



Assessing the Failure of Korea's Gifted and Talented Education Policy: The Role of New Public Management in Policy Delivery

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Abstract

The Korean Gifted and Talented Policy was initiated during the country's new public administration reform, set against the backdrop of a financial crisis. Its primary aim was to promote elitist education and cultivate individuals who could contribute positively to society. This policy replaced a thirty-year-old system of educational equalization in Korea, propelling the nation's education onto a highly competitive trajectory. Korea's gifted and talented policy has contributed to economic development through educational reform, to some extent due to the cultivation of human resources. However, this study argues that under the principles of New Public Management, the policy has had largely negative results, increasing the inequality of educational resources, shifting the burden of educational costs onto students and families, and even becoming one of the factors influencing the decline in fertility in Korea. The study concludes that the policy has failed to some extent. The announcement by the Korean Ministry of Education that all private high schools, elite high schools, etc. will be abolished by 2025 and will return to being general high schools, somewhat announces the end of Korea's gifted and talented policy. The policy is influenced by the diversity of factors in policy development and the complexity of policy implementation, which increases the difficulty of its policy delivery. At the same time, issues such as performance in the New Public Management principles and the transfer of costs to students' families after the introduction of private capital add to the difficulty of policy implementation in this process. The findings of this paper provide new critical perspectives on the development of education policies by stakeholders, and in particular, provide valuable insights for analyzing the effectiveness of education policies in Korea, and the challenges faced in their implementation.

Keywords

Korean gifted policy; policy failure; new public management; policy delivery; education policy

1. Introduction

The Korean government adopted a policy to promote gifted education on 28 December 1998 then enacted the Gifted Education Progress Act on 28 January 2000, which was implemented on 18 April 2002 (Seo, 2017). Korea's education reform constitution in 2000, legal security and basis for Korean Gifted and Talented Policy. Inaugurated a phase of elite

education that pursued pluralism and embarked on a path of elitism and competition.

The government has developed a comprehensive plan with a solid legal basis for its giftedness education policy, the product of joint efforts from various government ministries. New types of educational institutions and administrative systems have been established to house giftedness education initiatives, including gifted schools, gifted classes, gifted centres, and gifted education departments. Park (2004) has described how the Gifted Education Act has mainly been implemented through gifted high schools; centres for gifted education operating in cooperation with universities and school boards; and gifted classes that are pull-out programmes from regular schools. Since the first test run of science high schools was established in 1983, 16 science high schools have emerged and the Gifted Education Act provides a legal basis for its construction (Seo, H.A., 2017). Korea's first official school for the gifted was established by the Busan Science Academy in 2001, immediately following the policy's implementation. With financial support from the Ministry of Science and Technology, 15 university-linked centres for gifted education were established, while 16 provincial education offices have established pull-out classes for mathematics gifted education during non-formal curriculum time. The implementation process for the Gifted and Talented Policy comprises the stages of Synchronisation of private and public schools' selection, selection of new education, and assessment. Against this backdrop, the Korean Gifted and Talented Policy is being developed at a social level.

In Korea, the term 'elite' refers to individuals with exceptional abilities that can be stimulated through special education. Park states that the overall direction of educational reform is to increase the options of learning opportunities by enhancing school choice and diversity in school curricula (Park, 2013). In Korea, the aim of elite education is to improve upon traditional, frequently monotonous education and training mechanisms by providing special education for students with exceptional needs, unlocking their full potential through the opening of special schools. The fostering of these students may be seen as an investment in their future as well as their future contributions to developing Korean country and society.

2. Policy Success or Failure

Qin Baixue notes that in 2019 the South Korean Ministry of Education announced that it would abolish all private high schools and elite high schools, among others, and return them to general high schools in 2025 (Qin Baixue, 2019). This result symbolizes the end of the policy. Has the twenty-year-long policy on gifted education been a success?

2.1 Definition of policy success or failure

The definitions of policy success and failure have been the subject of academic debate, as policy outcomes are the result of a variety of factors. Some argue that it is rare for policies to be outright successes or failures and that outright failures are catastrophic and extreme. Andrews notes that public policies frequently address society's most intractable problems, such as market failures or the challenges of collective social action, and the complete failure of such high-stakes policies would be disastrous and extreme (Andrews, 2018). Policy outcomes are therefore not black and white, and McConnell suggests that policy advocates may sometimes claim successes to outsiders while their opponents are more likely to perceive policy failure; in reality, policy outcomes tend to fall somewhere in between these two extremes (McConnell, 2010). In this situation, policies are influenced by different latitudes, and only some aspects of policy will be successful, so defining policy successes and failures is critical, and garnered substantial academic attention. Researchers like McConnell have high standards for policy success, viewing unsuccessful policies as failures. In McConnell's view, successful policies are those that achieve the goals set by a policy's proponents without attracting any meaningful criticism or general support, while policy failure is when a policy does not achieve its goals while its proponents receive significant opposition and no support (McConnell, 2010). Howlett notes that this approach tends to link success or failure to independently verifiable statements made by parties about particular aspects or attributes of policy outcomes (Howlett, 2012); for example, whether policy objectives have been accomplished, whether policy target groups were impacted, whether the policy problem has been resolved, and several other key dimensions of the problem area. Compton, M.E. states that the success of the policy depends on good policy, which comes from decision-making, which in turn is influenced by the decision-making process (Compton, M.E., 2019). Such an assessment process is more of an observation of the policy process. At the same time, the success of the policy can be analyzed by its results (Bovens, M., 1998.). The process, the plan, and the political feasibility of the policy, although not seemingly at the same level of analysis, are the three key elements in assessing the success of a policy. Whether assessed in terms of policy outcomes or policy processes, the multiple dimensions of policy can be effectively analyzed (Bovens, M., 2010).

The next section therefore analyses the successes and failures of Korea's Gifted and Talented Policy from the perspectives of policy outcomes, policy processes, and policy implementation.

2.2 Analysis of the success or failure of gifted education policies in South Korea

Within this evaluation framework, the first point of entry for analysing the success or failure of Korea's gifted education policy is in terms of policy objectives and outcomes, and to some extent the Korean Gifted and Talented Policy has accomplished part of its policy goals. Cho indicates the policy's intentions as identifying talented individuals early, encouraging them to develop their innate potential, and helping them contribute to Korea's overall social development (Cho., 2016). The policy has been shown to have improved the quality of the country's education, as some Korean students have made significant improvements in reading achievement and excelled in mathematics and science (Park, H., 2009). Jones argues that the Gifted and Talented Policy has been undeniably critical to the development of Korea's economy, especially its highly skilled workforce for high-tech industries (Jones, 2013).

That said, the Gifted and Talented Policy has also had negative social consequences that must be acknowledged. First, the policy's implementation has resulted in significant inequalities in educational resources, with a relatively small range of students receiving elite education, a significant imbalance of students distributed across grades, and a significant imbalance in academic performance, the imbalance between public and public schools widens further (Kitamura, Y., 2022). Some studies have marked an increase in inequalities in student academic achievement since the early 2000s, suggesting that educational reform is, in fact, trending toward greater individualisation and inequality (Byun, 2010). Lim notes that the gap between students at the top and bottom of the achievement scale has increased over the policy's duration, and using a quantitative regression analysis shows how students' performance in mathematics has continued to fall after the education reform, especially for those at the median and below (Lim, 2022).

Second, the delivery of elite education in Korea has put the cost of administration and teaching pressure on the country's general population, leaving Korean families with high financial burdens. After running a quantile regression analysis, high inequalities in student achievement according to family socio-economic status have increased, indicating a growth of socio-economic status on student achievement in general (Lim, 2022).

High education expenditure is associated with low birth rates, as the cost of private education imposes significant financial burdens on parents (Kim, 2022). These policy outcomes go beyond policy expectations, so while Korea's Gifted and Talented Policy has achieved a specialisation of human resources and brought benefits to the country, these have been accompanied by undeniable negative policy outcomes that have given critics some reason to assess the policy as a failure on the broader scale.

A second approach toward evaluating policy success or failure may be through the context of an evaluation framework at the policy-making level. The plurality of policy development largely poses a challenge to policy delivery.

Pluralism is dynamic and multiple in nature and its definition is influenced by context. Korea's gifted and talented policy is top-down (Triandis, 1995). Pülzl notes, that top-down models mainly reflect the productive capacity of policy-makers, clear policy objectives, and control of the implementation phase (Pülzl, 2017). Contextually, Korea's Gifted and Talented Policy was rooted in the Korean government's eagerness to improve the level of education in Korea, overturning its 30-year policy of equalisation of education, as the government could not prevent students and their parents from seeking out Shadow Education (Off-campus private academic tutoring). This was ultimately banned in the name of Korea's rigorous college entrance examination system. In contrast, the Korean government's subsequent introduction of the Gifted and Talented Policy was something of a compromise made to face the unstoppable rise of private education.

This part analyses interest group factors associated with pluralism in policy making. Rational Choice Theory regards individuals and groups as rational persons in the field of economics, with the rationality hypothesis stating that individuals or groups tend to choose goals that are beneficial for their well-being. Under the self-interested criteria of this hypothesis, rational people only consider the costs and benefits they directly accrue in terms of any goal they choose to pursue (Green, 2002). While the hypothesis overlooks the fact that people and groups are perceptually influenced by their environment, it demonstrates the contest between different interest groups on policy implementation and enforcement, including on policy delivery difficulties.

Liff suggests that society's commitment to equality and the perceived relevance of differences to policy-making may be a factor in pluralism (Liff, 1997). In the development of Korea's gifted and talented policy, policymakers were faced with balancing the conflicting demands of students and their families for educational resources with the scarcity of educational resources in society. They are also faced with the challenge of balancing the inequitable status quo in terms of resources between public and public schools, while also including the pressing challenge of increased academic expenses and family costs for the families of students affected by the privatized education system. Gitonga points out that, in the context of a society with such income inequality, policy equity is particularly critical (2015). This will require a difficult trade-off, as tackling each difficult issue will involve sacrifice from the stakeholders involved. For example, giving more quality education resources to students with more special skills or better academic performance will

contribute to the elitism of Korean education, adding more talents to the country for the development of society. However, this will affect the educational resources available to the more average qualified students and only the more academically able or gifted will be able to access the better schools. And, as Korea is under the influence of Confucian culture, students and their parents prefer their children to receive a better education rather than participate in a general education. Students and their families choose to pay more to send their children to private tuition classes as they have to improve their performance in a number of ways to meet the competitive environment of the entrance examinations. This is because only with better results can children enter elite public schools and elite classes in public schools. However, this has resulted in significant costs for school families to cope with the competitive educational environment.

Van Ewijk suggests that collective concerns may be used selectively if representatives of particular groups are perceived to offer greater business advantages than others, which can exacerbate inequalities (Van Ewijk, 2011). The inherently biased and inequitable attributes of Korea's giftedness education policy have largely doomed the policy to social failure, as it solely focuses on exceptional students, and believes that only exceptional people and students can better advance society, bringing with it a great deal of competition and infringing on the well-being of a large number of more average, yet qualified, students. Korea hopes to identify more outstanding students in various fields and provide them with the opportunity to excel in their respective fields for the betterment of society (Brown, E.F., 2017). While there is nothing wrong with Korea's Confucian influence on the importance of social education, the Gifted and Talented Policy's objectives are not aligned with the public interest in increasing educational outcomes, while its policy biases are evident in its circumstances, leading to the policy being broadly criticised.

The third approach to analysing the success or failure of a policy is via an evaluation framework at the policy implementation level. In the case of Korea's giftedness education policy, such an evaluation shows that the policy's failures are largely attributable to complexities in policy implementation. This policy's delivery is largely top-down and incremental, with policy decisions starting at the top of the country's hierarchy of power with government decisions and then being implemented at its lower levels, from local governments to the individual public and public schools. For the policy to be effective, coordination between its various agencies is critical: Pressman and Wildavsky have emphasised how top-down governance models require a linear relationship existing between negotiated policy objectives and implementation, with a greater number of clearance points results in greater difficulties in implementation (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). This underscores the significance of appropriate bureaucratic procedures for accurate policy implementation, as well as sufficient disposable resources, clear policy implementation objectives, and layers of oversight for this implementation. Øverbye argues that this coordination must occur at both the top level, where policy goals are established, and at the bottom levels, where services are provided to those who need help and support (Øverbye, 2017).

In the case of the implementation of Korea's giftedness education policy, Korean teachers are the lowest clearing point for the policy's implementation and as such face many obstacles. Such obstacles are exemplified by the attempt to implement STEAM education, one of the policy's later education programmes, a science education initiative launched in Korea in 2015. Park notes that during the implementation of the policy, insufficient time was set aside for teachers to prepare for STEAM specialist courses, in addition to a lack of teaching materials and expertise in the subject area (Park, 2016). Consequently, these issues resulted in a significant lack of communication and coordination between STEAM's implementation agencies, and the overall Gifted and Talented Policy implementation process, making overall policy delivery more difficult. Compounding this issue is that many of the agencies responsible for implementing giftedness education policy initiatives such as STEAM have shifted responsibility for such implementation to each other in a self-serving manner.

As a result, the effectiveness of the implementation of Korea's Gifted and Talented Policy has been greatly affected by the numerous 'clearing points' in the process and the coordination problems of the implementing agencies themselves or between them, as well as the lack of sufficient resources at their disposal.

When presented with the above evidence, this paper argues that Korea's giftedness education policy has failed in terms of overall policy outcomes, policy formulation, and policy implementation. Moreover, biases exist in regard to the determination of policy issues and salience, while coordination problems within the agencies implementing the policy rearticulate its failure.

3. Has New Public Management Made the Delivery of Public Policy More or Less Difficult?

The previous section measured the success or failure of Korea's giftedness education policy, concluding that the policy had largely failed. This section addresses whether New Public management, as an approach and philosophy, has been responsible for any difficulties in implementing the policy in Korea.

3.1 From a new public management perspective

Lorenz, C. (2012) states that New Public Management is a neoliberal policy for the public sector, advocating a combination of free markets and intensive management practices. This approach fundamentally changes the role of government from a primary provider of services to that of a monitor, and thus the adoption of Neoliberalism aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policy and social services, rather than be fully responsible for their allotment. South Korea's New Public Management Reform has coincided with Korea's giftedness education policy by introducing private schools with a focus on performance to promote better quality student development. But, as such, the difficulties implementing this policy may reflect on weaknesses in the New Public Management.

The principles of NPM focus on performance measurements to the neglect of the educational process itself. While performance helps ensure that government organisations achieve their policy goals of developing excellence, they frequently neglect the original purposes and aims of education by undermining this education's key values. Lorenz suggests that New Public Management's definition of education ignores the most important aspects of the educational process (Lorenz, 2012). Such as Students' creativity and independent thinking are limited by the excessive pursuit of grades (Kim, 2005).

Hood notes that the transformation of private tools and practices in the public sector often fails to produce their desired initial results while leading to unintended, sometimes regressive outcomes (Hood, 2004). Prior to this, all schools in Korea, both private and public, were under the control of the education sector, but with private capital replacing the public sector and subject to marketisation, these dynamics have changed. Although public schools still account for a relatively large proportion of and have the highest number of students (Choi, 2014). But states that New Public Management focuses on offering to provide more efficient, effective public services through competition (Kalimullah, 2012). Private schools place a greater emphasis on performance and achievement, with schools demanding more from students, and students attending private schools tend to pay more at home for extra-curricular tuition to get better grades. private high schools have much higher promotion rates than their public counterparts. Sung, Y.K. points out that university admissions departments are more inclined to favor students from elite high schools and are even willing to ignore or lower GPA as an important entry requirement, which causes more students from ordinary schools to fall behind or fail in university admissions (Sung, Y.K., 2011). This is prompting students in general schools to commit to extra-curricular tutoring to obtain better grades and enter prestigious universities with a higher threshold for students in general schools. In these cases, then, educational inequalities have been magnified, exacerbating negative educational outcomes in Korea. Thus, the policy's exacerbation of Korean inegalitarianism and rigidity of the college entrance examination has led to a competitive rush for educational resources in the country.

At the same time, under the New Public Management principles, the cost of education is rising. Such costs fall directly on the students and their families. Lee, C.J. points out that the new high schools and schools with autonomy established under gifted and talented policies have largely widened the gap between rich and poor rather than promoting social inclusion (Lee, C.J., 2016). Schools wrongly use the autonomy discourse as a mechanism for social closure.

In order to receive a better education and gain access to better universities, especially for students from ordinary schools to get into public schools with higher progression rates, students have to work harder and pay more. Yoon notes that Korean society at large has lost confidence in public education as a means of social advancement and wealth creation (Yoon, 2014). The education has thus lost its public service attributes, instead resulting in an explosion of extracurricular providers and private industry. Mori points out that the prevalence of shadow education in Korea has been accompanied by massive student and parental expenditures, with the ensuing high financial burden borne by Korean families creating extreme inequities, deviating profoundly from the giftedness education policy's Nature of the public service (Mori, 2010). Throughout this process, the government, as a service provider, has failed to effectively assess and manage the spurt of out-of-school training providers in a timely manner, essentially providing tacit approval of out-of-school training providers and thereby worsening the direction of educational inequity. The high cost of education has continued to impact Korea's low birth rates, while a failure to develop sound supporting policies defies the benchmark that successful policy delivery requires effective coordination between various government agencies, stakeholders, and service providers.

The impact of NPM on policy delivery can therefore be seen in the adverse consequences of marketisation, including the resulting inequity in education and the widening gap between rich and poor.

4. Conclusion

The first section of this study explored the background, implementation content, and timeline of Korea's top-down giftedness education policy, as implemented within the context of the country's New Public Reform of education. The paper then analysed the success or failure of the Gifted and Talented Policy by gauging the negativity of its policy outcomes,

reviewing policymaking-level failures based on the concepts of salience and equity, and a top-down study based on the Pressman theory. Moreover, an analysis of the implementation-level failures of Korea's giftedness education policy failures was conducted, revealing that, although the policy has achieved some of its objectives due to support from the government and policy proponents, general policy outcomes have exceeded expectations and caused many negative impacts, including large burdens of education expenditure on Korean households, low birth rates and negative impacts on educational inequality. The section concluded that, while there are no outright policy successes or failures, the Korean giftedness education policy is to a large extent a failure. Pluralism's impact on policy delivery was also analysed in this context, with Rational Choice Theory used to examine the incongruent relationships between stakeholders that have further increased difficulties in policy delivery.

The second section of the paper analysing the impact of the New Public Management on difficulties in policy delivery. The paper argues that New Public Management has increased difficulties in delivering the Korean Gifted and Talented Policy in two ways: first, an increased focus on performance and goals has often ignored the educational process itself, while the transfer of education's economic costs to students' families has resulted in a number of complications, including a severe increase in household education expenditures and a lowering of the Korean birth rate. Second, the introduction of private capital as an alternative to the public sector under New Public Management has increased competition, market-based mechanisms, and decentralisation. Under such a mechanism, public schools in Korea have easier access to educational resources and recognition from prestigious schools, challenging the educational resources of students in ordinary schools and causing inequalities in education. In sum, the Korean gifted and talented policy has been a failure to some extent in terms of policy outcomes. It is influenced by a variety of factors such as the pluralization of policymaking, the policy implementation process, and new public management, making it more difficult to deliver.

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