

# Doctoral Nursing Education in South Korea

Hyeoun-Ae Park, PhD, RN, FAAN\*, Ok Soo Kim, PhD, RN \*\*,  
Myung Kyung Lee, PhD, RN \*\*\*

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## Introduction

History of nursing education in Korea goes back to 1903 when Pogunygwan (the first woman's hospital) Nurses' Training School began to train nurses<sup>1</sup>. Modern Western medicine was introduced for the first time in Korea around this time. In 1953, following the Korean War, a Technical High School was opened to train nurses with aid from the United States. Two years later the first four-year college for nursing education was introduced in 1955. As of 2010, there are 102 four-year colleges admitting 6108 students and 71 three-year junior colleges admitting 8075 students per year. First master's nursing program was introduced in 1960. As of 2010, there are 74 master's programs admitting 970 students annually<sup>2</sup>.

The first nursing doctoral education was introduced in 1978 in Korea. This was the first such program in Asia. The number of nursing doctoral programs in Korea increased exponentially, numbering three in 1990 to 11 in 2000, and 32 in 2010. These 32 doctoral programs admit 222 doctoral students annually<sup>3</sup>. Korea had the fourth highest number of nursing doctoral programs in the world following the US, United Kingdom, and Japan<sup>4</sup>. This rapid increase in the number of doctoral programs in recent years has raised concerns about the quality of doctoral nursing education.

There have been a few studies on evaluating nursing doctoral programs in Korea. Park et al.<sup>5</sup> analyzed 15 nursing doctoral programs in Korea using mail survey and phone survey in 2001. Kim et al.<sup>6</sup> used a qualitative research design to explore the strengths and weaknesses of nursing doctoral education in Korea using four focus groups composed of deans, faculty, graduates and students of 14 universities in 2007. Kim et al.<sup>7</sup> evaluated the quality of nursing doctoral education in terms of program, faculty, resources and having a plan in place for evaluation. They surveyed seven deans, 47 faculty, 52 graduates and 87 students from 14 nursing schools participated in their first study using online questionnaire starting in 2007. While there have been many changes in nursing education in Korea since these studies, a few findings are noteworthy from the latest reference<sup>7</sup>. Administratively, doctoral programs in private universities were perceived to have significantly higher quality than those in public and national universities. Institutions, where the ratio of doctoral to non-doctoral students was greater, were shown to have higher quality. The program domain was deemed to be most important; some areas of the resource domain were identified as being problematic. Finally, the faculty's perception of quality in the above three domains were more positive than those of students and graduates.

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Corresponding Author: Hyeoun-Ae Park, College of Nursing, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea, e-mail: hapark@snu.ac.kr

\* Dean and Professor, College of Nursing, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea

\*\* Division of Nursing, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Korea

\*\*\* Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, Dong-A University, Busan, Korea

## Aims

This study aimed to describe broad picture of doctoral nursing education in Korea with statistical data such as number of doctoral programs in nursing, number of students enrolled, and size of faculty and curriculums of doctoral nursing education such as number of credits for graduation, areas of nursing focus offered; describe national or regional networks as support systems of doctoral nursing programs in Korea and how such networks are used or impact doctoral education; describe types of collaboration in place with institutions in other countries, what their focus are, and the extent to which faculty and/or doctoral student exchanges occur; describe marketplace for doctorally prepared nurses in Korea; describe challenges facing doctoral nursing education in Korea; and describe future directions of doctoral nursing education in Korea.

## Methods

**Design.** A survey research design was used to describe nursing doctoral programs in Korea.

**Sample.** There are 32 schools offering nursing doctoral education in Korea. However, only 20 schools out of 32 produced at least one doctorally prepared graduate by 2010. We chose these 20 schools having at least one doctorally prepared graduate for this study.

**Measures.** A questionnaire with items on number of enrolled students, number of graduates, number of faculty, curriculum, requirements to graduate, areas of nursing focus, and career paths was used to collect data.

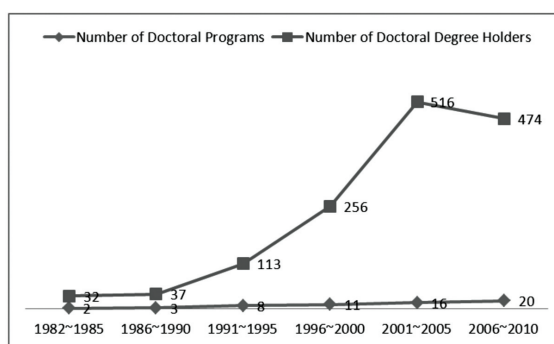
**Data Collection.** Investigators collected data using e-mail and electronic surveys augmented by telephone surveys using the questionnaire developed; data were collected between from July 1 and August 15, 2012. First we collected basic information on curriculum by reviewing and analyzing the websites of the study schools. If there is any information not available on the websites or need any clarification, we used email and telephone to collect additional data

**Analyses.** Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and relative frequency were used to summarize and describe the data.

## Results

Basic statistics of doctoral programs in Korea. There are 20 schools producing at least one graduate with doctoral degree out of 32 schools offering nursing doctoral programs in Korea as of 2012. The number of doctorally prepared nurses increased from 1 in 1982 to 1428 in 2010. According to figure 1, the number of doctorally prepared nurses increased three times from the second half of the 80s to the first half of the 90s, two times from the first half of 90s to the second half of 90s and again two times from the second half of 90s to first half of 2000s. In the 2000s annually about 100 nurses received doctoral degrees<sup>8</sup>.

The number of full time faculty per school ranged from 7 to 34, with the average number of full time faculty 7. The number of baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral students whom these faculties are responsible to teach ranged from 203 to 440<sup>6</sup>. All of these faculty members are doctorally prepared and are on the tenure track.



**Figure 1.** Number of doctoral programs and doctoral degree holders from 1982 to 2010 in Korea (Source: Korean Council of University Education, 2011)

### Curriculum analysis of doctoral programs.

According to the curriculum of the 20 schools surveyed, all of the doctoral programs are research-focused. Minimum 30 to 42 credits are required for a doctoral student to earn a doctoral degree in Nursing. Three quarters of nursing doctoral programs in Korea require minimum 36 credits of coursework in order to receive a doctoral degree. Recommended courses vary from school to school. However, they can be categorized into five groups: (1) required courses in doctoral programs; (2) elective courses common to both masters and doctoral programs; (3) elective courses in doctoral programs; (4) required courses in a specific area of concentration in nursing; and (5) elective courses in non-nursing programs.

Most of the schools except one school required students to take specific courses as part of doctoral program. These required courses include a nursing theory course such as nursing theory development, nursing theory analysis, and nursing theory synthesis, and a nursing research methodology course. In addition to coursework, nine schools include dissertation seminars as a required coursework with credits ranging from one to nine. Table 1 provides a summary of program requirements. Research experiences are strongly recommended so students can receive mentorship from senior faculty on research skills, developing a program of research, managing major projects, skills in collaboration, and the like.

**Table 1.** Doctoral degree requirements in nursing curricula of “general graduate programs”

Category	Number of credits	Number of doctoral programs
A. Number of credits required for nursing doctoral programs	30-35	4
	36	15
	42	1
B. Distribution of courses and credits by categories*		
Doctoral requisites /Doctoral electives	9-36/6-27	4
Doctoral requisites /Common electives /Subspecialty requisite	6-9/6-22/6-15	4
Doctoral requisites /Common electives and Doctoral electives	6-18/18-30	5
Doctoral requisites /Common electives	12-19/11-24	4
Doctoral requisites /Subspecialty requisite	6/27	1
Doctoral requisites/Doctoral electives /Other electives	12/12/12	1
Common electives and Doctoral electives	36	1
C. Number of credits for required courses	0	1
	6-19	18
	36	1
D. Number of credits for dissertation seminars	0	11
	1	1
	3-6	8

Note. \*Distribution of course credits- Doctoral requisite: required courses in doctoral programs; Doctoral electives: elective courses in doctoral programs; Common electives: elective courses common to both master's and doctoral programs; Other electives: elective courses in non-nursing fields; Subspecialty requisite: required courses in a specific area of concentration in nursing

**Areas of concentration in nursing.** All nursing doctoral programs in Korea allow doctoral students to pursue a specific area of concentration in nursing. Most of schools offer six subspecialties as a specific focus area in nursing. They are adult health nursing, child health nursing (including family health nursing), maternity nursing (including women's health nursing), mental health nursing, community

health nursing, and nursing management (including nursing administration and nursing policy). About half of the schools offer gerontological nursing and fundamental nursing as a subspecialty. However there are a few schools offering basic nursing science and nursing informatics as one of their subspecialties in nursing.

**Table 2.** Special areas of study in the doctoral nursing degree programs

Specific areas of study	Number of doctoral program
Nursing Administration and Management, Nursing Policy	18
Fundamental Nursing	14
Basic Nursing Sciences	7
Maternity Nursing and Women's Health Nursing	17
Child Health Nursing, Child Family Health Nursing, Family Health Nursing, Parent-Child Health Nursing	20
Adult Health Nursing	18
Gerontological Nursing	10
Mental Health Nursing	16
Community Health Nursing, Community-Occupational Health Nursing, Chronic and Home Health Nursing	19
Nursing Informatics	2

### **Collaboration with Domestic and Foreign Institutions**

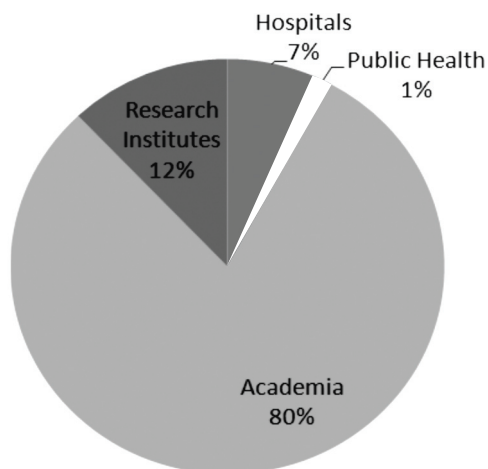
Most of doctoral programs have some forms of exchange and collaboration programs with doctoral programs in other colleges in Korea as well as in other countries. Domestically, all of nursing doctoral programs are part of inter-institutional study program with credit transfer. The credit transfer system among Korean universities is a relatively new system introduced in Korea. With this credit transfer system nursing schools allow students to take courses at other schools and recognize the credits students earned at other schools.

Internationally nursing doctoral programs have various exchange programs for students and faculty members. They range from a short term study tour, long-term training programs, internship program, and credit exchange program for students; and scholar exchange programs and research collaboration for faculty

members. Most of these international exchange and collaboration activities are with the colleges located in the United States following Australia and other countries in Asia such as China, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

### **Career Paths of PhD-Prepared Nurses**

PhD prepared nurses in Korea work in various fields. According to 2006 survey by the Korean Nurses Association, about 80% of the PhD-prepared nurses in Korea enter academic teaching positions at research-focused institutions, combining teaching and research. About 12 % of them enter research positions and about 7% enter clinical positions, combining clinical leadership and research<sup>8</sup>. They join the ranks of the leaders of their professions and participate in national and international efforts to improve the health care system and set standards for research and practice.



**Figure 2.** Field of service for doctorally prepared nurses in Korea

### Challenges

Nursing doctoral programs in Korea face many challenges. A first short term challenge is insufficient number of faculty. Number of nursing doctoral programs has increased almost three times from 10 programs to 32 in last 10 years. However, most of newly established doctoral programs did not prepare their faculty members before they open doctoral programs nor did they recruit qualified faculty members to teach incoming doctoral students. As noted in Kim et al.'s study, aging of nursing faculty in Korea makes this problem worse<sup>6</sup>.

A long term challenge associated with rapid growth of doctoral nursing programs in Korea is overproduction of PhD prepared nurses with low quality. Due to rapid increase of doctoral programs initiated during the last decade, the applicant pool may not be as academically strong as before. These newly opened doctoral programs will begin to produce 200 PhDs annually in a few years based on current number of annual admissions to doctoral nursing programs. This is over twice the current annual PhD production. With limited career paths available for doctorally prepared nurses in Korea where about 80% of PhD prepared nurses in Korea work in academic institutions as a teachers and

researchers, this will cause confusion in the job market.

A third challenge is lack of full-time students. Most of students admitted to doctoral nursing programs in Korea study part-time and work full time. This phenomenon leads to two problems. First, students miss an opportunity to participate in faculty research and learn how research is being conducted in the academic setting. Second, faculty members do not have enough students who could serve as research assistants. This challenge is more problematic from the faculty perspective, since faculty members in Korea shift their efforts from teaching to research as Korean universities are beginning to introduce an outcome-based performance evaluation system for faculty promotion and compensation.

Another challenge is fluency in the English language, both for faculty and students. Korean universities ask faculty members to offer classes in English as a way of improving English language proficiency of Korean students and as part of globalization to recruit foreign students. Also offering courses in English is one of college evaluation criteria in Korea. Also, faculty and doctoral students need to have fluency in English to teach and study the nursing literature developed mostly in the United States, and to publish articles in English.

### Future Directions

Nursing doctoral programs in Korea increased dramatically without taking into consideration the demand for doctorally prepared nurses, or the ability of the market to absorb PhD graduates into the marketplace. In addition, currently there are no accreditation bodies to evaluate nursing doctoral programs in Korea. This has created many concerns and challenges. Doctoral programs need to be evaluated by accreditation bodies at the earliest opportunity. Such evaluation will ensure that schools will admit academically strong students, recruit qualified faculty and provide adequate resources for nursing doctoral programs.

As well, nursing doctoral programs in Korea lack diversity in terms of program goals and objectives, classes and focus areas of study. They need to be more diversified to accommodate diverse educational needs and become more flexible to reflect societal changes more rapidly. Thus, new programs with different special areas of study, and a focus on the clinical aspects of nursing rather than academic research, could be introduced in the future.

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