Critical Policy Analysis: Investigating 'Missing' Values in the Lifelong Education System of South Korea

K.P. Joo
Pennsylvania State University

In Tak Kwon
Chonbuk National University

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K. P. Joo, The Pennsylvania State University, USA
In Tak Kwon, Chonbuk National University, Korea

Abstract: *This paper illustrates that 'critical policy analysis' (CPA) can uncover meaningful 'missing' values within the highly structured, centralized South Korean lifelong education policies and institutions.*

As the field of lifelong education[2] has considerably developed over the last few decades, related theories and practices have also expanded at individual and institutional levels. Therefore, numerous iterations of lifelong education exist among different researchers, organizations, and nations in relation to their own purposes. In the U.S., however, the discussion regarding lifelong education policy and institution at the national level has largely been limited to literacy and vocational education, and the federal investment in adult education as compared to one in formal education (schooling) has been relatively bounded. This situation can be attributed to the political and institutional circumstances of American adult education practices. That is, the political decentralization and structural variety of lifelong education institutions and practices have abundantly influenced the decentralized system of adult education in the U.S., which differs on a state-by-state level, and from one organization to another.

By contrast, other nations around the world, especially some European and Asian countries, include lifelong education in the national educational policy agenda. Particularly, the institutionalization of a national lifelong education system is salient in some East Asian countries, where centralized education systems persist, since they adopt the principles of lifelong education geared toward national development. The governments of those countries have exerted substantial efforts and investments in constructing and controlling the national lifelong education system. On the one hand, institutionalized lifelong education systems result in the rapid expansion of lifelong education practices. Government-driven policy building and implementation represent an efficient way of deploying lifelong education initiatives. On the other hand, this centralized and top-down structure of the system fails to accommodate and balance various needs of stakeholders, especially the underprivileged, and to reflect critical perspectives on policy formulation and management. Hence, it is imperative to investigate, through an adequate theoretical lens, how a centralized lifelong education system misses some critical aspects of lifelong education.

This paper aims at theorizing 'critical policy analysis' (CPA) so as to unravel the complex mechanism of the highly centralized lifelong education system in South Korea. CPA, a method derived from hermeneutic critical theory (e.g., Harbermas, 1971), has the potential to explicate key attributes and legitimatizations that guide and hinder policy formation and implementation (Chalip, 1996). CPA sheds light on invisible, but significant values that have been ignored within the current lifelong education system in South Korea.

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2 'Adult education' is a term that has been broadly used in the U.S. Alternately, 'lifelong education' has been employed more extensively in Europe and Asia. The semantic notions and connotations of 'lifelong education' and 'adult education' overlap in many senses, especially in practice, though lifelong education delivers a broader conception-encompassing human lifespan-whereas adult education just refers to the age of the adult, indicating the lifespan *after* youth.

Theorizing Critical Policy Analysis

Background

The concept of CPA has been developed primarily in the academic field of policy studies. Several researchers in the policy (analysis) fields problematized the lack of methodological sophistication of prevalent models in delving into 'political struggles involved in developing and implementing policy' (Fulcher, 1989, p, 3). This limitation of policy analysis models was broadly recognized and discussed by policy studies researchers and scholars. The increasing interest in methodological issues of policy analysis transferred the focus of the study from intentions of policy to the outputs or effects of policy. This methodological trend was incorporated into post-modernism 'as a growing intellectual and cultural sensibility' (Schram, 1993, p. 250) and the recent feminist approaches to policy analysis (Taylor, 1995). The transformed view on policy analysis, likewise, reflects the intellectual needs of critical perspectives on various policy issues, and this subsequently results in the emergence of CPA.

CPA has been employed in a variety of research fields, and the form and scope of CPA may vary considerably depending on how researchers adopt and adapt it to their particular inquiries [e.g., women studies, (Marshall, 1997), rural education (Eppley, 2009), higher education (Shaw, 2004), and sport (Chalip, 1996)]. Such analysis closely investigates a policy's origins and consequences with an eye toward justice, equality, and eventually human emancipation. And these studies illuminate CPA's ability to be sensitive as well as effective in providing methods for exposing oppressive structure in the political world where a certain policy functions.

Goals and Key Features

The general notion of CPA refers to an approach to policy investigation with particular emphasis on criticality, whereby researchers can identify policy outcomes as well as processes. Namely, critical perspectives that guide analytical processes of CPA are keys to grasping problems of the target policy by pointing to underlying values of the policy and understanding how those values relate to complex policy mechanisms such as associated structures, contents, and features. In this regard, CPA sheds light on undervalued dimensions of policy by means of analyzing pertinent policy descriptions **vis**-à-**vis** structural deconstruction, which entails close examination of cultural models, embedded power relationships, and discourse patterns of policy.

In addition to these general goals of CPA-to examine a policy's origins and outcomes in light of social justice and equity, it is seminal to articulate other significant features of CPA as distinct from other policy analysis approaches. First, it is only possible to produce 'legitimate' and exhaustive interpretations of policy when we consider circumstantial and contextual factors surrounding it. Put differently, from the critical perspective, policy can be viewed as an outcome of social and historical conditions; how one takes those various conditions into account determines if one successfully performs a valid CPA. In this sense, reviewing historical evolution of policy in the process of CPA enables us to capture how social conditions impact decisions made by policy-makers. For example, historical and social values embedded in South Korean lifelong education policy stem from The Social Education Act[3] enacted in 1982. Further,

3 The Social Education Act (SEA) was enacted in 1982 and has been legally reformed into 'The Lifelong Education Act (LEA)' in 1999. The LEA is particularly differentiated from the SEA in terms of the extended role of lifelong educators, which used to be restricted to developing, managing, and evaluating programs, but now includes teaching tasks in lifelong education practice.

the distinctive political development and economic advancement of South Korea account for central social values such as democracy and capitalism in the country.

Second, similar to critical social research, the outcomes of CPA encompass not only understanding what is going on and why, but also prescribing an antidote to the problem (Troyna, 1994). Therefore, CPA is obviously a political project, which inevitably requires a moral and ethical stance (Eppley, 2009; Prunty, 1985). This prescriptive, rather than descriptive, nature of CPA implies further steps to resolve the problems identified through the analysis process. In order to highlight this proactive aspect of CPA, researchers are accountable for recognizing and acknowledging power relationships among stakeholders. Given such political aspects of CPA, a significant task for analyzing the South Korean lifelong educational policy can be posited as explicating prevailing political values rooted in the key policies.

In sum, the overall procedure of CPA is assessing the dominant conception of policy and attendant problems that cause and reproduce the current system and structure of educational practice. Likewise, it investigates underlying assumptions of policy and suggests how those problems, so-called 'missing' values, can be corrected by analyzing representative policy resources (e.g., the Lifelong Education Act in this study), which involve lifelong education policy descriptions. This process stresses scrutinizing factors of inequality and oppression, conjecturing as to how this injustice becomes manifest in social systems and conditions. While the South Korean national lifelong education has developed as unproblematic, the critical approach to its broader context and consequences can appraise values that have been silent-the reason for naming them 'missing' values-in the policy.

'Missing' Values in Lifelong Education Policies and Institutions

Two major outcomes alongside emergent themes throughout the CPA process are the institutionalization and unachieved welfare in the centralized lifelong education system.

The Institutionalization of Lifelong Education in South Korea

The burgeoning movement of lifelong education and increasing educational needs of people regardless of their ages and positions were first legalized by the South Korean government in 1972, which gave rise to the Social Education Act. The national lifelong education system was further institutionalized and consolidated in the 1980s and the 1990s. In so doing, the institutionalization of the system was highly affected by the aforementioned development-oriented approach to education, and consequently national lifelong education initiatives have been established within this centralized national education model. However, the South Korean system does not effectively reflect the political dynamics of lifelong education practice in reality. The centralization and institutionalization of the South Korean lifelong education system have prevented local cultural advancement, precluded autonomy of local government and individual lifelong education institutions, and caused financial imbalance among major lifelong education tasks posed by the government. Even though the South Korean model seemingly emphasizes the role that local governments and communities play in national lifelong education initiatives, there are durable obstacles for local communities to promote sustainable learning capabilities of their people.

The Unmet Promise for Welfare

As the polarization among different social classes has become increasingly serious in South Korea, a variety of socially excluded groups draw more attention among scholars and policy-makers. In this context, lifelong education as an effective strategy to galvanize the

development of those groups has been underlined on relevant national policy agendas. This policy movement in South Korea has been influenced by several influential international organizations (e.g., OECD, 1999; UNESCO, 2002).

The South Korean lifelong education system has attempted to include various needs of underprivileged groups in national policies (Lee, & Chae, 2007). For instance, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has initiated lifelong education programs and basic academic certifications specifically targeting the underprivileged. The Ministry of Health and Welfare has undertaken the "Better-living" enterprise in order to promote self-development and employment of socially excluded people. The Ministry of Labor has also provided diverse vocational training programs for supporting lifelong learning of low-income groups. Likewise, one of the significant goals of South Korean lifelong education is to guarantee subsistence for those who lack employability and to facilitate productive social participation to encourage life autonomy for employees. Nevertheless, the South Korean model of lifelong education on the welfare level has not succeeded because it poorly reflects the contextual differences between South Korea and other, specifically North European, countries.

Lifelong education policy for the underprivileged groups should be constructed by an integrative consideration of employment and welfare as well as education itself. Martin (2003) noted that the current lifelong education policy is characterized in politically convenient ways in order to resolve persistent economic problems through lifelong education projects in a short period of time. The South Korean lifelong education model regards the underprivileged groups in the society as the target of national welfare initiatives, employing an efficient way to implement top-down welfare policy. Along with the centralized national lifelong education system, this top-down model hampers the development of mature citizenship based on citizens' autonomy, ethical quality and democratic society. In this respect, autonomy of learners, which has been considered as one of the core principles of lifelong learning for a long time, should be revisited (Caffarella & Barnett, 1994; Cross, 1981). In other words, lifelong education participants should be recognized not as recipients of national lifelong education initiatives, but as active subjects. In so doing, the government can establish a more authentic and inclusive lifelong education system, where various relevant policies can mutually develop, and consequently build the integrative lifelong education policy comprehensively reflected on multiple aspects of politics, society, economics, and education in the country.

Discussion & Implications

Though the value of policy analysis, in general, is to illuminate evidence that guides decision making and social practice (Rein, 1983), conventional policy studies in education, including lifelong education, have focused primarily on the ways in which the social majority (power-holders) finds cost effective methods of pursuing their goals (Ball, 1990; Scheurich, 1994). In contrast, critical theorists problematize the functionalist way of understanding policy due to the absence of issues of equality. They strive to understand the broader political, societal, and cultural meaning-generating processes by pursuing an overarching purpose of human emancipation (Prunty, 1985). Likewise, critical perspectives on education policy enable us to obtain insight into the broader implications a policy may hold for education by illuminating the relationship among power, culture, and ideologies (Edmonson, 1999).

Unless the identified problems, which are implicit and latent rather than overt, are adequately dealt with on the national policy level, the seemingly successful national lifelong

education system of South Korea is more likely to reach the limits of effectiveness and productivity. For example, although currently unemployed people may be able to enter the labor market with the assistance of lifelong education policy, they might quickly drop out again. In addition, strengthening collaboration among the national government, local governments, and various civic organizations is needed. From a policy perspective, it is vital to establish a coordinating organization that functions to jumpstart the collaboration among these groups, whereby effective partnerships can be formed.

The ways in which the South Korean lifelong education system and attendant institutions were examined through CPA provide implications for further policy studies in adult education, which may offer a foundational rationale in building national lifelong education systems in many other countries. Moreover, the methodological and theoretical approach of the study and findings imply a critical sense of searching for both historically and culturally significant values in adult education policy.

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