

Study on the School System at Elementary and Secondary School 1 Study on Free Education Before School-age in Other Countries (Outline)

1. Purpose and Overview of the Research

(1) Purpose of the Research

Education reform has been discussed in the Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding and the Central Council for Education as urgent policy issues. With this background, the “Study on the School System at Elementary and Secondary School” aims to provide basic information on the issue of educational reform, and pursue insights into mid-long term education reform discussion.

Our international cases team aims to identify why education reform was needed in other countries through analyzing their policymaking processes, and provide findings useful for our discussion on education systems through examining their achievements and issues by the reform.

(2) Overview of the Research

The main theme of the research for the international cases team this year was, focusing especially on the educational reform of free education pre-school education, to understand its current status and characteristics as a system in other countries and to figure out their policymaking processes for reform, including the policy content and planning processes.

We researched five countries where the starting age of free education pre-school education differs from that of compulsory education (US, UK(England), France, Finland and Korea), and identified characteristics, achievements and challenges of their free pre-school policy.

We conducted the research mainly by document investigation. Additionally, we visited governmental organizations, including policymakers (Department for Education), accreditation and monitoring organization (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills : ofsted), municipalities and educational organizations before school-age in England, and collected pertinent materials.

[Research Period: FY 2014-2015, Project Leader: WATANABE Keiko, Director, Department for Educational Policy and Evaluation]

2. Overview of the Research Results

Overview of each country

<US>—Chapter 1, Chapter 2

Chapter 1 reviews education pre-school education and childcare in the US. The US education before school-age and childcare is a pluralistic system and provides a variety of programs. Although names of programs etc. are not always consistent, and survey targets in statistical data need to be carefully handled, the government reports and statistics show that children of three or four start using private programs such as preschools, nursery schools or day care, and most of five-year

-old children are enrolled in kindergarten attached to public schools. With the policy targeting

academic performance improvement in elementary and secondary school education, and the accumulation of research outcomes of the effects by education before school-age, in recent years, many states are now supporting free education programs for four-year old children, and the Obama Administration has responded by starting to take efforts to support them, as well.

Chapter 2 reviews a policy that aims to expand and organize preschools/pre-kindergartens that are not included in the range of free public education, and target three-to-four-year-old children generally serviced by private businesses, by subsidies from states or the federal government. Each state's policy of universal preschool or universal prekindergarten targeting three-to-four-year-old children takes either of the following two standpoints: to target completely free education or to target eliminating disparities in receiving educational opportunities by financial aid for the poor. The Obama Administration's education policy aims, expressed as "From Cradle to Career" straightforward, to secure education opportunities from the day of birth, and even after the start of their career via higher education. Many programs in current policies still focus on a somewhat welfare aspect. Examining cases where these policy changes happen, however, a policy of targeting free universal preschool without income limitation shows feasibility worthy of attention.

<UK (England)>—Chapter 3

Since the late 1990s, England has been expanding and organizing education before school-age, in reaction to various domestic and international study results that pointed out the positive effects of enriched education before school-age, to academic performance in elementary school and after, and free education before school-age for three and four-year-old children (15 hours a week, 38 weeks a year) started from September 2010. Free education for two-year-old children started from September 2014, for families facing social/financial difficulties. Service providers of the free education, regardless of their business format and type, are basically obliged to execute educational activities based on a common national education course, and to be accredited and monitored by ofsted. The service providers fulfilling these obligations receive budgets from the government through municipalities, basically calculated according to the number of enrolled children they have.

A distinctive fact in England is that free education is provided in order to enhance educational function, while education and childcare are unified both functionally and administratively. With the purpose of enhancing educational function, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (SFEYFS) is defined in the common national education course. Additionally a system of accreditation and monitoring by the ofsted has been established, for the purpose of guaranteeing the quality of service providers. They have been promoting free education before school-age while evaluating the policy effects, including financial investment through massive panel surveys on the activities above.

<France>—Chapter 4

Facilities accepting children before compulsory school age fall under two structures. While childcare facilities are provided as social welfare services, with fees charged according to income, nursery schools (l'école maternelle) belong to the education system and is provided free of charge, based on the principle of free public education at all levels. Nursery schools guarantee education for all children aged three to five years. Reception of two-year-old children is promoted in nursery schools in socially disadvantaged environments, aiming to redress economic, social, and cultural disparities. Nursery schools are considered as the first stage (premier degré) of the education system, having the same administrative and financial structure, as well as teacher qualification, as elementary

schools. Nursery schools aim to provide every child with a solid foundation for future academic success.

Chapter 4 outlines the nursery school system, and then summarizes the background on how they were established and developed into their current form, together with achievements and issues, based on reports published by the government.

<Finland>—Chapter 5

Childcare has been a core system of the development of child education and childcare in Finland. It was after 2000 that the child education system was accelerated to become more organized. The trigger was one-year education before school-age, targeting six-year-old children. Having started as a trial in 2000, it was institutionalized and made free in 2001, and finally compulsory in 2015. One of the intentions is to support subsequent learning by securing quality education before school-age to all children while preparing for school. Not only tuition but also food services, commuting and textbooks are free. Teaching is basically done by “kindergarten teachers”, but can also be done by “homeroom teachers” who are elementary school teachers. The cost for education before school-age is shared by the government and municipalities. Financing is transferred from the government to municipalities, adopting the same system as compulsory education, and the government subsidies come from the general budget.

<Korea>—Chapter 6

Since free education for five-year-old children was legally defined in 1997, Korea has been gradually expanding the range of free education regarding child education and childcare, and in 2011, eliminated income limitations and made it free for five-year-old children who are enrolled in nursery schools. In 2012, they extended the target to all three-to-five-year-old children, providing them with education/childcare courses common for kindergarten and nurseries.

The policy of free education before school-age has been developing as a measure to address the declining birth rate and the aging society, and acquiring support from families raising children as a childcare support measure. The policy has yet to be completely achieved, however, because the government and municipalities do not have clear ideas on how to secure financial resources that they should bear respectively. Another fact of note is that budgets for other educational expenses including facility maintenance and air-conditioning, are cut because of free education before school-age. How to solve these issues from the standpoints of securing financial resources and cost-effectiveness is worth attention.