.

As of 2016, there are 432 higher education institutions in South Korea, consisting of 189 universities, 138 2- to 3-year colleges, and 46 graduate schools (Korea Educational Statistics Service, 2016). The youth employment rate (ages 15-29) is half that of older generations (ages 30-64); and the youth unemployment rate is three times higher than the older generations (Joint Ministry, 2016). The Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL) has been actively trying to address this youth employment issue. As of 2016, a career/employment centers exists in 140 universities (Joint Ministry, 2016). Among them, 41 are a Career Development Center for the Creative Economy (CDCCE; 대학창조일자리센터), and 24 are a University Youth Employment Center, both of which are directed by the MOEL (Ministry of Strategy and Finance, 2016). There are 15 universities that are not directed by MOEL but receive subsidies from MOEL for hiring Job Consultants [취업지원관] through the Job Consultant Initiative (MOEL, 2017a). The rest of them are operated independently by the institution.

Job Consultants have been the primary providers of career and employment services for the Youth Employment Centers and universities that participate in the Job Consultants Initiative. According to MOEL (2010), Job Consultants are responsible for assisting students with career counseling and career planning, offering employment assistant programs, developing and managing databases for job seekers, assisting job placement, and collaborating with local employment support centers. MOEL first created a pool of 463 Job Consultants (HanKyung Recruit, 2010) in 2010, one or more of the following qualifications need to be met in order to be listed in the pool of Job Consultants (MOEL, 2010):

- Hold the *Vocational Counselor License* with at least one year of relevant work experience
- Hold the *Youth Counselor License* (Level 1 or Level 2) with at least two years of relevant work experience
- Three or more years of experience in Human Resources or Labor Relations in the business/industry setting
- Three or more years of experience at management organizations, labor union organizations, and employment related research institutes

- Three or more years of experience of job placement and provision of occupational information
- Other professionals who are deemed by the head of a local employment support center to have relevant insights and experiences necessary for career and employment assistance

The governmental support for institutions that hire Job Consultants is diminishing. The Youth Employment Centers (YECs), where many Job Consultants are employed, have been transitioning into the CDCCE that aims to offer one-stop career and employment services. For example, in 2015, there were 44 institutions that had YECs, which became 24 a year later due to the transition (Jeon & Ko, 2016). Only six universities will be selected for the Job Consultant Initiative in 2017 (MOEL, 2017b), compared to 15 in 2016. The operation of the University YECs will further diminish to 14 institutions in 2017, utilizing consultants from private employment agencies that have contracted with the institutions (MOEL, 2017b). Instead, the CDCCE will be increased to 60 institutions in 2017 (Ministry of Strategy and Finance, 2016). However, this does not mean that the government will not control the qualifications of professionals working at CDCCEs. According to MOEL (2015), consultants working for CDCCE should meet the qualifications that apply to Job Consultants.

The CDCCE appears to be the future of government supported career centers at the higher education level due to legal support, with a potential name change in the future, as “Creative Economy” is perceived as a trademark of the immediate past President Park Geun-Hye. The establishment and operation of the CDCCE are grounded in Article 6 and Article 12 of the Framework Act on Employment Policy (2015), Article 3 of the Special Act on the Promotion of Youth Employment (2010), Article 25 and Article 26 of the Employment Insurance Act, and Article 35 and Article 36 of the Enforcement Decree of the Employment Insurance Act (MOEL, 2015). According to MOEL (2015), the CDCCE is framed to collaborate with MOEL, local employment centers, the local government, the hosting higher education institution, the Creative Economy Innovation Center, the Korea Employment Information Service (KEIS), and the Human Resource Development Service of Korea. The Korean Government funds 50% of the operation cost, while the hosting institution and the local governments funds 25%, respectively. There are four main areas of the CDCCE initiatives (MOEL, 2015):

- providing career development programs and services through career assessment and encouraging institutions to designate *Career Development* as a mandatory course;
- strengthening employment support services by providing opportunities to develop job search and basic employment competencies;
- developing the internal infrastructure for employment support by utilizing relevant internal entities such as small business development centers and establishing an academic policy that is supportive of student career development; and
- establishing and operating the governance of local youth employment through collaboration with various entities aforementioned.



## Public and Private Employment Service

According to a study conducted by the KRIVET (Ko, Oh, & Lee, 2011), as of 2009, the total number of vocational counselors and employment service workers was 32,000, and among them, 4,800 (14.9%) and 27,600 (85.1%) were working in the public sector and private sector, respectively. As of 2014, there were approximately 25,913 employment service workers in the private sector (Keum, Rho, & Kang, 2016), which is a slight decrease compared to 2009. Of the 2009 data, men accounted for 65.5% of the population; and women accounted for 31.5%. The average age was 41.3. In terms of educational level, 95.6% of workers in the public sector had at least four-year university degrees, while only 65.4% had college or university education in the private sector. The average years of work experience in the career and employment service field was 7.01 years in the public sector and 4.97 years in the private sector. Most of them neither have a degree relevant to career counseling or employment service nor are equipped with the necessary competencies (Ko, Oh, & Lee, 2011).

**Public employment service.** Public employment services began by the Employment Security Act (2015) that was enacted in 1961, and initially, 44 public job security centers [공공직업안정소] were established in different local governments (Kim, Rho, Finn, 2015). According to Yoo (2016), 1,378 public employment service centers exist and they are governed by either the central government or local government as of March 2016. There are 94 centrally governed Employment (& Welfare+) Centers across the nation. A number of ministries have career and employment related centers. The Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL) has 342 centers with different names targeting youth (94), seniors (81), women (149), and people with disability (18); the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has 164 centers addressing the needs of stay-at-home moms (147; in collaboration with MOEL) and female college students (17); the Ministry of Health and Welfare has 440 centers for basic livelihood security recipients (250) for their vocational rehabilitation and for senior employment (190); the Ministry of National Unification has 26 centers providing career and life adjustment services for North Korean Defectors; the Ministry of Justice has 14 centers for inmates and ex-offenders; the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has 7 centers for veterans; the Ministry of National Defense has one center for career transitions of officers and non-commissioned officers into the civilian world. In addition, local governments have 298 employment centers in different regions in Korea (Yoo, 2016).

Career centers in the public sector hire civil officers specialized in career development who have the Vocational Counselor License or hire Vocational Counselor License holders on a contract basis. For example, the New Work Center (147 centers), the Mid-Life Employment Hope Center (28 centers) that are under MOEL require the Vocational Counselor License for career related positions. The Vocational Counselor License (especially, Level 2) has become a required qualification in the public sector.

A significant trend in the public career development service arena in Korea is the enhanced collaboration and integration among different aforementioned centers such as the Employment Center, the New Work Center, the center for veterans, and welfare service centers directed by different ministries. The integration has been taking place through the Employment and Welfare + (EW+) Centers that aim to provide true one-stop services without the need for

users to visit multiple facilities in order to receive different services since 2014. EW+ centers provide three different types of services as follows (Yang & Lee, 2015):

- Employment service: provision of unemployment compensation, career counseling, vocational training, support for stay-at-home moms, and support for foreign workers
- Welfare service: administrative support for different welfare services including intake interviews and integrated case management
- Financial service: administration of the financial support policy, collecting cases for unlawful private financial services, credit recovery, and others

For example, a single mom who has two children can visit the EW+ center and start a process for career counseling and vocational training using a government set program called the Employment Success Package. After a while, she can also participate in family counseling, also receiving services for the development of at-risk children and collecting food stamps at the same center.

Career counselors working at the EW+ center need to have the Vocational Counselor License along with an understanding of the National Basic Living Security Act (2014) because of the EW+ center's emphasis on integration with welfare services. In addition, an understanding of the Employment Insurance Act (2015) and related policies and systems is crucial.

**Private employment service.** As of 2014, there were 12,071 agencies providing placement services (90.8%) and career and occupational information (9.2%), respectively (Keum, Rho, & Kang, 2016). The Korea Employment Information Service (KEIS) started providing an accreditation program for employment agencies that provide superior services while managing the agency effectively in 2008, following Article 4 of the Employment Security Act (2015). However, as of 2016, only 56 out of the 12,071 (0.4%) were awarded the accredited agency status that is currently in effect (KEIS, 2016). According to KEIS (n.d.), the purpose of the accreditation system is to increase the quality of employment services and assist in informed decision-making of job seekers and employers. Although the existence of the accreditation practice is desirable, the low accreditation rate seems to indicate the lack of quality control of 99.6% of private employment service agencies. A more proactive approach to the quality control is warranted.

The Employment Security Act (2015) defines who can provide employment services as follows: "A person who conducts fee-charging job placement services upon completing registration under Article 19 (1) shall hire one or more vocational counselors having qualifications prescribed by Ordinance of the Ministry of Employment and Labor." (Article 22). According to the Enforcement Decree of the Employment Security Act (2014), two or more executives of an employment agency need to meet one of the following requirements (Article 21):

1. A person qualified as a Vocational Counselor of Level 1 or Level 2 under the National Technical Qualifications Act;
2. A person with experience in counseling, for not less than two years, regarding job consultation, job guidance, job training, and other matters related to job placement at a job placement service office, vocational ability development training facilities

under the Act on the Development of Workplace Skills of Workers, schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act, and youth groups under the Framework Act on Juveniles;

3. A person qualified as a certified labor affairs consultant under the provisions of Article 3 of the Certified Public Labor Attorney Act;
4. A person who has been exclusively engaged in union affairs for not less than two years in a unit labor union with one hundred members or more, a labor union of industrial associated organizations, or a labor union or confederation of associated organizations;
5. A person who has been exclusively engaged in labor relations for not less than two years in a business or in a place of business with three hundred full-time workers or more;
6. A person who has worked as a national or a local public official for not less than two years;
7. A person certified as a teacher under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and who has two or more years of teaching experience as a teacher; or
8. A person certified as a qualified social welfare worker under the Social Welfare Services Act.

This broadly applicable qualification criteria indicate qualifications are loosely applied in the private sector (Ko, Oh, & Lee, 2011).

Ko, Oh, & Lee (2011) did a research survey with a sample of 400 private agencies. The results reveal the types of services offered as follows (multiple answers were permitted): job placement (53.75%), career counseling (45.5%), provision of career information (44.5%), group counseling (20.25%), job matching (15%), accompanied interviews (9.5%), training (8.75%), and follow-up (5.50%). Table 2 indicates a) the number of agencies that have employees with different types of credentials and b) the average number of workers who possess each of the credentials within the agencies (Ko, Oh, & Lee, 2011). The most utilized credential was the *Social Worker License* (Level 1-3), accounting for 94.25%, and the *Vocational Counselor License* (Level 1&2), accounting for 85% of the agencies. Considering levels of the licenses, *Vocational Counselor – Level 2* was the most popular one. However, the dominance of *Social Worker License* holders can be problematic from a competency standpoint, unless they possess the *Vocational Counselor License* at the same time.

Table 2

*The Status of Credentials of Employment Service Workers*

Type of credentials	Number of cases (N = 400 agencies)	Average number of workers per agency
Vocational Counselor – Level 1	35 (8.75%)	6.43
Vocational Counselor – Level 2	305 (76.25%)	5.23
Social Worker – Level 1	143 (35.75%)	2.43
Social Worker – Level 2	230 (57.5%)	2.82
Social Worker – Level 3	4 (1%)	1.5
Youth Counselor – Level 1	7 (1.75%)	1
Youth Counselor – Level 2	35 (8.75%)	1.94
Youth Counselor – Level 3	9 (2.25%)	1.89
Career Coach*	54	6.28

*Note.* \*Career Coach is a certification issued by private institutions. All others are licenses awarded by the government.

### **Credentials for Career Services Providers**

#### **Governmental Credentials**

Traditionally, the Vocational Counselor License was the only government issued credential in the field of career development. However, with a transition to employ the National Competency Standards (NCS) nationwide for all potential jobs, at least three relevant jobs that will be regulated with licenses were identified. In this section an overview of the Vocational Counselor license and the NCS-based licenses is provided.

**Vocational Counselor License.** Korea began offering the Vocational Counselor (Level 2) and Senior Vocational Counselor (Level 1) Licenses, by revising the Enforcement Decree of the National Technical Qualifications Act in 1999 (Presidential Decree, 1999). The Level 2 qualification examinations started in 2000. As of 2016, 30,520 individuals have obtained the license with a passing rate of 15.6% taking both written and practical test results into consideration (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2017a). The Level 1 qualification started in 2003, and only 300 individuals have obtained the license with a passing rate of 17% (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2017b).

Holders of the license may work for such agencies as Employment Security Centers, Ministry of Labor Local Labor Office, national employment stabilization centers, and private employment agencies. Qualification exams for both licenses require candidates to pass a written test and a practical examination, respectively. Written examinations have 100 multiple choice questions addressing vocational counseling, occupational psychology, occupational information,

labor market theory, laws and regulations related to labor issues, taking 150 minutes. Practical examinations also take 150 minutes (Human Resource Development Service of Korea, 2017a).

There is no eligibility requirement to take examinations to obtain the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Vocational Counselor License. In order to obtain the Level 1 license, the applicant needs to meet one of the following four criteria (Presidential Decree, 1999):

- Practiced vocational counseling for at least three years after obtaining the Level 2 license;
- Practiced vocational counseling for at least five years;
- Practiced vocational counseling for at least three years after obtaining a bachelor's degree; or
- Practiced vocational counseling for at least four years after obtaining an associate degree.

**NCS-based licenses.** The Framework Act on Qualifications (2013) is a central law in Korea when it comes to credentialing. The Korean government has been extremely active in building the National Competency Standards (NCSs) for the last five years or so. NCS, which is within the National Qualification Framework (NQF), defines necessary competencies required by specific jobs in industry while also identifying eight proficiency levels of each job. NCS-based governmental licenses in different levels are scheduled to be developed selectively considering the demand. As of December 15, 2016, 615 different licenses in different levels in 24 different job categories have been defined following the NCS (National Competency Standards, 2016). NCS-based recruitment and selection have begun involving 130 public institutions in 2015 (Han, 2015). The potential impact of this is significant because the job applicants will be screened based on their job-related competency levels, with lesser emphasis on other elements including GPA, schools graduated, age, gender, etc.

With regard to career services, four licenses are defined within the NCS system: Career Guidance [경력지도] (L5), Career Transition Service [전직지원] (L5), Vocational Counseling [직업상담] (L5), and Job Placement [취업알선] (L4) licenses (National Competency Standards, 2016). Career Guidance, Career Transition Service, and Job Placement licenses are new while the previous Vocational Counseling License will transition to the NCS system in the near future. The implementation of these licenses has not begun yet as of March 2017, but it would be helpful to review the required competencies of each of the licenses to understand what competencies are valued in different spaces of career services (see Tables 3-6). “L” after the name of each license indicates the level of proficiency out of eight levels (1 being lowest; 8 being highest). It appears that the required competencies for levels in high demand are identified first with a possibility that competencies for the other levels will be identified later on.

Table 3

*Required and Optional Competencies for the Career Guidance (L5) License*

<b>License</b>	<b>Required Competencies</b>	<b>Optional Competencies</b>
<b>Career Guidance (L5)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Designing career guidance</li> <li>2. Assessing the competency of individuals</li> <li>3. Assessing the required competencies for occupations</li> <li>4. Developing action plans for career guidance</li> <li>5. Career counseling</li> <li>6. Career coaching</li> <li>7. Leadership development</li> <li>8. Reporting the results of career guidance</li> <li>9. Developing career development policy</li> <li>10. Implementing career development policy</li> <li>11. Conducting job analysis</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Managing career guidance manuals</li> <li>2. Developing training programs</li> <li>3. Evaluating training performance</li> <li>4. Instructing others</li> <li>5. Developing human resource development strategies</li> <li>6. Designing a job classification system</li> <li>7. Adjusting job analysis results</li> <li>8. Utilizing the results of job analysis</li> <li>9. Managing key talents</li> <li>10. Needs assessment for life design</li> <li>11. Providing life design consulting</li> </ol>

Table 4

*Required and Optional Competencies for the Career Transition Service (L5) License*

<b>License</b>	<b>Required Competencies</b>	<b>Optional Competencies</b>
<b>Career Transition Service (L5)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Planning for career transition consulting</li> <li>2. Awareness of transition</li> <li>3. Assessment for career goal setting</li> <li>4. Consulting on career goal setting</li> <li>5. Career transition needs assessment</li> <li>6. Developing competencies for career transition</li> <li>7. Competency development consulting</li> <li>8. Implementing career transition programs</li> <li>9. Evaluating career transition programs</li> <li>10. Follow-up management of career transition services</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-consultation for career transition programs</li> <li>2. Developing adaptability to career transition environments</li> <li>3. Pre-consultation for start-up competencies</li> <li>4. Consulting for start-up support</li> <li>5. Needs assessment for life design</li> <li>6. Preparing for career assessment</li> <li>7. Administering career assessments</li> </ol>

Table 5

*Required and Optional Competencies for the Vocational Counseling (L5) License*

License	Required Competencies	Optional Competencies
<b>Vocational Counseling (L5)</b>	1. Identifying career assessments	1. Assessing problems of career adjustment
	2. Administering career assessments	2. Career adjustment counseling
	3. Understanding and debriefing the results of career assessment	3. Start-up preparation counseling
	4. Analyzing job seeking competencies	4. Support for start-up implementation
	5. Job search counseling	5. Analyzing characteristics of retirees
	6. Assessing the competencies to re-enter the workforce	6. Retirement counseling
	7. Re-entry counseling	7. Analyzing competencies for occupational rehabilitation
	8. Implementing group counseling	8. Occupational rehabilitation counseling
	9. Transition counseling	9. Analyzing career competencies for multicultural individuals
	10. Supporting the transition process	10. Multicultural career counseling
	11. Managing occupational information	11. Analyzing the status of a potential career counseling business
		12. Starting and managing career counseling business
		13. Cyber career counseling
		14. Developing a network of career counselors

Table 6

*Required and Optional Competencies for the Job Placement (L4) License*

License	Required Competencies	Optional Competencies
<b>Job Placement (L4)</b>	1. Planning for matching the needs between recruitment and job search	1. Counseling for vocational training
	2. Attracting recruiters and job seekers	2. Preparing for career assessment
	3. Initial counseling for job seekers	3. Administering career assessments
	4. General counseling for job seekers	4. Planning a job placement business
	5. Initial counseling for recruiters	5. Operating a job placement business
	6. General counseling for recruiters	6. Planning job search competency development training programs
	7. Preparing for job search counseling	7. Implementing job search competency training programs
	8. Providing job search skills clinic	
	9. Preparing for matching between job posts and job seekers	
	10. Follow up management	

Traditionally, applicants for skills-based licenses had to take a written test followed by a practice test. However, the Korean government started to implement an additional option to allow training providers that are accredited by the Ministry of Employment and Labor to manage the first part of the evaluation process. In that option, applicants need to take a training program based on the NCS and take a test given by the training institution following guidelines for each competency. The second part is for the government to administer the test, so called “external evaluation.” Once an applicant successfully passes both parts he/she can be awarded the license. (Human Resources Development Service in Korea, n.d.). This second option has not been applied to any of the career development related licenses yet.

There seems to be a need to reconsider the plan to offer four different licenses before they are implemented. Researchers including Cho (2015) have noted that the classification system of the NCS does not meet the MECE principle—mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. This is evident in the case of career development related licenses as well. The Career Guidance License seems to address the need in the workplace, while the other three licenses do not seem to be context specific. For example, both the Career Transition Service License and the Vocational Counseling License address transition counseling. It seems also plausible that competencies required for L5 of the Job Placement License, which is to be developed, would look very similar to Vocational Counseling and Career Transition Service Licenses.

### Private Credentials

There are a number of certifications offered by private agencies and professional organizations. However, as noted in Ko, Oh, & Lee (2011), the utilization of non-governmental credentials is very low. In Korea, KRIVET has been monitoring the status of certifications by allowing different organizations that offer private certifications to register theirs on Private Credentials Information Service ([www.qui.or.kr](http://www.qui.or.kr)) since 2008. Using the keyword, [상담],



indicating “counseling,” the search revealed 3,579 certifications that have the name counseling in the certifications. With keywords, [진로] and [경력] indicating “career,” 395 and 2 entries were found, respectively. This is a chaotic situation because many offering organizations present a false hope to potential certification seekers while the utilization rate of such certifications is extremely low. Due to these concerns, the Korean Government, along with KRIVET, developed a policy to certify private certifications with an aim to increase the credibility and utilization of them (KRIVET, n.d.). However, no government certified private certifications related to career development was found as of March 2017.

### **Summary & Future Directions**

Korea has made enormous progress with regard to career development in the last 10 years to set the structure of a nation-wide career development system tailored to different settings including K-12, higher education, and employment services in the public and private sectors. Korea has actively benchmarked services, programs, and policies of leading countries in the world and customized them to a Korean context in a creative way. Korea seems to have a good structure thanks to the strong, government-driven approach.

Challenges exist, however. First, the career development industry in Korea has grown exponentially over recent years by number, perhaps not in quality. This probably is a natural process as Korea has been expanding its capacity by, for example, employing Dedicated Career Teachers in most schools, hiring Job Consultants at the higher education level, increasing the number of one-stop career centers, and establishing relevant laws and policies. The improvement of career service quality comes with the development of career professionals. Korea will soon be providing graduate degrees in career development and implement four different career licenses following the NCS to resolve the quality issue. A thorough review of this potential integration needs to be in place before implementing the nationwide licenses. In addition, quality control of the 10 graduate career programs needs to take place in order for career education at the K-12 settings to be successful from a long term perspective.

Second, the role of the government in career development settings needs to be reconsidered to empower private industry. For example, the government has been doing the majority of the work, while not empowering private industry. Dedicated Career Teachers have experienced work overload, as well as public sector career services employees. Also, a shortage of qualified career professionals and increasing administrative tasks dealing with employment insurance, managing the government fund and service and fund recipients have been causes for ineffectiveness (Kim, Rho, Finn, 2016). The government has been monitoring private agencies by allowing them to register their certifications; however, as noted before, there are nearly 400 career-related certifications but none of them is certified by the government, which could indicate the lack of quality of the program and management of the agencies. Also, the fact that only 0.4% of the private employment services agencies are accredited by the government warrants more capacity building in the private sector.

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