

Committee on Educational Policy and Finance FINAL REPORT

[Table of Contents]

- CHAPTER 1..... The Basic Plan for the Educational Promotion – The way to analyze and to properly make the Plan
- CHAPTER 2..... Issues with the governmental treasury system to cover the compulsory education cost
- CHAPTER 3..... Issues with the teacher salary system
- CHAPTER 4..... Longitudinal factor analysis of the regional discrepancies regarding the educational expenditures funded by the state, prefecture, and city level
- CHAPTER 5..... Conditions of regional discrepancies based on the longitudinal analysis of pre-calculated standards for educational expenditure and actual expenses
- CHAPTER 6..... Issues with the current funding system for the school operation costs

[Conclusion: To make the best use of the recommendations offered by each of the chapter authors]

1. Revise the Basic Plan for the Educational Promotion

The Basic Plan for the Educational Promotion developed by the previous government in 2008 only listed the quantified goals to be achieved but lacked financial plans on how to fund the resources necessary to achieve those goals (Chapter 1). Thus, we must reexamine and revise this “Basic Plan” as soon as possible.

Among the necessary resources, the most fundamental item to be secured is the enough number of teachers and other school personnel. However, there were public schools at elementary and junior high level that failed at some points of a school year to meet the quorum (Chapter 2). Although those schools eventually met the standard after they received a warning from the education ministry, there should be no school at any times failing to meet the quorum and the mere fact that there are times when some schools cannot hire enough teachers and/or school personnel should be regarded as an

indication that the current way of funding resources has a problem. In addition, regional discrepancies on salary for teachers and other school personnel are found to be on increase, especially in relation to the promotion of decentralization policy (Chapter 3). As such, we must carefully examine and identify funding sources to ensure that every school has enough teaching forces as well as other adults needed to make a school work.

2. Increase the amount of governmental treasury

The purpose of education is not only to achieve the full development of individuals but also to grow them as rights-holding citizens who are the agents responsible for the formation of a democratic society. This means that the outcome of education is both personal and social, and therefore that educational responsibility should rest at least in part on public agencies. The issue here, however, is the divisional balance between the State and the Local, such as division of financial responsibilities and of authority.

Following the idea of decentralization principle, one option can be to increase the degree of autonomy and authority given to the local along with the full financial responsibilities. Such policy, however, would increase the regional discrepancies, contributing to expand the social inequalities where educational opportunities and the quality of education one receives depend on where one lives. If we instead pursue the goal of providing equal educational environments regardless of local government's financial conditions, we might say that educational costs should be covered totally by public money such as the central government treasury. One thing that needs to be remembered, however, is that actual educational activities take place within the concrete everyday lives and within the context of local community. Thus, as a way to realize the decentralization policy, we should aim at giving the local governments both funding and autonomy, rather than to give money but restrict the autonomy of local governments or to give a greater autonomy but with the burden of financial responsibilities.

From that perspective, there is at least one thing that needs to be done. That is, we should increase the central government's contribution under the central government treasury system for the compulsory education costs, which currently makes the central government cover a third of the costs, at least to the previous level, which set the central governmental contribution at a half.

3. Develop a budget based on school realities

Securing funding sources is needed to achieve equal educational opportunities and environments. The meaning of "equality" however is achieved within the context

of each school and each local community, depending on the local realities, issues, and priorities that would determine concrete activities to be taken. Decentralization of educational policies without changing the centralized control structure that defines much of relationships between school and community or between school and students will result in a budget plan that is unresponsive and unable to meet the specific needs of each school and community, inviting even more expansions of regional discrepancies on educational conditions. Educational opportunities are secured only when there installed a budget plan that reflects the needs and realities of each school.

In order to advance such discussion, we must first identify the amount of education costs currently paid by students' families as well as the realistic estimation of school operation costs and the deficiency of current governmental funds at a school level (Chapter 6).

4. Conduct field studies on education finance

Following the argument above, we should conduct close studies at a school level on the actual conditions of educational finance. Upon evaluating the educational finance, we must carefully examine what expenses are really needed and what are not. Although we may say that funding can never be enough, we can certainly establish priorities depending on each school's urgent tasks and issues and save some low-priority items for future. It is important to evaluate the appropriateness of funding not only by its total amount but also by the balance of its distribution.

Moreover, as a method of inquiry, it is indispensable to directly interview teachers and other school personnel because some of the educational costs are often actually paid by their private money such as educational materials being purchased and prepared by a teacher. In such cases, public educational funds are seemingly sufficient although in reality there is indeed a deficiency but the debt is only covered by the school staff's personal expenses. Thus, sometimes the lack of public educational funds may not become visible (in the sense of educational activities being successfully executed). Many teachers feel that education cannot wait until enough money is secured. School is a moving body and education is an ongoing activity that cannot be made to stop due to insufficient funds because educational rights of the children are at risk. We cannot simply blame the insufficient funds and do nothing about the educational disadvantages daily incurred by the problem. We must not let it happen that the children's rights for education get to be violated, and for that someone in the field has to pay the debt so the everyday learning and teaching in the classrooms can move on as if no barrier that infringes on students' educational rights exists. That is the reality of school life in many cases. Therefore, we can understand the negative impacts of insufficient funds on educational activities only if we listen to teachers and other school personnel and learn about the details and concrete realities of what goes on and

how in school.

5. Equip flexibility within the budget plan

As suggested already, it is important to plan a budget that is grounded on the realities of each school. However, that will not be enough. We must keep in mind that learning and teaching is dynamic and alive by its nature. Children grow every single day and they often change unpredictably. Educational practices must be responsive to these changes. That is, it needs to be assumed that an initial budget may have to be modified in the middle of year, and therefore a school budget should equip within itself a certain degree of flexibility.

6. Consider the accountability system carefully

Following the argument above, there may be an approach where each school directly sits at the negotiation table with the local finance bureau. By considering a budget as one of educational means or by strategically planning educational activities through budgeting, schools open a path for themselves to become an agent in constructing and securing the resources that meet their local needs.

This can however result in defining and planning educational programs more as something visible and measurable since the funds are allocated for the proposed programs that describe expected outcomes, for which the funded programs are to be held accountable.

If we take this stance exclusively, one part of educational purposes, which is to achieve a full development of individuals, will become jeopardized. That is because personalities and many aspects of human development cannot be discussed in quantitative terms such as “outcomes” and “measures.” Simply put, they cannot be reduced to numbers. Changes such as “the student’s eyes are getting brighter” or “the student has become more active” are indeed significant outcomes of education even though those kinds of phenomena cannot be taken out from the contextual and relational spaces, within which they are embedded, and presented as a quantitative sample. As such, “students’ developments” in a quantitative sense cannot simply be used as accountability indices.

Furthermore, and more importantly, we believe that educational authorities should not dictate which direction individual students may take in terms of their own development. Teachers would of course offer a general framework as guidance but there has to be freedom for individual students to decide on how they want to change and grow. The authority of public education should not step over the line, measuring and evaluating the development of human personalities, much less allocate funds based on the evaluation.

We do not mean to suggest that evaluation of educational activities is

impossible or that we must try hard to develop a system by which students' growth can be captured numerically. Rather, our point is that we need to make a budget with a full acknowledgement that a rather significant part of educational outcomes is immeasurable.

That is, we must make a budget based on the principle of equity that cannot be measured by the standard of efficiency. In other words, the relationships between educational outcomes and allocation of education funds must not be simplified; they indeed sometimes have to be separated. This once again leads us to our argument of increasing the non-conditional central government treasury funds for education. And if funding distribution is to be connected to some kinds of educational outcomes, it should be done only to give compensatory funds concerning those outcomes that are measurable.

Today, the general public increasingly regards and calls for the publication of students' scores on standardized academic performance tests as an important education outcome to hold schools accountable. However, no one really explains what those test scores account for and what they really mean, ignoring the fact that test scores and ranking per se are meaningless. What can we learn from reading the test scores? – Issues to be recognized, objectives to be set, strategies to be tried, and the ways in which tests can help us solve the problems, etc. These kinds of information should be examined and publicized; otherwise test scores are short of accountability measures.

If we imagine education as presenting students information (input) and having them take a test to yield scores (output), that is extremely poor view of education, we must argue, from which no useful discussion could ever emerge.

7. Construct a new vision of education

It is both unrealistic and illogical to believe that we can manipulate children's development as we wish according to how we want to educate them. It is the fundamental fact about education that the goals the teachers and other school personnel may aim for and the students' actual development cannot be reduced to a simple cause-and-effect relationship. Ignoring this fact, any educational policies would end up severely damaging education.

As long as educational activities are conceptualized in this simple cause-and-effect manner, there will always be forces that try to identify students who do not fit into the expected relationship or schedule and to segregate (exclude) them. We must begin with the basics that the part is limited in educational arena where such input-output framework works and that individuals' development cannot be predicted nor manipulated. Otherwise, ensuring of educational rights can never be achieved. No matter how much funds are spent on education, they will only be used to control the "commodified goods" and not used to protect human rights, to ensure equal

educational opportunities, and to promote the rights-holding citizens. In other words, educational investment does not result in resources for the realization of social aspect of education (i.e., education as social assets).

Getting opportunities to be educated and to learn is human rights and never a commodified service. Thus, business theories cannot account for education. Children are not the objects of manipulation nor the market items. When we start from the assumption that we can predict and control human growth and development, contradictions are sure to arise. And when we further try to ignore or hide those contradictions, children's sense of self as well as needs are sure to be dismissed. This is absolutely unacceptable for something to be called education.

Educational policies should be guided not only by the Constitution of Japan but also by various international treaties, most notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that have stronger binding power than domestic laws. And as a concluding remark, we must draw attention to a very obvious fact that the current approach for education policies in Japan, which has been strongly influenced by a market-oriented principle, significantly diverges from the direction that those guiding frameworks lead us to take.