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Education Welfare Projects in Korea¹⁾

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The importance of education welfare is growing as a means of preventing the education gap from widening as a result of the educational environment and socioeconomic inequalities deteriorating following the Covid-19 pandemic. It is crucial that no one, in a time of crisis or otherwise, be put in a disadvantageous position in education because of their socioeconomic disadvantage or lack of access to resources. In this regard, it is essential that education welfare projects are designed and delivered so as to provide equal opportunities for education to students and outside-of-school adolescents alike. This study examines the concept of education welfare as presented in relevant legal frameworks and municipal ordinances, analyzes the education welfare projects implemented by the central and municipal governments and local offices of education, and presents improvement options.

Introduction

The learning gap among schoolchildren has emerged as a significant social concern in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Huge sums of money have been put into building wireless networks (Wi-Fi) in schools, distributing smart devices, and building online education platforms, but the gap has hardly narrowed. Following the Covid-19 outbreak, education gaps have widened instead, likely as a result of existing disparities in living conditions and available resources in a disaster situation translating into a

1) This is an abridged reworking of *Analysis on Educational Welfare Expenditure of Central and Local Governments* (2022), a KIHASA working paper, authored by Wonhee Na et al.

greater impact on everyday life for some social segments, adding to the existing disadvantage in learning, especially for children of socioeconomically underprivileged backgrounds.

The need is acute now for education welfare to play a bigger role in mending education disparities. It is also important to assess and monitor the various education welfare projects administered by different agencies. In recognition of the need for education welfare for vulnerable groups, the education authorities concerned have been at work to enhance education support, both universal and targeted, including subsidized education programs, tailored education assistance for children from low-income families, and daycare and after-school programs. However, the lack of a clear definition for education welfare poses challenges in precisely taking stock of current education welfare projects. In this study, I attempt to pin down the concept of education welfare, which has been defined varyingly across time by different researchers, and then analyze in a comprehensive way education welfare projects run separately by the central and local governments.

Defining education welfare

◆ *Literature review*

Education welfare has been conceptualized in various ways in previous studies by different researchers at different times. Education welfare in its broad sense may cover all members of society. In a narrow sense, it targets the ‘education-marginalized’ or ‘education-vulnerable’ strata of society. The concept of education welfare has also been explored in terms of the relationship between education and social welfare. Some have regarded all education activities as education welfare. Others view education welfare as a component of social welfare. Still others see education as an integral part of social welfare that serves as a means to embody a welfare society.

There has emerged from multiple studies conducted in recent years a practical prioritarian view, a position arguing for reducing relative marginalization and disparities in education as well as guaranteeing an absolute minimum level of education²⁾. In this view, education welfare as distinguished from social welfare is ‘school-led’ and ‘directly related to the regular academic curriculum.’

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2) Lee, Bong Joo & Woo, Myungsuk. (2014). A Study of Size and Priorities of Public Finance for Educational Welfare Programs: Focusing on the Seoul Metropolitan Education Office. *Journal of Economics and Finance of Education*, 23(4), 75–104; Eom, Moonyoung et al. (2014). A Study for Exploring the Actual Conditions and the Efficiency Plans of Education Welfare Investment. Korean Education Development Institute.

[Table 1] Education welfare as defined in the existing literature

		Concept of education welfare
Existing literature	Korea	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In terms of the relationship between education and social welfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The concept of welfare as inherent in education. - Education welfare as a realm of social welfare. - Education itself as a component of social welfare. 2. In terms of its target populations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted support for socioeconomically vulnerable students (narrow) - Universal support for all students (broad) 3. Defined grounded in practical prioritarianism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some recent studies have made attempts to conceptualize educational welfare in a prioritarian context - As distinct from social welfare, education welfare is defined as “school-led” and “directly related to the regular academic curriculum.”
	Overseas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. OECD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No ‘educational welfare’ is used, but ‘equity’, a similar concept: To make society more equitable, all individuals should have access to equal learning opportunities regardless of social background, origin, gender, etc. and students with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and socially disadvantaged situations should receive special assistance. - Early childhood education and care and adult learning as important policy areas - OECD’s education expenditure surveys focus on within-institutional settings (formal education, schools), while the social expenditure database (SOCX) focuses on individuals and families in disadvantaged circumstances. 2. Other cases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The UK and France distinguish between education welfare and social welfare - Germany, Finland, and Japan do not distinguish between education and welfare, but include education policies within the framework of social welfare policies.

Source: Na, Wonhee et al. (2022). *Analysis on Educational Welfare Expenditure of Central and Local Governments*, KIHASA.

◆ Legal frameworks

The Constitution and the Framework Act on Education provide the principles and basis for education welfare. Paragraph 1 of Article 31 of the Constitution puts forth a definition of education welfare: “All citizens shall have an equal right to receive an education corresponding to their abilities.” Article 4 of the Framework Act on Education provides grounds for an “equal opportunity of education for all” (Paragraph 1) and the “responsibility of the state and local governments for realizing education welfare” (Paragraph 2). Legislation concerning education welfare is scattered not only across various Acts concerning school education³⁾ but also across Acts on general social welfare pertaining to children, youth, and workers⁴⁾. Education welfare bills had been proposed many times throughout the 17th through 20th National Assemblies, but they all expired as the terms of these assemblies ended.

In these circumstances, most municipal governments and local education authorities have their own ordinances in place to implement education welfare programs. A comparison between the ordinances of the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education suggests that while the city government targets “preschool children, primary and secondary schoolchildren, out-of-school adolescents, and those wishing to receive lifelong education,” the office of education targets “all students.”

3) Early Childhood Education Act; Elementary and Secondary Education Act; Higher Education Act; Act on Special Education for Persons with Disabilities; Lifelong Education Act.

4) Child Care Act; National Basic Living Security Act; Social Welfare Services Act; Child Welfare Act; Act on Welfare of Persons with Disabilities.

In addition, the city government’s projects on ‘healthy development of students, children, and youth’ target ‘out-of-school children and adolescents’, whereas the office of education concentrates on within-school welfare programs, including those ensuring curriculum coverage and learning opportunities and eco-friendly school meal programs.

[Table 2] A comparison of education welfare ordinances

「Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education Basic Ordinance on Education Welfare」	「Seoul Metropolitan City Ordinance on the Establishment and Operation of the Public-Private Council for Education and Welfare」
<p>Article 1 (Purpose) This ordinance aims to contribute to the promotion of students’ education welfare by stipulating matters concerning the establishment of educational welfare policies, their support, and the activation of public-private cooperation in accordance with Articles 31 and 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea and Article 54 of the Enforcement Decrees of laws such as Article 27 of the Basic Education Act and Article 28 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.</p> <p>Article 2 (Definition of Terms) “Education welfare” refers to the provision of opportunities for all students to receive consistent education and support for all matters to reduce educational marginalization, maladaptation, and inequality caused by individual and social factors so that all students can develop their full potential by receiving education that meets their educational needs. “Education welfare project” means a project implemented by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of the Superintendent of Education (hereinafter referred to as the “Superintendent”) to promote students’ education welfare, and refers to the following projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Projects for ensuring that the formal curriculum and learning opportunities are available for all B. Eco-friendly school lunch program C. Projects for reducing the burden of public education expenses D. Projects for preschool education E. Projects for special education F. Projects for expanding the care function of schools G. Projects for promoting student health management H. Projects for maladjusted and marginalized students I. Education expenses for socioeconomically vulnerable students J. Support for multicultural, North Korean, and multi-child students K. Projects for the support of students from families in poverty or near-poverty and single-parent families. L. Other projects that the Superintendent deems necessary for education welfare. <p>Article 7 (Eligible Students for Educational Welfare Projects) Students eligible for education welfare benefits are students enrolled in kindergartens under Article 2(2) of the Early Childhood Education Act, schools under Article 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and other educational institutions deemed necessary by the Superintendent.</p>	<p>Article 1 (Purpose) The purpose of this ordinance is to stipulate matters concerning the establishment and operation of the Seoul Education and Welfare Public-Private Council, a public-private consultative body for educational support and cooperation in Seoul.</p> <p>Article 2 (Definition) In this ordinance, education and welfare refers to “the establishment and support of a comprehensive welfare system related to education in order to fairly provide educational opportunities for pre-school children, elementary and secondary school students, out-of-school youth, and those seeking continuing education, enhance equity in curriculum, and improve the quality of education.”</p> <p>Article 3 (Functions) The functions of the Seoul Public-Private Council for Education and Welfare (hereinafter referred to as the “Council”) are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Deliberation on major public-private partnerships related to education and welfare for the healthy development of students and children and adolescents B. Ratification of policy council consultation matters pursuant to Article 8, Paragraph 2 C. Coordination of the agenda for the Policy Council

Source: author’s summarization of the “Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education Basic Ordinance on Education Welfare” and the “Seoul Metropolitan City Ordinance on the Establishment and Operation of the P ublic–Private Council for Education and Welfare”

◆ *Education welfare, defined*

A general overview of recent studies and related laws and ordinances suggests that education welfare is distinct from social welfare in that it focuses on school-oriented assistance ‘directly related to the regular curriculum.’ Regarding targeting, education welfare, as presented in the literature reviewed, employs a mixed approach that combines selectivism and universalism rather than favoring one over the other. Education services delivered ‘within schools’ constitute a key difference that sets education welfare apart from social welfare, as a similar distinction is made in a 2021 OECD report on educational expenditure about the location of service providers between within and outside of educational institutions. Education welfare is thus defined in a broad sense as the provision of social services intended to meet the educational needs of all members of society, with a special emphasis placed, in line with the practical prioritarian approach that emerged in some previous studies, on promoting learning opportunities for those who are educationally marginalized or disadvantaged. This definition combines a universal approach to welfare, encompassing all children and students, with a selectivist approach to addressing the learning gaps that exist in lower socioeconomic classes. The targets of education welfare include young children, students in primary and secondary schools, out-of-school adolescents, and even adults with low educational attainments.

◆ *Method of analysis*

Our analysis of education welfare programs drew on the 2022 project descriptions and budget information published by the central government (Open Finance, dBrain system), municipal governments (Local Finance 365, e-Hojo system), and local education authorities (Local Education Finance Disclosure System, K-edufine system). Given that the trends in education spending must have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we used the National Assembly’s finalized budgetary data for 2022, the year that students returned to normal-time in-person classes. Our analysis focused, at the national level, on the Ministry of Education, the national government’s education policy arm, and, at the municipality-level, on the Seoul metropolitan city—its government and the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education—for which data is more abundant and better organized than for other cities.

[Table 3] Merge of data on education welfare projects

Documentation used for analysis		Documentation used for reference	
	Documentation 1 (Published data)	Documentation 2 (Budgetary documents)	Documentation 3 (Project rationale)
Features	Budget by component	Budget by sub-component	Project rationale, what it is composed of and for whom, at sub-component level
File format	Excel	Pdf	Pdf
Cons	No data on sub-component level allocations	Unable to determine what the project consists of and for whom it is intended	Too much information to absorb
Sources	Open Finance	Internal documentation	Internal documentation
	Local Education Finance Disclosure System	City/province/education office websites	City/province/education office websites
	Local Finance 365	Local government websites	Local government websites

Source: author's configuration

◆ Education welfare projects

Education welfare projects target different age groups, ranging from preschool children to adults, aiming at ensuring that compulsory education is available to all, expanding early childhood education opportunities, preventing inequality in educational opportunities resulting from economic and regional disparities, and tackling educational maladjustment and inequality. These projects cover lifelong education and job training and, when it comes to the promotion of national basic education, efforts to ensure that all citizens have opportunities for education and attain at least a basic level of education. Projects that are aimed at reducing disparities in educational opportunities include assisting in tuition and school meals for students from low-income families, enhancing educational conditions for students living in low-income urban and rural areas, bridging the information divide, as well as programs designed specifically for school dissenters and dropouts, out-of-school youth, returnees from overseas, North Korean refugees, and children from families of multicultural backgrounds.

◆ Classifying education welfare projects

Education welfare projects are classified as either 'within school' or 'outside of school', depending on where the service is provided, either targeted or universal, depending on the groups the service is meant for, and specific to a particular age group (preschoolers, primary and secondary schoolchildren, college students, or adults). As illustrated in Table 4, Type A represents targeted in-school programs, Type B universal in-school programs, Type C targeted 'outside of school' programs, and Type D universal 'outside of school' programs. By the OECD standards, however, expenditures on care and education services for preschool children, depicted as the hatched areas in Table 4, fall under either the education category (for *Education at a Glance*) or the social expenditures category (for the SOCX database).

[Table 4] Classification of education welfare projects (Types A, B, C, and D)

	Education welfare projects		Target population	OECD
	Targeted	Universal		
Within school 'Within educational institutions'	A	B	Adults	Education expenditure
			College students	
			Primary & secondary school students	
	Preschool children			
Outside of school 'Outside of educational institutions'	C	D	Adults	Social expenditure
			College students	
			Primary & secondary school students	
			Preschool children	

Source: author's configuration

Current state of education welfare

Most of the Ministry of Education's education welfare projects are 'within school' programs that are targeted (Type A) or universal (Type B). The most representative of Type A are national scholarships intended for students in higher education. Type-B projects include childcare cost support for parents with preschool-age children and free schooling for high school students. Among the Education Ministry's targeted 'outside-of-school' projects (Type C) are employment-linked benefits for high school students and lifelong education vouchers. Universal 'outside-of-school' projects include support for the development and delivery of open online courses.

For the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, the focus is mostly on within-school universal support (Type B) aimed at, as is made clear in its Basic Education Welfare Ordinance, "providing equal opportunities in education for all students." Among the education welfare projects administered by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education are free school lunch programs, support for education costs for parents of preschool-age children of 3~5 years of age, and support for textbooks for children in primary and secondary education. There are some within-school projects that are of the targeted type, such as afterschool care programs for primary school children (intended to help to fill childcare gaps and reduce the childcare cost burden on families with both parents working) and the education allowance for students from households with a countable income equal to or less than 50 percent of the median. The education office's "outside of school" projects as well are mostly universal programs (Type D), examples of which include textbook support for accredited lifelong education institutions, the Nuri Curriculum serving children 3~5 years of age as financial support for childcare costs, support in the enhancement of linkage

among afterschool care services, prevention of in-school smoking, and prevention of smoking and violence in school. Among the targeted ‘outside of school’ projects (Type C) administered by the office of education are alternative education programs (dropout prevention, support for alternative education, help centers for adolescents, etc.), operational support for cyber middle and high schools serving adults and school dropouts in their teens, lifelong education programs from adults with disabilities, and support for students from families of multicultural backgrounds.

Our analysis found that most of the education welfare projects run by Seoul Metropolitan City are of the universal ‘outside of school’ type (Type D). Accounting for over 80 percent of the city government’s education welfare expenditure, these Type-D projects consist mostly of support for childcare costs for preschool children, afterschool community activity programs, and afterschool care in and outside of school. The city government’s universal ‘within school’ projects include eco-friendly school meals and free lunch programs for kindergarteners and primary and secondary school students. However, it should be noted that a simplistic comparison of figures between the central government (Ministry of Education) and local offices of education on the one hand and local governments on the other should be avoided, as while for the former the responsibility is mostly about education, the latter, of which the City of Seoul is one, have a lot more than education to handle, including public order and safety, general public administration, and social welfare.

[Table 5] Education welfare projects undertaken by Ministry of Education, Seoul Office of Education, and Seoul Metropolitan City Government, by type

	Ministry of Education	Local Office of Education (Seoul)	Local Government (Seoul)
Type A (within School, targeted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customized national scholarship support (national scholarship support, college student work scholarship support, outstanding student national scholarship support, hope ladder scholarship support, post-employment student loan/bond repayment and interest payment, post-employment student loan interest waiver, military interest waiver, special exemption, secondary conservation, loss compensation) • Support for the education of students with disabilities (Support for the Education of Children with Disabilities, National Special School Improvement, Support for Vulnerable Students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Benefit Assistance (special assistance for low-income students, tuition assistance, and free education for special education students ages 3-5) • Education welfare priority support • Support for academic improvement • Support for after-school programs • Elementary care classrooms • Support for the education of multicultural and North Korean refugee children • Special education welfare • School violence prevention and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education benefits (National Basic Living Security Education Benefit, Basic Recipient Education Benefit) • Scholarship support • Scholarship Fund • Scholarship recipient selection • Scholarship foundation operations • Support for low-income scholarships • Operate dental clinics for students and low-income children • Support for older at-risk students
Type B (within school, universal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free high school education • Education for preschool children • Childcare for preschool children • Textbooks • Teaching manuals • Development and distribution of curriculum-related books • Online textbook pilot projects • Support for university-centered continuing education • Support for happy dormitories • Expansion of facilities at national universities [lease-type private business (BTL)]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition assistance • Textbooks (primary, secondary, high school special education, and special school textbooks) • Preschool fees for children aged 3-5 • Support for school meals • Free school meals • School health care • Support for private preschools • Student safety management • School violence prevention and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Free Education • Operation of educational welfare centers • Support for entrance preparation • School lunch program • Children's dental clinic program • School violence prevention programs • Providing school security
Types A and B for preschool children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for childcare fees for early childhood education, • Capacity building support for state-run schools (early childhood education support) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant tuition for children ages 3-5 • Preschool tuition for children ages 3 • After-school program fees • Low-income preschool tuition • Do Run Do Run Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for green preschool meals
Type C (outside of school, universal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for high school job placement incentives • Continuing Education GED support (GED program operations support, GED activation and network support) • Continuing education voucher support • Support for adult literacy programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative education programs • Continuing education operations (GED, broadcast secondary school tryout, continuing education facilities) • Literacy programs • Adult continuing education for adults with disabilities • Multicultural student support • After-school child care assistance • School health care (medical assistance for students with rare and incurable diseases, medical assistance for migrant students, and assistance for students in crisis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dream Start projects • Supporting out-of-school youth (DREAM Operations) • Digital Tutor Support Project • Seoul-type mentoring program • Adult literacy education • Childcare at single-parent family welfare centers • Out-of-school youth meal support program
Type D (outside of school, universal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing of the National Center for Lifelong Learning • Revitalization of local continuing education • Development and utilization of Korean-style online open course content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook support (textbooks for accredited continuing education facilities) • Operation of Innovative Education Districts • Nuri program (childcare for 3-5 year-olds) • Strengthening after-school care services • School smoking prevention education (Operation of school smoking prevention centers) • School violence prevention and education (school smoking prevention campaigns and smoke-free streets) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth (village) after-school activity program • After-school care within and outside of schools • Childcare fees for 0-2 year-olds, including the operation of after-school care centers. • Support for infant and toddler childcare fees • After-school childcare fees • Support for the operation of after-school daycare centers

Note: rows in beige represent portions included in the SOCX .

Source: author's summarization



Concluding remarks

After the Covid-19 pandemic, the learning gap has widened to a worrying extent among school-age children and youth. Preventing the gap from further widening would require that, on top of existing education welfare programs, additional support measures be promptly taken tailored to students and youth of socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our analysis found that the majority of the education welfare projects that the Ministry of Education is undertaking are of the ‘within school’ kind, with those intended for primary and secondary school children universal (Type B) and those intended for students in higher education more targeted (Type A).

The majority of education welfare projects undertaken by local offices of education are also predominantly ‘within school’ programs with universal coverage (Type B), such as free school meals. In contrast, local governments prioritize ‘outside of school’ support, focusing on out-of-school adolescents and providing Type-D assistance for childcare costs for infants and toddlers.

There is a need for the central government, local education offices, and local governments to increase their education welfare support through Type-C programs targeting socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals outside of school, such as alternative education and literacy enhancement for adults.

This study is an attempt to clearly define education welfare and analyze the education welfare projects implemented by the central government, local governments, and local education offices. However, the disparities that exist between the central government and local education authorities in the way they categorize their education welfare projects added complexity to the process of our analysis and rendered the evaluation less accurate than it otherwise could have been. For example, how local authorities classify their education welfare projects, lumping them together with projects on older adults under the umbrella category of ‘older adults and youth’, may conflict with the central government’s classification, where ‘older adults’ and ‘youth’ are distinct, each treated as a category of its own. This discrepancy in classification can make it difficult to keep track of how much of what services go to whom. As this in turn can cause overlaps and gaps in support, changes and amendments should be promptly made to the classification methods.