

The Role of Achievement Standards in 2022 National English Curriculum

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This study investigates some of the implications for developing Achievement Standards (ASs) in 2022 national English curriculum by analyzing the perception of elementary and middle school teachers on the role of ASs in the 2015 national English curriculum. The major research areas were categorized into clarity, practical usability, and AS level and amount in the national English curriculum. Based on a survey of both descriptive and inferential statistics, the results of the current study demonstrated group differences in specific subtopic questions. Teachers did not have positive perceptions regarding practical application and clarity, while they exhibited positive perceptions regarding the level and the amount of ASs. The survey also suggested alternative ways to improve clarity and practical application of ASs by strengthening the linkage between elements in the curriculum such as assessment methods and instructions and supplementary comments of Ass beyond clear presentation of the ASs.

Key words: applicability of achievement standard, usability, clarity, level and amount of achievement standard, 2015 national curriculum, English curriculum

This work was based on the raw data from a previous Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation Report (Lee et al., 2019)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the achievement standards (ASs) were introduced into the Korean curriculum from the 7th national curriculum, there have been criticisms that the term ‘standards’ introduced for fair evaluation in the United Kingdom and the United States was uncritically introduced into Korea, causing confusion (Lee, 2018). However, in reality, the ASs of national curriculum are closely related to teaching-learning and evaluation in each subject curriculum (Yim, 2020), thus occupying an important position. In other words, the ASs are set up for each subject and for each grade level in the national curriculum first, then the learner’s degree of achievement is evaluated to determine whether or not the educational goals are achieved (Lee, 2017). Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that a learner’s academic success depends on the level and the amount of learning set up in ASs. For this reason, the ASs takes a role of both the standard of each subject content and evaluation.

Despite the importance of ASs, several issues have been constantly raised about ASs not only from the general curriculum, but also from each subject curriculum. The issues include clarity of the meaning of the ASs statement in English subject (Yim, 2020), practical usability for teaching-learning process (Park & Kang, 2018), and the level and the amount of learning of ASs (Lee, 2019). For example, in a study by Park and Kang (2018), which analyzed the difficulties teachers had when actually applying the curriculum, teacher participants reported various difficulties such as the problem of abstraction of the meaning of the ASs which leads to ambiguous interpretation of ASs, and an excessive amount of learning established by ASs. These difficulties raised a fundamental problem in that if the crucial position of ASs could be reduced to decorative rules or sentences, then it might not be able to act as a practical tool as criteria of subject content and assessment. In particular, the English subject, unlike the content subject, is ambiguous in the hierarchy or linkage of the grade (cluster) content system so that criticism of the amount and level of learning derived from this lack of clarity has been continuously raised since the introduction of the ASs (Lee, 2015a).

The current 2015 revised curriculum has been applied sequentially from the first and second grades of elementary school in 2017, and is currently applied to all school levels up to the third grade of middle school and high school. Considering that the 2022 revised curriculum is being prepared, it should be taken into consideration that teachers’ perceptions about ASs such as the clarity and practical usability of ASs need to be analyzed, because they occupy an important place in implementing the national curriculum.

To date, studies on ASs of the 2015 revised English curriculum reflect some areas, such as the amount or level of ASs (Lee, 2015b), curriculum document system (Lee, 2018), and English writing area rather than a comprehensive area (Kim & Noh, 2016), key competencies reflected in ASs (Kim, 2019), learning activities and ASs (Kim & Kim, 2020),

teacher evaluation expertise based on ASs (Kim, Kim, Chang, & Lee, 2017), and comparative analysis of overseas curriculum and Korean ASs (Hwang, 2016; Jeon & Kim, 2018) and others. However, these studies were limited to specific areas in relation to ASs. For example, Hwang (2016) compared and analyzed the ASs of the English reading area of elementary school with descriptors in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a comparative criterion, suggesting that ASs in the national English curriculum needs to add the steps below A1 by subdividing parts of ASs.

A number of studies can be found on the major analysis areas of ASs. For example, a more comprehensive study is that of Lee (2015a, 2015b), in which teachers' perceptions of the objectives and contents of the national English curriculum, teaching-learning methods, and appropriateness of evaluation in relation to ASs were analyzed. In some areas of this study, the main content elements and practical usability of the ASs were analyzed, and a specific school level of elementary or secondary school was a separate study target. From a viewpoint of general curriculum, several major areas were suggested for ASs applicability analysis such as clarity of the standards, the amount and level of learning, the scope of ASs, and practical usability (Lee et al., 2013; Lee, 2019). In addition, Yang (2014) also suggested two important improvement directions regarding applicability of ASs in which the author specified clarity and practical usability of ASs. The concept of clarity refers to "the meaning of a term or sentence presented in the national curriculum document must be clear", and the practical usability is "suitable for use in autonomous school curriculum organization and implementation in order for a teacher to demonstrate curriculum-related expertise" (Lee, Kwak, Lee, & Choi, 2012, p.171).

Considering the crucial role of ASs and results of previous studies, the purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perceptions on major areas of ASs applicability such as the practical usability, clarity of the ASs, and the amount and level of learning of the ASs. In addition, through the analysis of the differences in perceptions between elementary and middle school English teachers, this study was intended to provide implications for which areas should be reinforced and improved in the next curriculum, scheduled to be revised in 2022.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section discussed the importance of achievement standards first, and then analyzed previous studies on the clarity and practical usability, and the level and the amount of ASs. The importance of ASs in the national curriculum has already been briefly mentioned in the introduction section. Presenting the content of the curriculum as *standards* is a global educational reform trend that can be found in Korea and other countries (Yoon, Park, & Lee,

2008). In particular, in countries where localization and school autonomy in curriculum governance are not fully activated, the local or school level ASs are almost the same as that of national curriculum (Park & Kang, 2018). In this process, teachers recognize ASs in the national curriculum as absolute standards which they must follow rather than objects of active restructuring.

The intent of developing ASs in any subject of the national curriculum is to determine in detail what the goals and contents of the curriculum mean. More specifically, it is basic to clearly present to teachers and students what they need to teach and learn by clarifying to what extent and to what depth the educational content in the curriculum should be covered (Paik, 2015). When such clarity is secured, the practical usability in the school curriculum increases. In addition, since the ASs in the national curriculum encompass the amount and the level of subject education content, this aspect has always been an issue of controversy regardless of subject (Lee, 2019). The previous studies regarding three major research areas can be found as follows.

First, previous studies about the clarity of ASs are presented. Kim, Baek, and Chae (1998) pointed out that, though clarity of ASs is crucial in national curriculum, if the ASs are stated in too much detail, it may lead to fragmentary learning. In contrast, if stated in a comprehensive and inclusive way, it becomes an abstract standard that is not very helpful for teaching and learning. However, Kim, Baek, and Chae (1998) suggested that, at the very least, ASs should be detailed enough to induce common communication about the specific meaning of the ASs and to materialize the evaluation standards. In this regard, efforts have been made to improve the clarity of the ASs of the English subject. Since the 7th revised English curriculum, English evaluation and content has been set as a major research area (Chang, 2010). In the 2007 revised English curriculum, the concepts of situations and topics were introduced to clarify the ASs, and the horizontal and vertical hierarchies of ASs for four language skills were constructed by grade level and by language function (Kim, 2007; Lee, 2005). In the 2009 revised English curriculum, it was intended to clarify the vertical connection of ASs by setting the ASs for domains and allowing the categories of teaching-learning materials to expand as the grade level goes up (Park & Park, 2013). In the 2015 revised English curriculum, a 'content system' was newly introduced and language function and communication activities were integrated. The 'content system' presents the core educational contents to be dealt with at the entire school level in the English curriculum.

Despite these steady efforts, as revealed in the study of Lee (2015a), who analyzed elementary school teachers' perceptions of clarity in the 2015 revised national curriculum, teachers' demands for clarification of ASs were still very high. In addition, perceptions of secondary school teachers also reported that their evaluation of the clarity of the achievement standards was not positive, with an average of 3.35 to 3.46 on a 5-point scale, below the positive response of 4.0 or higher (Lee, 2015b).

Second, previous studies on practical usability can be found as follows. In order to enhance the practical usability of ASs, four additional categories of information such as learning elements, supplementary comments of ASs, teaching-learning methods and instructions, and assessment methods and instructions were directly added to ASs, which was already mentioned for the clarity (Hwang, 2017). The reason that these four categories of information are given to practical usability is that teachers reconstruct the school curriculum based on these categories of information. With regard to the practical usability based on ASs reconstruction, Park and Kang (2018) conducted a comparative analysis with the ASs presented in the curriculum of U.S.A. and Australia, and provided implications. Summarizing the research of Park and Kang (2018), the practical usability of the curriculum should be employed to national curriculum with reference to the elements of vertical and horizontal consistency, so that teachers actively reinterpret the given curriculum with a professional intention, and the curriculum does not end with the document itself, which means that the curriculum can be implemented by teachers as curriculum practitioners. Regarding specific suggestions to improve practical usability, Kang (2018), based on the survey on teachers' perception, found that teachers tend to think that each item of ASs must be taught as it is in school. Therefore, the way of improving practical usability of ASs should be designed by maintaining consistency not only with the hierarchy of grades and the logical sequential organization of grades, but also with the systematic connectivity with goals or objectives, the criteria of learning contents, and the evaluation in terms of each element in national curriculum. In this regard, Lee (2020) comprehensively analyzed overseas curriculum documents using FGI research method and literature analysis to improve the ASs of the 2015 revised English curriculum, and provided ways of organizing and integrating ASs with the content system by grade level.

Third, the appropriateness or adequacy of the amount and the level of ASs has been highlighted as a major issue each time the curriculum was revised. As shown in Yim (2020), who analyzed the history of achievement standards from the 7th curriculum to the 2015 revised curriculum, the number of ASs continued to decrease quantitatively. Prior to the 2007 revised curriculum, research was conducted to set an appropriate target level compared to the exposure time of school English class in consideration of the situation in EFL where English is taught as a foreign language and to adjust the level of ASs accordingly (Lee, 2015b). For example, in a study (Lee, 2004) on the perception of elementary and middle school students and teachers on the level and the amount of learning of the 2007 revised curriculum ASs, the most common opinion was that the ASs of the 7th curriculum was not appropriate in general. However, the study reported that there were various and different responses by school size and region. The level of ASs was also studied in a specific way. For example, a study on the language proficiency level of Korean ASs compared with foreign language proficiency evaluation standards (Park, 2005) suggested that it is desirable

to lower the level of the first year of high school to ‘intermediate-mid’ level in ACTFL. At the time of the 2009 revised curriculum, clarity of the ASs and the scope and level of subject contents were adjusted, and the number of ASs was greatly reduced by the presentation of ASs for each grade level (Lee et al., 2013). However, Lee (2015a) reported based on the analysis of teachers’ perceptions of the 2009 revised curriculum that adjustments in the amount and level of learning were still necessary. In addition, Lee et al. (2013) also reported that the ASs decreased by an average of 16.80%, although there were slight differences by subject and school level.

In particular, in the case of the English subject curriculum, the number of ASs decreased from 118 to 79 in the 2015 revised curriculum, showing a decrease rate of 33.05% (Lee, 2019). In this regard, as a result of conducting a survey on teachers and supervisors of elementary, middle and high schools in 17 cities and provinces across the country, 63.5% of supervisors and 45.2% of teachers responded that the number of ASs in the 2015 revised curriculum should be still reduced (Lee, 2019). In fact, in the 2015 revised curriculum, efforts were made to reduce the amount of learning, and the number of ASs was reduced by more than 30% compared to the 2009 revised curriculum (Lee, 2016). Perhaps due to these efforts, in a study of Pae (2020), who analyzed the amount and the level of learning in the ASs of the 2015 revised curriculum, more than 70% of the teachers reported that the content level and the amount of learning in grades 3 and 4 of elementary school were appropriate in all four language areas by function. In contrast, Kim (2020) reported that the teachers’ perceptions on the level and the amount of ASs in the 2015 national English curriculum were rather negative, though they showed different perceptions depending on school groups. Therefore, Lee (2018) raised an issue that the level of ASs and the amount of learning cannot be determined simply by the number of ASs. The author analyzed the ASs of overseas countries such as Singapore and Finland. As a result, in Finland, which aimed at slimming curriculum, had only 10 ASs, while, in the case of Singapore, which aimed for a detailed and specified curriculum, the number of ASs reached to thirty-six, even if sub-categorical ASs are excluded. There are also studies that suggest specific ways to optimize the amount of learning by adjusting the inclusiveness and specificity of the ASs. For example, analyzed and compared the Basic-User level language proficiency descriptors of CEFR with ASs in the 2015 revised curriculum for elementary school English ASs. These authors provided suggestions that ASs in the English curriculum in Korea was recommended to add a conditional or complementary clause for low-level learners with reference to CEFR.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants and Research Questions

In this research, a total of 110 teachers (elementary school $N = 62$, middle school $N = 48$) from 17 local provinces participated. The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze teachers' perceptions and differences between the two school level teachers on ASs in the 2015 revised national English curriculum. More specifically, this study focused on clarity, practical usability, and level and amount of ASs. Based on the purpose of this study, three research questions were established as follows:

1. How do teachers with different school levels perceive ASs in the national English curriculum in terms of practical usability?
2. How do teachers with different school levels perceive ASs in the national English curriculum in terms of clarity?
3. How do teachers with different school levels perceive ASs in the national English curriculum in terms of level and amount of subject learning contents?

3.2. Questionnaire

For the purpose of the current research, the questionnaire contained 15 multiple-choice questions, which can be grouped into four sub-categories: Four items (Q1.1-1.4) associated with the teachers' general views on the need for continuity of the four explanatory items added to ASs, five items (Q 2.1-2.5) with areas and degrees of ASs use, and four items (Q 3.1-3.4) with areas and degrees of clarity, and two items of level and amount of ASs (Q 4.1-4.2) Then, the four sub-categories were re-grouped into three main categories corresponding to research questions in this paper; practical usability of ASs, clarity of ASs, and level and amount of ASs as shown in Table 1. In order to measure the reliability of the questionnaire items, the value of Cronbach's alpha was calculated and turned out to be strong enough for each questionnaire group as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Construct of Questionnaire¹

Category	Sub-Category	Number of Items	Corresponding Item Number	Cronbach's α
Practical usability of ASs	Q1. The need for continuity of the four explanatory items added to ASs	4	Q1.1, Q1.2, Q1.3, Q1.4	.922
	Q2. Areas and degrees of ASs use	5	Q2.1, Q2.2, Q2.3, Q2.4, Q2.5	.892
Clarity of ASs	Q3. Areas and degrees of clarity	4	Q3.1, Q3.2, Q3.3, Q3.4	.853
Level and amount of ASs	Q4. Level and amount of ASs	2	Q4.1, Q4.2	.770

3.3. Data Collection

For the data collection, stratified random sampling was used as data a collection process. First, three percent of elementary and middle schools from seventeen local provinces were sampled in accordance with the school size. In the sampled schools, teachers of various subjects were participating. As a second step of data collection, among the background variables of subjects, only English teachers were extracted, with those of other subjects excluded. Third, each selected teacher was informed of the purpose of the research, the ASs and organization of the national English curriculum document, and asked to complete the questionnaire through an online survey platform. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate their item response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', or, 'very low' to 'very high' or 'not at all' to 'very much' depending on types of the questions. According to the five-point scale, 1 refers to 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'neutral', 4 'agree', and 5 'strongly agree' as such.

3.4. Data Analysis

For the data analysis, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were employed. The test results were counted in number, coded and analyzed using the statistical package of the *SPSS 25.0* version and *EXCEL 2010*. First of all, descriptive statistics were calculated. In order to answer the first, second, and third research question regarding teachers' overall perception of ASs, teacher responses to each questionnaire item were counted in number and converted into percentage.

¹ Each question item and sub-items are fully illustrated and explained in the section of research results.

Next, independent sample t-tests were conducted in order to check for significant statistical differences between the two teacher groups, through which responses from the two teacher groups were contrasted. In case there was no statistically significant difference, descriptive statistical results were calculated and presented when the difference between the two groups was large enough that the readers of this paper should be aware regarding the purpose of this study. In each category and subcategory, teachers' responses to the items belonging to the same category (i.e., items such as objectives of English subject, level and scope of ASs in the subcategory of 'areas and degrees of ASs use') were further compared and contrasted to examine whether there were any patterns or unique features related to the three research questions posed.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Results of Research Question 1: Practical Usability of ASs

This section examines teachers' perceptions on practical usability of ASs, which consists of two sub-categories; the need for continuity of the four explanatory items added to ASs, and areas and degrees of ASs use. In this section, the questionnaire items and analysis results are presented together in order to help readers' readability. The questions for first sub-category are as follows.

Q1. In the 2015 national English curriculum, achievement standards (ASs) are presented together with four items as ASs explanations; (a) learning elements (b) supplementary comments of achievement standards (c) teaching-learning methods and instructions (d) assessment methods and instructions. Do you agree that the items as explanations of ASs need to be presented continuously in the next curriculum?

This question examines the need for continuity of the four explanatory elements added to the achievement standards in the 2015 revised curriculum document system, which is related to the first sub-category of practical usability of ASs and is interpreted as the same concept as asking whether these four factors are helpful to teachers when using achievement standards. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Perceptions on the Need for Continuity of the Four Explanatory Items Added to ASs

Sub-items	EST/ MST	SD(%)	D(%)	SS(%)	A(%)	SA(%)	Sum(%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t(p)</i>
Q1.1	EST	4(6.5)	4(6.5)	21(33.9)	21(33.9)	12(19.4)	62(100.0)	3.53	1.08	0.888 (.376)
	MST	0(0.0)	1(2.1)	20(41.7)	20(41.7)	7(14.6)	48(100.0)	3.69	0.75	
	Total	4(3.6)	5(4.5)	41(37.3)	41(37.3)	19(17.3)	110(100.0)	3.60	0.95	
Q1.2	EST	4(6.5)	1(1.6)	20(32.3)	23(37.1)	14(22.6)	62(100.0)	3.68	1.05	0.636 (.526)
	MST	0(0.0)	2(4.2)	23(47.9)	17(35.4)	6(12.5)	48(100.0)	3.56	0.77	
	Total	4(3.6)	3(2.7)	43(39.1)	40(36.4)	20(18.2)	110(100.0)	3.63	0.94	
Q1.3	EST	2(3.2)	1(1.6)	19(30.6)	24(38.7)	16(25.8)	62(100.0)	3.82	0.95	0.800 (.426)
	MST	0(0.0)	2(4.2)	18(37.5)	21(43.8)	7(14.6)	48(100.0)	3.69	0.78	
	Total	2(1.8)	3(2.7)	37(33.6)	45(40.9)	23(20.9)	110(100.0)	3.76	0.88	
Q1.4	EST	2(3.2)	1(1.6)	19(30.6)	27(43.5)	13(21.0)	62(100.0)	3.77	0.91	0.143 (.887)
	MST	0(0.0)	2(4.2)	18(37.5)	18(37.5)	10(20.8)	48(100.0)	3.75	0.84	
	Total	2(1.8)	3(2.7)	37(33.6)	45(40.9)	23(20.9)	110(100.0)	3.76	0.88	

Note. SD = strongly disagree; SS = so-so; A = agree; D = disagree; SA = strongly agree; EST = elementary school teacher; MST = middle school teacher

First, no statistical difference between elementary and middle school teachers was shown regarding the need for continuity of the four explanatory items added to ASs such as (a) *learning elements* (b) *supplementary comments of achievement standards* (c) *teaching-learning methods and instructions* (d) *assessment methods and instructions*.

Second, in general, both groups of teachers similarly showed around 54% positive perceptions including 'agree' and 'strongly agree' towards both (a) *learning elements* and (b) *supplementary comments of achievement standards*. With regard to the need to continue the items of (c) *teaching-learning methods and instructions* and (d) *assessment methods and instructions* to be added to ASs, about 60% of the participants on average rated their preferences to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' as shown in Table 2. In other words, both EST and MST groups showed more positive views on the (c) *teaching-learning methods and instructions* and (d) *assessment methods and instructions* than (a) *learning elements* and (b) *supplementary comments of achievement standards*. Overall, for the necessity of each element to be added to ASs, both EST and MST showed a positive response of 50%-60%. In contrast, negative responses ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree') are limited to only 4-8% on average for the four items.

Next question² inquired about how and to what extent teachers were actually using ASs at school (Q2. *How and to what extent do you use the achievement standards?*). The reason this question is necessary in terms of practical usability is that, in addition to the role as the content standard for achieving the objectives of each subject, the ASs is at the central factor in determining other factors such as teaching and learning methods and evaluation methods presented in national curriculum document. By synthesizing these factors, teachers reorganize the curriculum and apply it to the class. Sub-question items are four, including Q2.1. ‘*I use the ASs as the one most relevant to the subject’s objective.*’, Q2.2. ‘*I use the ASs a content criteria*’, Q2.3. ‘*I use the ASs as a teaching method*’, and Q2.4. ‘*I use the ASs as an evaluation criteria*’, arranged in the order of the sub-items. Their item responses on a five-point Likert scale were ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘very much’.

TABLE 3
Perceptions of the Extent to Use ASs

Item	EST /MST	NA(%)	NM(%)	SS(%)	M(%)	VM(%)	Sum	M	SD	t(p)
Q2.1	EST	1(1.6)	1(1.6)	11(17.7)	32(51.6)	17(27.4)	62(100.0)	4.02	0.82	
	MST	0(0.0)	4(8.3)	17(35.4)	19(39.6)	8(16.7)	48(100.0)	3.65	0.86	2.297* (.024)
	Total	1(0.9)	5(4.5)	28(25.5)	51(46.4)	25(22.7)	110(100.0)	3.85	0.85	
Q2.2	EST	1(1.6)	1(1.6)	10(16.1)	33(53.2)	17(27.4)	62(100.0)	4.03	0.81	
	MST	0(0.0)	2(4.2)	20(41.7)	19(39.6)	7(14.6)	48(100.0)	3.65	0.79	2.516* (.013)
	Total	1(0.9)	3(2.7)	30(27.3)	52(47.3)	24(21.8)	110(100.0)	3.86	0.82	
Q2.3	EST	1(1.6)	2(3.2)	19(30.6)	30(48.4)	10(16.1)	62(100.0)	3.74	0.83	
	MST	0(0.0)	6(12.5)	17(35.4)	17(35.4)	8(16.7)	48(100.0)	3.56	0.92	1.073 (.286)
	Total	1(0.9)	8(7.3)	36(32.7)	47(42.7)	18(16.4)	110(100.0)	3.66	0.87	
Q2.4	EST	1(1.6)	1(1.6)	8(12.9)	25(40.3)	27(43.5)	62(100.0)	4.23	0.86	
	MST	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	10(20.8)	25(52.1)	13(27.1)	48(100.0)	4.06	0.70	1.073 (.286)
	Total	1(0.9)	1(0.9)	18(16.4)	50(45.5)	40(36.4)	110(100.0)	4.15	0.79	
Q2.5	EST	0(0.0)	1(1.6)	17(27.4)	26(41.9)	18(29.0)	62(100.0)	3.98	0.80	
	MST	0(0.0)	3(6.3)	18(37.5)	19(39.6)	8(16.7)	48(100.0)	3.67	0.83	2.026* (.045)
	Total	0(0.0)	4(3.6)	35(31.8)	45(40.9)	26(23.6)	110(100.0)	3.85	0.83	

* $p < .05$

Note. NA = not at all; NM = not much; SS = so-so; M = much; VM = very much

First, there was statistical group difference between different school levels in Q2.1 ‘*I use the Ass as an objective of subject curriculum*’ ($t = 2.297, p = .024$), Q2.2 ‘*I use the Ass*

² From this part, the survey questions are included and explained in the text, and the tables of sub-question items themselves are omitted.

content criteria' ($t = 2.516, p = .013$) and Q2.5 '*I use the Ass as criteria of curriculum reconstruction*' ($t = 2.026, p = .045$). Regarding the positive responses, for the item of Q2.1, EST reported a more positive view (79% on average; 'much' 51.6%, 'very much' 27.4%) about their preferences than MST (56.3% on average; 'much' 39.6%, 'very much' 16.7%), revealing group differences. For the item of Q2.2, EST reported a more positive view (80.6% in total; 'much' 53.2%, 'very much' 27.4%) about their preferences than MST (54.2% in total; 'much' 39.6%, 'very much' 14.6%). For the item of Q2.5, EST reported a more positive view (70.9% in total; 'much' 41.9%, 'very much' 29.0%) about their preferences than MST (56.3% in total; 'much' 39.6%, 'very much' 16.7%), also revealing group differences.

Second, responses to the items with no statistical difference between EST and MST such as Q2.3 '*I use the ASs as a teaching method*' and Q2.4 '*I use the ASs as evaluation criteria*' were also generally positive. In particular, around 80% of both groups on average (EST 83.8%, MST 79.2%) showed positive responses to the Q2.4, showing the highest rate in this question asking about practical usability.

In general, more than 60% of the participants on average rated their preferences to 'much' or 'very much,' for each question from Q2.1 to Q2.5 as shown in Table 3. On the other hand, the ratio of disagreements ('not at all' and 'not much') was found to be just around 10% on average for both EST and MST ('not at all' 0.0 to 0.9%, 'not much' 0.0 to 12.5%) for the five questions.

4.2. Results of Research Question 2: Clarity of ASs

This question inquired about the clarity of ASs and objectives of the English curriculum, the most relevant to ASs clarity. In order for the ASs to be clear, the level and scope of the educational contents presented by the ASs must be clear, as well as the evaluation items based on the subject objectives and ASs. The question and sub-question items are as follows.

Q3. In each of the following items, how clearly do you think the contents that must be taught in schools in the national curriculum are presented? Sub-question items include Q3.1. 'Subject objectives in the English Curriculum are clear', Q3.2. 'The scope and level of educational contents are clear', Q3.3. 'What needs to be assessed in subject education is clear', and Q3.4. 'Alternatives to the case where students do not reach their goals are clear (e.g., subsequent ASs, etc.)', arranged in the order of the sub-items. Their item responses on a five-point Likert scale was ranging from 'not at all' to 'very much'

TABLE 4
Perceptions on Clarity of ASs

Item	EST/ MST	NA(%)	NM(%)	SS(%)	M(%)	VM(%)	Sum(%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t(p)</i>
	EST	0(0.0)	1(1.6)	27(43.5)	30(48.4)	4(6.5)	62(100.0)	3.60	0.64	
Q3.1	MST	0(0.0)	4(8.3)	22(45.8)	17(35.4)	5(10.4)	48(100.0)	3.48	0.80	0.858 (.393)
	Total	0(0.0)	5(4.5)	49(44.5)	47(42.7)	9(8.2)	110(100.0)	3.55	0.71	
	EST	0(0.0)	2(3.2)	28(45.2)	29(46.8)	3(4.8)	62(100.0)	3.53	0.65	
Q3.2	MST	1(2.1)	4(8.3)	20(41.7)	18(37.5)	5(10.4)	48(100.0)	3.46	0.87	0.491 (.625)
	Total	1(0.9)	6(5.5)	48(43.6)	47(42.7)	8(7.3)	110(100.0)	3.50	0.75	
	EST	0(0.0)	2(3.2)	28(45.2)	28(45.2)	4(6.5)	62(100.0)	3.55	0.67	
Q3.3	MST	0(0.0)	4(8.3)	22(45.8)	16(33.3)	6(12.5)	48(100.0)	3.50	0.83	0.339 (.735)
	Total	0(0.0)	6(5.5)	50(45.5)	44(40.0)	10(9.1)	110(100.0)	3.53	0.74	
	EST	3(4.8)	16(25.8)	27(43.5)	14(22.6)	2(3.2)	62(100.0)	2.94	0.90	
Q3.4	MST	3(6.3)	11(22.9)	21(43.8)	8(16.7)	5(10.4)	48(100.0)	3.02	1.04	0.460 (.647)
	Total	6(5.5)	27(24.5)	48(43.6)	22(20.0)	7(6.4)	110(100.0)	2.97	0.96	

Note. NA = not at all; NM = not much; SS = so-so; M = much; VM = very much

First, there was no statistical group difference between different school levels for all four sub-questions as shown in Table 4.

Next, in general, both groups of teachers similarly showed around 50% positive perceptions towards Q3.1 ‘*Subject objectives in English Curriculum are clear*’, Q3.2 ‘*The scope and level of educational contents are clear*’, and Q3.3 ‘*what needs to be assessed in subject education is clear*’, while positive perception towards Q3.4 was low, unlike other sub-question items. That is, for this Q3.4 ‘*alternatives to the case where students do not reach their goals are clear (e.g., subsequent ASs, etc.)*’, the average positive perceptions of both EST and MST were only 26.4%, and the negative response was 24.5%, with a similar ratio between positive and negative responses. Compared to the other three sub-questions about the clarity of ASs, negative responses from both groups of teachers were remarkably higher for this sub-question.

4.3. Results of Research Question 3: Level and Amount of ASs

This question inquired about the level and the amount of ASs in the national English curriculum. The question was ‘Q4. *What do you think of the national English curriculum in terms of the level and the amount of learning based on the Achievement Standards?*’ Sub-question items include ‘Q4.1. *Level of Achievement Standards*’, and ‘Q4.2. *Amount of learning based on achievement standards*’, arranged in the order of the sub-items. Their item

responses on a five-point Likert scale was ranging from ‘very low (little)’ to ‘very high (much)’ as can be seen in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Perceptions on the Level and the Amount of Learning

Item	EST/ MST	V(L)(%)	L(L)(%)	so-so(%)	H(M)(%)	VH(VM)(%)	Sum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t(p)</i>
Q4.1	EST	1(1.6)	6(9.7)	26(41.9)	24(38.7)	5(8.1)	62(100.0)	3.42	0.84	1.153 (.252)
	MST	0(0.0)	4(8.3)	31(64.6)	10(20.8)	3(6.3)	48(100.0)	3.25	0.70	
	Total	1(0.9)	10(9.1)	57(51.8)	34(30.9)	8(7.3)	110(100.0)	3.35	0.78	
Q4.2	EST	0(0.0)	4(6.5)	31(50.0)	17(27.4)	10(16.1)	62(100.0)	3.53	0.84	2.073* (.041)
	MST	0(0.0)	6(12.5)	30(62.5)	8(16.7)	4(8.3)	48(100.0)	3.21	0.77	
	Total	0(0.0)	10(9.1)	61(55.5)	25(22.7)	14(12.7)	110(100.0)	3.39	0.83	

* $p < .05$

Note. VL = very low (little); L (L) = low (little); H (M) = high (much), VH (VM) = very high (very much)

First, there is no statistical difference regarding Q4.1 ‘*the level of ASs*’ between two groups of teachers. However, though with no statistical group difference between the two school levels ($t = 1.153$, $p = .252$), 46.8% of EST reported that the level of ASs is high comparing to MST (27.1% in total, ‘high’ 20.8%, ‘very high’ 6.3%), showing a 20% difference in their perceptions.

Second, there was statistical group difference between different school levels ($t = 2.073$, $p = .041$) regarding ‘*the amount of ASs*’ (Q4.2). EST rated the amount of ASs higher (43.5% in total, ‘much’ 27.4%, ‘very much’ 16.1%) than MST (25% in total, ‘much’ 16.7%, ‘very much’ 8.3%), showing 18.5% difference in their perceptions.

In general, it can be seen that EST perceived that the learning amount and the level of ASs were higher than those of MST by a fairly large difference.

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the perceptions of elementary and middle school teachers on the achievement standards. The purpose of this study was also to provide implications for the next revision of the curriculum through the analysis results. In this section, the research results are summarized and then some discussions will be made.

The analysis results can be summarized as follows. First, the category of practical usability consisted of two items with regard to the first research question. The first category is about the need for continuous presentation of learning elements, supplementary comments of ASs,

teaching-learning methods and instructions, and assessment methods and instructions that correspond to the explanation of the ASs presented along with the ASs in the national curriculum. The result of the analysis showed that two groups of teachers showed a positive response of more than 50% to all four sub-elements, but it did not show a statistical difference between elementary and middle school teachers. The second category on the practical usability of ASs was to examine the perception of how and to what extent the ASs are being used in the teaching and learning process. As a result, EST showed more positive response to the three sub-items such as the one most relevant to the subject's objective ($t = 2.297, p = .024$), content criteria ($t = 2.516, p = .013$), and curriculum reconstruction ($t = 2.026, p = .045$). There was a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of teachers.

Second, the clarity of the ASs consists of four sub-items with regard to the second research question. Among these, the average positive responses of both groups of teachers to the three sub-items of clarity such as subject objectives, the scope and level of ASs, and the items to be assessed reach around 50% on average. In particular, to the question of whether the alternative is clear when the goals are not reached by learners, both groups of teachers showed a similar ratio of positive and negative responses, indicating that they had a particularly negative perception compared to other sub-question items for the category of clarity ($M = 2.97, SD = .96$ for item Q3.4).

Third, as a result of the analysis of teachers' perceptions of the level and the amount of learning of the ASs, statistically significant difference was shown for the amount of ASs between the two teacher groups ($t = 2.073, p = .041$ for item Q4.2). Overall, the level and the amount of learning of ASs were not perceived as excessive by both groups of teachers, though there were group differences for the amount of learning.

Based on the results of this study, some discussions can be made as follows. First, it is necessary to discuss ways to improve the practical usability and clarity of ASs. These two areas are in fact highly related to each other. If the clarity of ASs will increase, it can be said that the practical usability will also be improved. As shown in the results of this study, it was found that the extent of practical usability of MST was relatively low compared to that of elementary school. A similar result was observed for clarity including all four sub-items such as the scope and level of ASs. From this result, it will be possible to rationally infer that a way to increase the clarity of ASs leads to improving the practical usability. In case of one of the sub-items, in particular, both groups of teachers showed only 25% of positive responses, and negative responses including 'so-so' is over 70%, which prompted a discussion of devising ways of improving clarity of ASs in the national English curriculum.

Regarding this issue, as revealed in previous studies, clarifying ASs is not so simple. Moreover, the solution to the clarification issue has been limited to a discussion of the negative and positive aspects when specifying or detailing the ASs. For example, as pointed out in the study of Lee (2015a), due to the nature of the English subject, it is difficult to

hierarchically show all the learning contents in detail, and specifying and detailing ASs may lead to an excessive increase of the amount of learning in ASs. In addition, in this case, it may act as a constraint on textbook development and teaching-learning process, so that the clarification of ASs and practical usability may not be linked. In contrast, Lee (2019) pointed out that the slimming and inclusive ways of ASs statements, in contrast to specifying and detailing, would be of no use if the inclusiveness lowered the clarity and practical usability. Therefore, the best way is to balance the inclusiveness and specificity of the ASs, which must not be an easy task. At this point, we will have to look at what has been causing this difficulty. In other words, it is not a matter to think of a plan based only on ASs itself.

Given our own discussion, we need to devise alternatives in consideration of the results of this study, beyond the way of clearly presenting the ASs itself, by designing ways of strengthening the linkage between each element in the document such as learning elements, objectives of subject, supplementary comments of ASs, teaching-learning methods and instructions, assessment methods and instructions. This alternative method is expected to make it possible to induce them to play a complementary role among the elements of the curriculum document so that the ASs can be communicated more clearly. In the same vein, we also need to consider that there is a large gap between the ASs and the subject objectives (Lee, 2016), which has significant implications for the clarity of the achievement standards. In the results of this study, although teachers agree on the need to continue with the explanatory elements added to achievement standards such as evaluation methods, and elements of teaching and learning methods, they have a strong negative perception about the clarity of ASs elements in documents in terms of connectivity among subject objectives, evaluation items, and others. Among the elements of the curriculum document related to ASs, a method of clarifying the evaluation method (Lee, 2017) can also be considered. Suggesting the ways of clarifying what and how teachers evaluate in relation to ASs, Lee (2017) devised a descriptive evaluation format that displays evaluation factors such as evaluation goals for each domain, accuracy, fluency, or meaning by grade.

Second, the findings of the current study and analysis of previous studies suggested that the amount and level of learning in ASs, which has long been continuously controversial issue from the 7th national curriculum, should be further researched. Because, as a result of this study, both groups of teachers who perceive that the level of achievement standard and the amount of learning to be high are limited where only 46.8% of EST and 27.1% of MST responded that the level of ASs was high. In addition, the proportion of those who answered that the amount of learning in the ASs was high was only 43.5% in EST and 25% in MST. In contrast, the ratio of 'not high' of ASs level and learning amount reached 61.8% for the level and 64.6% for the amount of learning. Such results are similar to the research results of Pae (2020). In addition, the results of this study on the level and the amount of ASs requires more detailed analysis by school level, and by regional differences such as large

cities and towns and villages, or by school size in the future. In particular, it should be noted here that we need to consider the research result of Hwang, Kim, and Kim (2013) that there was a large difference in teachers' perception by region with regard to the evaluation of the English curriculum. This is because the findings of this study showed that both groups of teachers have significantly different perceptions of the amount of learning in ASs. Therefore, it is expected that this issue of adequacy of ASs level and learning amount will be researched in consideration of ways of selecting and organizing ASs in terms of subject content rather than simply reducing the number of ASs. This study had a limitation in that it used only quantitative research methods to analyze teacher's perceptions. Therefore, in the follow-up study, an in-depth analysis of the relationship among the items in the survey and the differences in teachers' perceptions will be required based on an integrated research methodology including a qualitative study.

Applicable levels: Elementary, secondary

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