
Guest Editor's Preface

We live in a society where knowledge plays an increasingly important role for our lifetime success. The folk theory of education in this society may say that "If I study hard, I can succeed, and education is the best way to help me succeed." Many parents and students who share such beliefs aspire for higher education and seek social mobility through educational investment. "Education fever" often refers to the phenomenon of national obsession with education, particularly parents' feverish aspirations and support for their children's high educational attainment and achievement. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in the national and social context of education. While each society may have its own idiosyncratic meaning and symptoms of education fever, some common elements may be observed in any society where children's education is placed as a top priority by families and parental involvement in education is a desirable social norm.

This special issue of the *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* is designed to advance our understanding of the concept "education fever" and related educational policy issues from international perspectives. Previous studies of education fever tend to polarize between micro-level individual case studies and macro-level studies that tap into social, cultural, and institutional aspects of the phenomenon. We need to bridge the gap and understand how education fever, as both individual and collective sources of energy for educational attainment and achievement, shaped the current form of education in the region of East Asian countries. We also need to examine the phenomenon of education fever beyond the boundary of Asian countries and to expand our cross-cultural understanding of the issue.

While education fever in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea has contributed to their rapid educational and economic development in the past, it also has produced some negative side effects such as excessive competition for entering into the nation's top-tier universities, narrowing education to preparation for college entrance exams, and students' disengagement in schools. Recently there were media reports of Korean families who left their country to free themselves from the ordeal of education fever and voted with their feet to choose American schools. How Asian immigrant students would fare in the American educational system is an interesting issue, where they have to cope with cultural and language barriers for their desired educational attainment and achievement.

One of the key factors that affect education fever is test score. It is not only parents that are obsessed with their children's grades and feel hard-pressed to invest more in their children's education through private tutoring after school. It is also policymakers and the public that often judge the quality of public schools by test scores or other readily available evidence and jump

on the bandwagon of reforming public schools. The past American school reform policies following *A Nation at Risk* and *Trends in International Math and Science Study* (TIMSS) reports illustrate educational policymaker's version of education fever for winning the international brain race. Indeed, student performance and school accountability are buzzwords racing through the top of many developed nations' school reform agenda.

Education fever may be viewed as a double-edged sword. How can educational policymakers and practitioners address the challenge of capitalizing on education fever as a driving engine for educational excellence and equity while reducing its potential negative effects? While this theme has significant implications for contemporary educational policy and practice across the world, it has evaded joint discussion among international educational researchers.

In light of these concerns, a multidisciplinary group of researchers from four countries—China, Japan, Korea, and the United States—contributed their papers to address the following questions related to education fever from diverse perspectives. What is the meaning of education fever as shared by educational experts in Korea? What are the historical roots and current state of test-driven education fever in China? How does parental education fever vary between Korea and Japan despite their similar educational systems? How do Korean high school students' occupational aspirations compare with those of Japanese counterparts? How does parental education fever influence Asian immigrant students' academic success or failure in Canada and the United States? How do American myths of student achievement based on test results drive school reforms? Six papers in this issue are expected to enrich our understanding of education fever and provide policy implications.

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