

Study on the education policy system in foreign counties for promoting Evidence-Based Education Policy

-Executive Summary (English version)-

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Full text of the study report is available on the website of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (the above-mentioned URL)

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1. Outline of the Survey

This survey comprehended and analyzed the evidence-based education policy of foreign countries to provide information that could contribute to future consideration for establishing a system capable of comprehensively promoting an evidence-based education policy in Japan.

Two countries particularly initiating advanced policies are targeted: the United Kingdom and the United States. The survey team strove to get a grasp of the relevant details by reviewing literatures and field surveys, as well as interviewing two experts to deliberate suggestions to Japan, as described in the last chapter of this report, based on the information obtained.

2. Evidence-Based Education Policy in the United Kingdom

(1) Historical development

Advancing education levels and reducing educational inequality among regions and schools have been consistent themes in government education policy in the United Kingdom throughout the Conservative Party reign from 1979 to 1997, the Labour Party from 1997 to 2010 and the Conservative Party from 2010 onwards. To ensure accountability, the government has carried out inspections in regions and schools.

It was the late 1990s when serious discussions on an evidence-based education policy got underway, triggered by discussions on how best to engage in educational research to enhance schoolteachers' expertise. During the same period, investment in education was also boosted; taking into consideration the evidence that early positive intervention in the sector would be efficient. As good practices and international research trends in the medical sector affected other sectors, "efficiency" also became a more focused theme in the policy formulation cycle of the education sector and the government incorporated the adoption of evidence into its policy.

Since 2010, the adoption of evidence has been prioritized to a greater extent under the Conservative Party's fiscal consolidation and as part of measures to delegate authority to educational institutions. To do so, particularly in educational practice, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), an independent grant-making charity founded under the initiative of the Department for Education (DfE) in 2011, has been more prominent in developing methods to effectively transmit the educational research outcomes to educational institutions and thus reflect them in educational practices. Moreover, as well as delegating authority to educational institutions, the DfE, universities, NGOs and other related parties have developed leadership of teachers, including school management. Through a mutual learning process among schools, evidence is being adopted in the scene of educational practices on a broader scale.

(2) Ecosystem

The DfE is responsible for general education policy in central government. As well as helping facilitate the generation, transmission and adoption of evidence, it engages in evidence-based policy planning and evaluations by allocating social research experts and utilizing individual databases. In case of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy which oversees research in higher educational institutions, its affiliated fund allocation organization recognizes such evidence for social purpose as evaluation criteria of research activities carried out by universities and other institutions, to motivate them to generate evidence that can be reflected in policies and practices.

Private foundations fund NGOs and other entities, while some foundations develop innovative funding methods through their own surveys for themes which it is difficult for central and local governments to fund. The EEF was an institution whose concept was developed by private foundations as part of the aforementioned activities and founded by DfE funds, etc. The EEF facilitates the functional cycle involved in the generation, transmission and adoption of evidence by cooperating with wide-ranging parties involved in education policy and practice beyond sectoral divisions.

Universities play a key role within the ecosystem in generating evidence through primary research but also handling the transmission of evidence by conducting secondary research such as a systematic review. Recently, universities have striven to expand their opportunity to make contact with educational practitioners by actively promoting joint research and postgraduate education of teachers.

Local governments, NGOs and private sectors mainly function as intermediaries in evidence-based education policy. Following recent educational reform, the role of local governments has also been shifting toward integrating non-educational services within regions to support children in vulnerable situations. NGOs provide extramural education services and also often mediate between educational research and practices. Private investigation companies specializing in education policy research and evaluation support efforts to adopt such evidence in educational practices; mainly through their consulting services.

Educational institutions are the main entity to adopt the evidence. Under circumstances whereby direct fund allocation to each school for their individual activities has increased in line with government policy, it is crucial for schoolmasters and other members of the school management to show leadership and adopting evidence is seen as key to improving their performance. Given the increasing number of cases where teachers learn how to adopt such evidence at postgraduate education and external training courses, a policy to encourage such human resources to supervise other schools has also been promoted.

(3) Outcome and issues

With the impact of educational research in the United State, success in the medical sector and advanced information technology, researchers played a central role in advancing the initiative to generate evidence and the quantitative research capacity is deemed to have rocketed in the field of educational research thanks to their efforts. Human resource systems and information infrastructure developed within the government are also evaluated as largely having incorporated educational research into policy formulation. Meanwhile, researchers are required to dedicate themselves to “educational research adoptable in practice” using the research funds allocated to their institutions, which has prompted them to design research activities while collaborating with educational practitioners and set research themes. Similarly, teachers are required to build capacity to generate more meaningful evidence to educational practice in terms of cooperating with researchers.

Regarding the transmission of evidence, positive outcomes are observed by developing user-friendly methods which transmit key points more easily and simply; based on research methods such as systematic review. This method allows busy policy planners and teachers to utilize suggestions obtained from educational research. However, some parties have pointed out that using the online tool alone is insufficient to link research and practice and an effective intervention method is still sought. While local

governments previously played the role of transmitting evidence on a regional basis in support of their management authority, school networks have been strengthened following the delegation of authority after educational reform and new organizations like EEF have also been established. These networks and private organizations are expected to function by transmitting evidence effectively.

In terms of the adoption of evidence, since the post of teacher has been reconfirmed as a specialist with higher expertise over the last two decades, the importance of evidence supporting their decisions based on expertise and the need for ongoing career development have also been widely acknowledged by educational practitioners. Teacher training programs in government, research institutions, NGOs and other entities as well as cooperation with university researchers have further enhanced the expertise of teachers. Schools have also been encouraged to adopt evidence against a backdrop of social accountability, direct government subsidies to reduce educational equality and other reasons. Existing surveys have clearly shown that adoption of evidence is infiltrating on a school management level. Conversely, reducing educational inequality is contingent on the school and teacher side. Whether educational practitioners achieve their target outcomes by adopting evidence depends on their function as an ecosystem while the achievement levels are set at a national level.

3. Evidence-based Education Policy in the United States

(1) Historical development

Under the United States Constitution, it is state governments, not the federal government, which should take responsibility for education, which is why state governments retain basic educational authority. Since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, under which funding goes to regions with a high proportion of poor families, the federal government has been involved in education policy; mainly through amending the Act while legislating new acts.

The evidence-based education policy in the United States had been accelerated by researchers leading program development with exact evaluation methods. In 2002, the then Bush administration stipulated the new roles of the federal government in public education under the “No Child Left Behind Act” and requested that each state establish accurate evaluation systems, comprehend academic ability, analyze issues and establish improvement measures. Further, a specified organization for developing statistics, analyzing current status and promoting research was established under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 to provide exact evidence indicating effective education policy.

Meanwhile, there are many criticisms against the No Child Left Behind Act, citing the federal government’s excessive intervention, expanded authority and setting of the common target levels state-wide. Accordingly, the federal government had to gradually change its approach. In 2009, the then Obama administration established the Educational Reform Act, “Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge”; adopting measures to support educational reform at the state level by establishing a large amount of competitive grants preferentially provided to states achieving their outcome. Further, in 2016, the “Every Student Succeeds Act” was enacted as an amendment to the “No Child Left Behind Act”, revising to return authority of evaluation method for exams to determine academic ability, a reform support system for schools with poor academic performance, systems related to teachers and so on and data other than exact evaluation results have been recognized as evidence.

(2) Ecosystem

Through legislative enactments and grants, the United States Department of Education is responsible for promoting evidence-based educational practice on a state level. In the “Every Student Succeeds Act” of 2016, for example, evidence-based criteria, which was previously limited to results evaluating research with an exact design, were classified by including even relatively inexact examples and a framework to boost the scale of funding was established to expand the scale of research with a very precise design. Increasing the evidence criteria and providing funds at the same time are both linked to encouraging the adoption of evidence.

Moreover, under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, the federal government established the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), a research institution, to promote evidence-based education policy within the United States Department of Education. The IES comprises four national centers: the center for providing grants to and reviewing educational research programs; the center for special education; the center for gathering educational statistics and the center for promoting evidence-based education policy, disseminating research outcomes of the IES and evaluating policy of educational programs.

Within the fourth center, two functions were established: the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) and the Regional Educational Laboratories (REL). The WWC sets out unique and exact criteria to review educational research programs and provide information. It also strives to expand the base for researchers and policy planners involved in the WWC’s review by providing various training opportunities. As a bridge between research institutions and regions, the REL functions as a contact point for evaluation research and region-specific technical support, which sees the IES outsourcing to private survey companies that specialize in evaluating education policy.

State governments basically obtain grants in accordance with laws and guidelines provided by the United States Department of Education to promote evidence-based education policy. They also plan policies by analyzing long-term longitudinal data system which compiles from childhood to adults and other sources. Conversely, the School Board integrates various relevant services supporting the healthy development of students on a regional level, such as holding a round table discussion with wide-ranging persons concerned from other than educational institutions, taking state policy and the results of current status analysis into consideration.

The academic sector, led by university researchers, is spearheading a global initiative to generate evidence in the education sector, which also functions as an engine for evidence-based education policy in the United States. In this sector, a range of primary research is being conducted which involves developing and evaluating innovative programs for educational practice. While university research centers conduct evaluations, there are also some cases where cooperation systems with NGOs and other private organizations are built to assess the situation from practice to evaluation of extramural education. There are also some researchers who see the way educational research is insufficiently utilized for educational practice as problematic and promote the transmission of evidence.

Such innovative initiatives are sustained by public funding, e.g. via competitive funding from federal government and grants individually provided by state governments as well as funding from private foundations. While large-scale private foundations provide generous funding nationwide and having an impact on education policy, private foundations have also recently emerged, which provide grants to collaborative projects involving researchers and educational practitioners to link educational research and practices.

(3) Outcome and issues

From the perspective of generating evidence, the Obama regime clearly indicated that evidence-based policy formulation was governmental policy, whereupon education policy was initiated with quantitative indicators. Policy planning has also been facilitated thanks to a unified database established at state and federation levels. In addition, taking into considerations the past policy issue of focusing only on exact research design while recognizing relatively less exact variables, the government formulates classifications and devises its funding policy so that a more flexible environment has been developed for the entity; generating evidence to promote their innovative activities.

In terms of transmission, an environment is deemed developed where the evidence tends to be relatively adopted to interpret research results and policy suggestions since the independence of the IES is legally secured to promote educational research and transmit relevant evidence. A system whereby the REL within the IES accompanies the state and other local governments is also introduced to ensure its consultation functions are secured on a regional level. However, many parties concerned point out that the system used to transmit evidence remains insufficient, which shows that the information currently provided by the IES is not aligned with what educational institution needs. Accordingly, more interests accumulate in activities in which researchers conduct research on topics closer to educational practitioners.

Regarding the adoption of evidence, the outcome is observed from the fact that clear policies and competitive funds to state government of the federation government strongly motivate policy planners. There are also regions facilitating adoption via educational materials for teachers. Issues that can be raised include that how to access to the evidence information is not ascertained while such information does not reach to teachers appropriately. Besides, some pointed out that it was unrealistic to expect all teachers handling excessive work to adopt the evidence.

4. Suggestions to Japan

The first suggestion is to start engaging in consideration based on current status analysis. As shown by the cases of the United Kingdom and the United States, insufficiencies within their ecosystem were investigated to strengthen them under policy, it is equally desirable for Japan, too, to overlook the current status first, then promote the activities of each entity involved in evidence-based education policy. Moreover, revitalizing communication among the parties concerned, in enhancing discussions which will start by identifying beneficiaries' needs, is essential to advance cooperative activities involving understanding of each entity.

Secondly, measures to boost investment should also be considered. The target countries in this survey defined reducing educational inequality and guaranteeing minimum education levels as themes for advancing evidence-based education policy. The importance of earlier investment in the education sector based on the outcomes of long-term research and other prior research was a view collectively shared by the political parties. Moreover, private foundations oversee project development at a pilot stage in both countries to cover areas where it is difficult for the administrative sector to provide funding. There is therefore a need to share recognition of a funding system to suit Japan's social structure across public and private sectors.

Thirdly, social infrastructures supporting evidence-based education policy should be established as soon as possible. As for information infrastructures, both the United Kingdom and the United States

have established long-term and traceable databases and publication rules for research purposes have also been developed. Both countries also develop specialists who initiate the generation, transmission and adoption of evidence collectively to explore work opportunities. Further, in expanding the base of evidence adopted, it is expected that developing training programs in the administration sector and introducing the department of education in postgraduate education correspond to the level of users' needs. With these references, it is desirable to improve social infrastructure in line with the actual status of Japan.

The fourth suggestion is that, in terms of enhancing the function of generating evidence, not only quantitative but also qualitative research should be focused and this should be broadly understood when introducing evidence-based education policy. For the outcome of qualitative research in particular, it is deemed important to clarify the logical structure and hypotheses using a logic model, etc. Although quantitative research should also preferably be designed with precision, it is expected that the criteria defined will be shared among many persons concerned so that the research can be adopted with a less precise design and conditions.

Fifth, it is also deemed necessary to enhance the evidence transmission function. Given that fewer entities are in charge of the transmission, the EEF of the United Kingdom and the IES of the United States enlarge their presence within the ecosystem by taking on responsibility. One of their features is the ability to secure independence while the central government is involved in their establishment in both cases. The EEF and IES used to advance online tool development but are currently seeking measures to interact with educational research and practice. Accordingly, Japan is also expected to introduce such institutions, with transmission in mind.

Finally, the function of adopting evidence should be enhanced. Until recently, governmental organizations in each country initiated policy while mainly focusing on generating evidence. In the case of target countries, the critical issue was seen as facilitating adoption within the ecosystem. Based on these findings, cross-sectoral networks are expected to consider dissemination measures in line with the context of Japan and allow learning from cases of success and failure overseas and in other sectors.

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