Abstract

In recent years, importance of evidence such as scientific grounds have been increasingly recognized, and efforts have been made to achieve ‘evidence-based’ or ‘evidence-informed’ policy-making or practice in the field of education in Japan. However, efforts to use empirical data and/or research results in making policy or carrying out practice is not totally new, although the word “evidence” may not have been used.

In this paper, firstly, by tracing the 60-year history of the revision of the course of study since World War II, an overview of the use of empirical data such as the results of assessment of academic abilities has been provided. Initiatives are outlined, such as academic ability tests and pilot schools, which were started up to evaluate the ‘provisional course of study’ and out of concern about the poor academic ability of students in the postwar ‘educational reform’ era. In addition, the paper discusses how research on the curriculum which was introduced after the absence of the national surveys of scholastic achievement and other monitoring programs such as PISA of the OECD have been used.

Secondly, it is examined how educational policies were made based on empirical data or analysis in the Central Council for Education report in 1971, with special focus on the proposed ‘pilot experiment’ as a system for producing evidence that facilitates the reform of the school system and the ‘trinity cooperation’ of educator, researcher and administrator, and how these were treated in the real arena of policy making.

Learning from past experience, the following points are to be considered when promoting the use of evidence in educational policy and practice, and improving policy making and practice.

1. Building a system of producing, collecting, accumulating and disseminating evidence

   Systems have been set up to monitor the actual situation of teaching and scholastic abilities of students both at national and local levels. But challenges remain for improving the quality of evidence and research methods. Moreover, while decentralization, local autonomy establishment and school based decision making have been strengthened, disseminating evidence and good practice which may contribute to better decision making or practice at each level have become more important and there is a pressing need to improve their quality and increase their quantity.

2. Establishing a partnership among stakeholders

   Not limited to the educational field, it is indispensable to have such a partnership among
practitioners, researchers and administrators, and furthermore, the support of public opinion. In fact, administrators are increasingly seeking researchers’ cooperation in the analysis of scholastic ability assessment result at national and local levels. Academics from universities also are well aware of the active approach to policy or practice.

③ Dissemination and enlightenment, human resource development and allocation, and financial support

It is important not only to cultivate ‘evidence literacy’ or ‘research literacy’ for using evidence, but it is also necessary to develop, train and allocate human resource that have abilities to produce, collect and interpret empirical data with statistical method based on the reality of education. In addition, a considerable amount of financial expenditure is inevitable for producing, collecting, accumulating and disseminating empirical data.