

The Teacher License Renewal System in Japan : The Case of Bukkyo University

Hiroko Higashiyama, Ph.D.
Kiyoharu Hara, Ph.D.

[抄 録]

Teacher training is becoming a big changing point. It is said that the government has long pursued a national policy of opening the door for teaching credentials, however, a new system for teacher credential renewal is being fully implemented from this year, requiring individuals who currently hold a teaching license for *Teacher License Renewal* and submit to examination. This new system for teacher license renewal was widely reported by mass-media as a means of removing incompetent teachers from the classroom. Teachers complained about the addition of yet another requirement to their already long list of responsibilities.

In this study, we report teacher reactions to and opinions about the trial *Seminar for Teacher License Renewal* offered at Bukkyo University last year. During the discussion scheduled for later, we hope to hear your opinions about the merits and demerits of this new system for license renewal, and what you consider necessary for future teacher training.

キーワード : teacher training, teaching credential, Teacher License Renewal
a national policy, responsibilities

0. Introduction

Teacher training in Japan is going through a major change. While the government has long pursued a national policy of opening the door to individuals seeking teaching credentials based on its desire to secure high-quality human resources in education, it has become increasingly evident that the traditional approach to teacher training, with its emphasis on theory over practice, fails to adequately prepare aspiring teachers for their role in the educational process. To address this shortcoming, the government has begun to

require that universities augment their teacher training programs with coursework that allows students to develop practical skill in classroom teaching. An example of this is the introduction of a *Practical Seminar for the Teaching Profession* as a compulsory class for students beginning with the next fiscal year.

In addition, after a one-year trial period, a new system for teacher credential renewal is being fully implemented from this year, requiring individuals who currently hold a teaching license to attend a 30-hour *Seminar for Teacher License Renewal* and submit to reexamination once every 10 years.

This new system for teacher license renewal was widely reported by mass-media as a means of removing incompetent teachers from the classroom. Teachers complained about the addition of yet another requirement to their already long list of responsibilities.

In this study, we report teacher reactions to and opinions about the trial *Seminar for Teacher License Renewal* offered at Bukkyo University last year. During the discussion scheduled for later, we hope to hear your opinions about the merits and demerits of this new system for license renewal, and what you consider necessary for future teacher training.

1-1. Background of the System for Teacher License Renewal in Japan

Discussion on the new system for teacher license renewal in Japan began with the *Proposal for Teacher Training and Licensing* announced by the Research Commission on the Education System, Liberal Democratic Party of Japan in 1983. This proposal called for discussion on setting limits to teacher license validity and making license renewal seminars compulsory. The new system for teacher license renewal developed by way of a proposal for reform submitted by the Education Rebuilding Council under then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in response to growing concern from around 2000 about declining academic standards and issues relating to teacher quality. The Educational Personnel Certification Law was revised in June 2007, and the system for teacher license renewal started in April 2009.

1-2. Merits and Demerits of the New System for Teacher License Renewal

The new system for teacher license renewal promotes the improvement of ability by

periodically requiring professionals to become familiar with new teaching techniques and information. The opinion has also been expressed that this new system is necessary to eliminate incompetent teachers and maintain quality at a certain level. On the other hand, this new system has the potential of causing an increase in educational expense and a reduction in the quality of educational services. Thirty hours is a significant commitment, and certainly such time away from school means less time for preparation, administrative duties, student counseling, and discussion with parents, etc. It has also been pointed out that there is the potential for this new system to be used as a tool to eliminate teachers whose thinking may conflict with school administrators or other education officials.

2. Seminars for Teacher License Renewal at Bukkyo University

Bukkyo University has a student population of 6,500 students enrolled in full-time and 24,000 students enrolled in distance education programs, which means a significant teaching load for university faculty. Establishing a Seminar for Teacher License Renewal would create an excessive amount of work for those involved, and administration of the program would have to be absorbed into the existing organization of the university. Taking these factors into consideration, Bukkyo University focused on the following two points in the trial seminar.

1. The efficient creation and management of participant data
2. Delivering a high level of quality while minimizing the burden on faculty and participants.

In order to achieve these goals, we established the Bukkyo University Teachers' License Renewal Center (BTReC), which maintains overall control of the program. We designed a program with a capacity for 150 students that offers a selection of nine 6-hour courses from which students choose 18-hour preference field blocks. (Hereinafter, we refer the overall teacher license renewal system at Bukkyo University including the System for Teacher License Renewal System as BTReC.)

2-1. Creation and Management of Participants' Data

Considering the cycle of seminar participants, we determined that it would be inefficient to create and manage data in the same manner that we do for students enrolled at the university. We thought the Internet might provide a practical solution and looked into the possibilities that it had to offer. Taking a hint from Internet sales, we decided

to set up a system that allowed participants to reserve seminar classes online. The participant accesses the seminar website and places the desired classes into a shopping cart. The participant then enters the required information on the site's reservation page. A reservation number is then automatically sent to the participant. The participant downloads the application forms, fills in the required information and the reservation number, and sends the completed application form to BTReC by mail. Upon completion of Internet reservation process and submission of the application by mail, the reservation is accepted. Registration availability for each class is based on the concept of inventory management. The capacity for the seminar we developed is 150 participants. As participants register, number is counted down from 150 in the inventory. When the number in the inventory reaches zero (0), the seminar seats sold out. In other words, the class is booked, and the class is deleted from the list of the products on the website.

The above procedure is a brief outline of flow of the system. As we will describe later in the section on class patterns, we created an exclusive system which allows the online submission and correction of reports. Furthermore, administrative notices are sent through e-mail or posted on the official website.

This method has a number of advantages. Data does not need to be manually created; the database for each class can be easily managed ; and it reduces the inequality seen in mail-only registration, where applications are customarily accepted in the order of arrival, creating a disadvantage for individuals who live farther away from the seminar site. However, the most important benefit is that it encourages greater use of the Internet among individuals involved in education, which works to improve the ability of educators to use this outstanding tool. We have already heard that some participants actually established networks at their workplaces. The drawback of this method is that the individuals who do not have Internet access cannot apply for classes.

Results show that the overall attitude about Internet usage is good, with all participants indicating that the system is convenient. However, it is perhaps natural for participants to provide a positive response based on the very fact that they were already Internet users prior to registering for the seminar. We feel it is logical to assume that there were individuals who wished to register for the seminar but who could not due to their inability to use computers or the Internet, and that any such individuals would consider an online

registration system to be inconvenient.

We know that it is likely to cause criticism, but it is probably an unavoidable reality that we cannot meet everyone's needs. Put in such terms, we must admit that Bukkyo University has made the decision to cut out individuals who cannot use the Internet.

2-2. Class Patterns

We designed three class patterns as shown below :

1. S (= schooling) : Face-to-face class sessions,
2. STS (= schooling/ text/ schooling) : Combination of face-to-face class sessions and correspondence education, and
3. T (= text) : Correspondence education.

We set class capacity at 150 participants and grouped participants without regard to school type or years worked. In the below sections, we will describe each class pattern.

2-2-1. Face-To-Face Class Sessions (S)

Face-to-face class sessions (S) comprised three subjects. For each subject, we provided a six-hour block of instruction covered in one day with a qualification test given at the end of the class. Requirements for completion were attending the six-hour class and passing the qualification test. At the 20-minute orientation provided at the beginning of each six-hour class, we collected attendance cards, checked the participants, introduced the instructors, and explained the subjects to be covered and the requirements for completion. We set the capacity at 150 participants for each subject, making a total of 450 participants for the three subjects, and received 450 applications. However, the actual number of participants was 347 or 77.1% of the total capacity, and the number of certificates of completion issued was 347. In regard to the 103 applicants who did not attend classes, a larger number of applicants failed to give notice that they would be absent than those who informed us of their absence in advance.

The ratio of actual attendance to the number of certificates of completion issued suggests that a merit of this class pattern is that participants can complete the six-hour class for one subject in one day as long as they can assure attendance on that day. However, participants mentioned that it was hard to concentrate for six hours because of monotonousness, instructors suffered from significant fatigue, and it is doubtful that a one-

day cram session would have a significant effect.

2-2-2. Combination of Face-To-Face Class Sessions and Correspondence Education (STS)

Combination of face-to-face class sessions and correspondence education (STS) included four subjects and consisted of a two-hour face-to-face class session, two-hour report creation, and a second two-hour face-to-face class session, divided into two separate days. At the end of the class session on the first day, the report was assigned. Participants completed the approximately 1,600 Japanese character (equivalent to approx. 800 English words) assignment at home and submitted it online. The submitted reports were discussed and the qualification test was given on the second day. Internet account information and passwords for online submission of the report were provided to each participant on the first day. Each participant received copies of the submitted reports after identifying information was concealed or removed. Requirements for completion were to attendance on both days, submission of the report, and a passing mark on the qualification test. We set the capacity for each subject at 150 participants, making a total capacity of 600 participants for the four subjects, and received 526 applications. The actual number of participants of the first day class was 422 or 80.2% of the total capacity, and 413 participants submitted reports. Computer problems, late submission and drop out accounted for the nine papers that were not submitted. Second-day participation totaled 413, and the number of certificates of completion issued was also 413. In regard to 104 applicants who did not attend classes, a larger number of applicants failed to give notice that they would be absent than those who informed us of their absence in advance.

The advantages of this pattern were that each of the two class sessions was only two hours, which meant that participants did not need to schedule a whole day ; the content varied during the day so that participants could concentrate better ; home study, while it involved a degree of inconvenience, could produce the expected learning effect ; the report could be written at home and submitted easily ; lecturers could correct reports anywhere an Internet environment was available ; and participants had access one another's reports because they were delivered to all participants. On the other hand, participants had to use two days and time for study at home to complete the six-hour session, which gave them the impression that the class took too much time. Participants pointed out the need for relief measures in the event they are unable to submit the report to avoid the need to drop out. Most responses expressed concern about the seemingly longer period of

participation in classes.

2-2-3. Correspondence Education (T)

Correspondence Education (T) consisted of two subjects. Upon receipt of reservation via the Internet and application by mail, we provided account information and passwords for each applicant. Participants studied at home according to the assignment and submitted reports (about 1,600 Japanese characters or 800 English words) via the Internet to be corrected by the instructors. Instructors can correct reports anywhere an Internet environment is available. After checking the material and study points on the Internet, participants completed their assignments and submitted reports in accordance with the directions provided by the instructors. Participants who submitted reports were eligible to take the qualification test offered in Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, Matsuyama, and Fukuoka. Requirements for completion were submission of the report and passing the qualification test. We set the capacity for each subject at 150 participants, making a total of 300 participants for two subjects, and received 170 applications. One of the reasons that the number of applications was lower than the number for other class patterns was the shorted application period. Eighty-nine participants submitted the reports and 89 participants took the qualification test. The number of issued certificates for the completion and the actual number of participants were equal at 89. A breakdown of the number of participants who took the qualification test at each venue shows 8 participants in Sapporo, 12 in Tokyo, 19 in Nagoya, 45 in Kyoto, 3 in Matsuyama, and 2 in Fukuoka. In regard to the 81 applicants who did not complete the seminar, a larger number of applicants failed to give notice that they were withdrawing than those who informed us of their withdrawal in advance.

The advantages of this pattern are that participants living far from the venue are able to take classes, needing to travel only to take the qualification test. On the other hand, lecturers can't see participants so that it is hard to fully communicate the content and intention of the subjects. Participants applied thinking that it would be easier because it was a correspondence education program ; however, they found out it was difficult to study alone at home, which resulted in their dropping out along the way, a phenomenon that is often seen in correspondence education programs. It is also difficult for the administrator of the classes (the university) to create a year-round schedule due to difficulty in securing testing venues. In the case of Bukkyo University, we used the

same venues for the qualification test and unit tests for the correspondence education program and scheduled the exams on the same day ; therefore, which, we believe, made it possible to secure the venues without problems. However, the most important problem to be solved in the correspondence education program is that instructors cannot see participants. We consider it inappropriate to offer any correspondence education programs until we can properly address this issue.

2-2-4. Reference for Future Improvement

Results of the survey of three above-mentioned class patterns conducted by Bukkyo University are shown in the below table.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
If an evening program (Mon.-Thu./ 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM) were offered during the regular school term, would you be interested in participating?	100	118	276	343	12	849
If Saturday or Sunday Programs were offered during the regular school term, would you be interested in participating?	289	251	172	131	6	849
Which class pattern would you prefer (S/ STS/ T) ?	S 503	STS 365	T 96		25	989

In regard to the evening program, the percentage of respondents indicating a strong interest in participating was low at 11.8 % ; however, some respondents living inside the city reported being eager to participate in the evening program. In regard to the Saturday or Sunday programs, the percentage of respondents indicating a strong interest in participating was high at 34%. We consider these results helpful hints for preparing more convenient and popular programs in general. In regard to the S, STS, and T patterns, the percentage of respondents indicating a preference for the T pattern was low at 9.7%, which means too much work for instructors to manage this pattern. In fact, the workload was heavy and it was hard for instructors to understand what the participants were thinking and how they felt about the classes because they had no face-to-face contact.

3. Future Problems and Solutions

The problems for BTReC that have been clarified by the above discussion are that as a university already offering both resident and correspondence education programs, teachers are required to take on an excessive amount of work and it is unreasonable to consider the extra work as falling within the duties of instructor's university position. We also find it difficult to locate individuals interested in becoming involved in the program. In light of this, the only solution is, we think, to review compensation for teaching the seminar. In other words, offering more attractive pay to motivate instructors is the only way to implement this system.

Seminar participants are not regular students ; therefore, we should create a section to handle administration. For the trial seminar this year, we prepared separate telephone line for them because we needed to separate it from our regular telephone lines. For regular phone lines, we usually ask whether the person on the phone is in a resident program or correspondence program and for the caller's student ID. In order to reduce confusion in responding to the needs of each student at the university and participants in the seminars, we prepared one telephone line exclusively for seminar participants. In addition, one staff member was given responsibility for handling e-mail inquiries from seminar participants to assure consistent responses.

Another problem to consider is that seminar participants are also teachers. They usually return home at 8 : 00 PM, and then start sending e-mails. The person handling e-mail inquiries is also a university teacher and responding to each e-mail would keep him/her busy past midnight. And the number of e-mails is usually higher on Saturdays and Sundays. Overtime can easily exceed 100 hours a month. This, in addition to his other university duties, means no rest. This is one of the reasons that we think it is necessary to create a section to handle seminar participants.

Now, let's move on to matters related to seminar contents. We feel that there is a need to prepare at least three types of seminar content ; one that deals with solutions to problems that educators face, one that promotes liberal education, and one that provides specialized subjects. As you already know, school teachers are classified as

specialized public workers and face unique problems. On the other hand, what we teach at universities is theoretical. There is a big gap between these two realities and the challenge we face is to narrow that gap in the most effective way possible. Evaluation of participants is also a difficult issue. The degradation of teacher quality lies behind the implementation of the new system for teacher license renewal. However, the evaluation of participants in the seminars changes according to the way in which the degradation of teacher quality is defined. If you evaluate participants as adult members of society, then the ability write, to use the Internet, or call to let someone know you'll be absent or late become important indicators. If you evaluate participants as teachers, then being able to do function without a manual and work effectively with a wide range of personalities become important.

It also came as a fresh reminder that the seminars were in fact to be provided by universities. I remembered someone saying that violence and bullying have shifted from the real world to the Internet. We should learn such new information at universities. The fact is that universities are equipped to collect, analyze, and present the latest information from both home and abroad. If the deterioration of teacher quality means a deterioration of academic ability, then this may be extremely effective in providing the most recent and significant theories in seminars. However, pedagogy is different from education. In order to implement seminars, it is necessary for us to firmly consider what teachers require and what is required for improvement ; otherwise, we will merely succeed in creating unnecessary conflicts between universities and seminar participants.

Furthermore, there are some facts must be considered fully before making seminars available. Based on the trial seminars conducted this year, it is clear that simple motivation to provide seminars, no matter how strong, cannot be allowed to overshadow careful planning and adequate preparation. Participants tended to approach the seminars with negative rather than positive attitudes, and it is not too much to say that they were, more often than not, focused merely on getting through the 30 hours as painlessly as possible. In addition, the university was focused more on how many people would participate in the seminars and how to handle them.

BTReC considers it necessary for participants to approach the seminars with the desire and intention to learn and improve rather than merely showing up and doing their time ; and the instructors must shift their motivation from simply handling participants

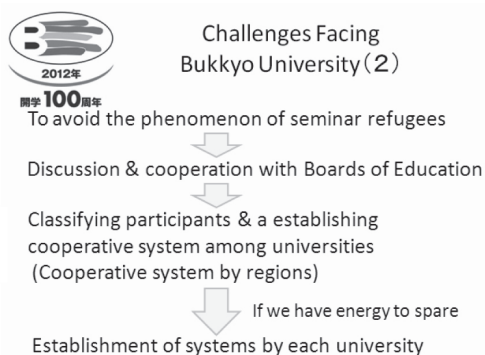
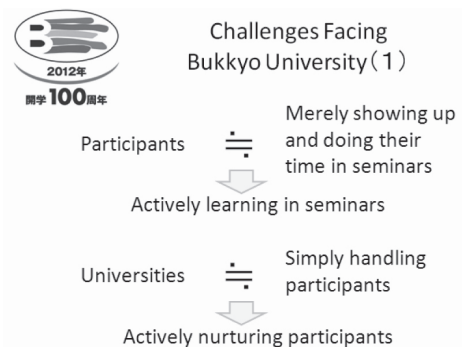
to actively nurturing them ; otherwise, seminars for teacher license renewal lose their meaning.

There is also a need to give greater consideration to seminar dates and schedules. The university needs to provide convenient dates and schedules for participants living near the university by offering seminars on Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, and evenings during the regular school term, and during spring, summer, and winter holidays

for participants living farther away from the university. Beyond this, we felt that implementation of the seminars proved to be a greater burden to the university than the participants, and that even if we offer more frequent seminars, the number of participants is not going to be less. Also, as already pointed out, the content of the subjects needs to be considered, and there are also operational limitations. For participant data management, it is necessary to set up a system such as we examined in the trail seminar. Bukkyo University is currently considering BTReC improvements to create a model system that will contribute to the full implementation of an effective seminar system.

In order to prevent so-called seminar refugees, we held a number of discussions with Boards of Education and other universities. We feel that universities in Kyoto can provide standard content for license renewal for teachers living in Kyoto prefecture in cooperation with one another while also offering unique content designed to serve teachers in other

regions. When we talked with staff from the Hokkaido Board of Education, we learned that they will take the initiative in classifying participants. We believe that a cooperative system should be created that allows universities to meet the needs of the participants in their individual regions. On this basis, if we have energy to spare, each university should

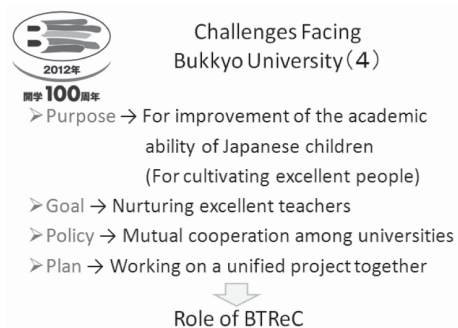
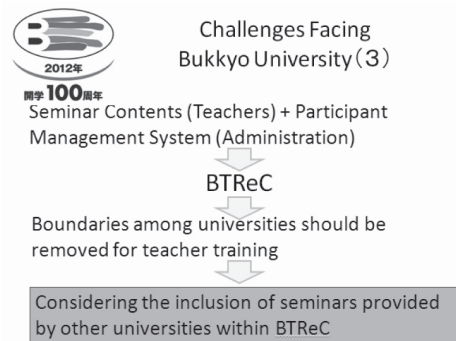


discuss and determine original ways to establish their seminars. In any case, if each prefecture can establish seminars for participants in their individual regions, we believe the phenomenon of “seminar refugees” can be avoided. Then, additional seminars should be provided for those who would like to study more. This may sound like an idealistic argument, but BTReC believes that this is the best way to handle this. We also believe that Kyoto, a city of universities, should be a model for such a system.

A new era of open admissions for universities has arrived, and universities will be competing to survive as a result. However, we believe that it makes more sense to cooperate mutually rather than compete for teacher training. When we consider the deterioration of academic achievement of Japanese children nationally, it is meaningless to

have just one university working to improve teachers. In order to reach the same goal in relation to teacher training, each university is required to offer its specialized knowledge in the cooperative development of this important project. By walking through the new system, we were able to identify the features essential for success, from the submission of applications to the issuance of certificates of completion, and we are confident that we will be able to improve the system to make it more effective. We are also considering enhancement of BTReC to manage the database not only for Bukkyo University but all other universities as well in an integrated fashion.

This trial seminar helped us to recognize once again that, in order to improve the academic achievement of Japanese children, all universities and educational institutions involved in school education are required to cooperate together in carrying out teacher training beyond the boundaries of these organizations. We will strive to contribute



to the establishment of a teacher training program that is appropriate for Kyoto, a city of universities, with a positive attitude. We also believe that it is our mission to establish a unified system in cooperation with all universities to nurture excellent teachers for the improvement of the academic ability of Japanese children. We continue seeking the potential of BTReC as a tool to accomplish that mission.

(ひがしやま ひろこ 臨床心理学科)

(はら きよはる 教育学科)

2009年10月13日受理

