

Education policy reforms and their impact on public school systems in Asia

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ABSTRACT

Education policy reforms across Asia have sought to improve the quality, accessibility, equity, and effectiveness of public school systems through curriculum updates, teacher professional development, decentralized school governance, expanded digital infrastructure, and increased funding. Despite widespread reform efforts, empirical evidence reveals persistent gaps between policy design and classroom-level implementation, with countries such as the Philippines, India, and Indonesia experiencing uneven gains in student learning outcomes, equity, and school performance. This study employs data mining integrated with a systematic literature review to synthesize findings from empirical studies, policy reports, and academic publications on education policy reforms across Asian public school systems. Guided by Fullan's Theory of Educational Change, Systems Theory, and the Political Economy Theory of Education, the analysis identifies recurring themes including curriculum reform, funding disparities, teacher quality, school governance, infrastructure limitations, and technology integration. Findings indicate that teacher training exerts the strongest influence on student achievement and reform sustainability, while insufficient funding, weak management capacity, and urban-rural disparities remain the most significant barriers to effective implementation. The study concludes that successful education reform in Asia requires coordinated investment in teacher capacity, equitable resource allocation, strengthened monitoring systems, and evidence-based policymaking tailored to local contexts. Recommendations are offered to guide future educational policy development toward more inclusive, effective, and sustainable outcomes across the region.

Keywords: Education policy reform, public school systems, teacher professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

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Education policy reforms consist of purposeful changes to policies, programs, and the way governance is organized with the aim of improving the quality, accessibility, equity, and effectiveness of education systems. In Asia, such reforms have involved revising the curriculum, providing professional development for teachers, decentralizing the management of schools, adjusting the way education is financed, expanding digital learning and promoting inclusive education. For instance, the Philippines introduced the K-12 curriculum so that students would be better prepared for further education and for employment. The Right to Education Act in India mandates free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. Indonesia's School-Based Management policy includes community participation and transfers decision-making power to the local level. The aim of these reforms is to improve student learning outcomes, boost school performance, reduce educational inequalities, and allow students to meet the demands of a changing society. In the case of public schools, such measures are necessary for tackling current problems and for helping to achieve sustainable educational progress.

Even though many education policy reforms have been carried out in Asia, recent research shows that major problems and gaps still exist. In Indonesia, India and the Philippines, higher school enrollment has not consistently led to better learning results, greater equity or improved school performance. The available literature points to ongoing inequalities resulting from insufficient funding, uneven distribution of resources, differences in the quality of teachers, and mismatches between the design of policies and their actual implementation. For example, in Indonesia higher enrollment has not been linked to higher literacy rates, since only half of fifteen-year-olds reached the level of basic reading competence in the international assessments. India still suffers from financial and resource limitations and reform efforts frequently fail to benefit the most disadvantaged groups. In the Philippines, differences in administrative capacity hinder the effective implementation of policy. All these points show that shortages in resources, in teacher training and in administrative capacity prevent education policies from being successfully implemented. Moreover, the level of resistance to change within the existing bureaucratic systems, which differ from country to country, also has an impact on policy implementation. The management difficulties and the disparities between rural and urban areas are further exacerbated by each country's historical background in terms of infrastructure and governance. Even with a great deal of reform, classroom outcomes are still inconsistent and are affected by demographic, geographic and institutional factors both within and between countries. The fact that this is so suggests that, although there are national differences, the success of education reforms in Asia is determined by recurring challenges and opportunities. This underscores the importance of carrying out comparative analysis to detect common patterns and to assist in the formulation of future policy in the region. Most of the current research is concerned with the experiences of individual countries, which hinders an understanding of wider regional trends and of the complex interactions among policy, culture and economic factors across national boundaries.

To fill this gap, the present analysis brings together the findings from several countries in Asia to provide a comparative view of the implementation and results of education policy reforms. By carrying out a systematic review and analysis of the assigned articles, this study aims to identify both common and differing trends, to enhance understanding of the obstacles to effective reform, and to make evidence-based recommendations for improving equitable and effective education policy throughout the region.

Educational policy changes affect public schools by making education easier to access, improving teaching quality, managing schools more effectively, and helping students perform better. In Asia, these changes usually include updating curricula, training teachers, increasing school funding, using digital tools, and improving school management. These steps aim to

address current problems and improve school performance. However, results vary from country to country because of how changes are made, available resources, management quality, and social and economic conditions. Even though more students are enrolling and have access, many Asian education systems still face problems with fairness, quality, and student success.

Fullan's Theory of Educational Change states that change only succeeds when policy changes reach classrooms and results in actual improvements in schools (Fullan, 2007). He stresses that educational change is a complex process and requires cooperation among teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and the communities involved. The theory emphasizes developing useful skills, involving all relevant parties, providing ongoing support, and encouraging learning within organizations. This is clear in Asia, where some well-planned reforms have failed because of a lack of capacity, poor management, and insufficient teacher training. According to Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), education operates as a connected system in which various components work together to achieve the desired results. Education policy reforms are seen as key inputs that affect how schools are managed, how teachers teach, and how resources are used. If these processes are properly implemented, they can lead to better student performance, more effective schools, greater educational equity, and higher graduation rates (Bertalanffy, 1968). The theory holds that genuine improvement occurs only when all the parts of the system function together. Recent educational reforms in Asia, which seek to improve learning and the general quality of education by integrating curriculum, teacher preparation, assessments, and administration, demonstrate this. The Political Economy Theory of Education emphasizes how political choices and resource allocation affect the growth and results of education (Carnoy, 1995). This theory asserts that government policies relating to funding, governance, accountability, and access to education have a significant role in determining the quality, equity, and effectiveness of educational systems (Carnoy, 1995). This implies that how governments establish priorities, allocate resources, and implement educational policies has a significant impact on educational opportunities and outcomes. Therefore, differences in policy decisions and the allocation of public resources can contribute to differences in student performance, access to high-quality education, and overall school performance. Differences in policy implementation and resource allocation cause inequalities in education. Studies in Asia indicate that insufficient funding, the gap between urban and rural areas, weak management, and unequal access to resources are major obstacles to reform. The theory helps to explain how political and policy choices influence the performance of public schools in different countries. Educational reforms depend not only on policy design but also on effective implementation, stakeholder involvement, adequate funding, sound management, and strong institutions. By applying these theories, this analysis reviews current evidence on education policy reforms in Asia, identifies common strategies, examines their effects on public schools, and makes recommendations for future policy.

Statement of the problem

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To identify the major education policy reforms implemented in public school systems across Asia.
2. To examine the impacts of education policy reforms on public school outcomes, including student achievement, educational access, educational equity, and school effectiveness.
3. To determine which education policy reforms have been most effective based on the findings of existing empirical studies.

4. To analyze the common challenges and barriers encountered in the implementation of education policy reforms in Asian public-school systems.
5. To propose evidence-based recommendations for future educational policy development and reform implementation in Asia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs data mining, integrated with a systematic literature review, to analyze education policy reforms and their impact on public school systems in Asia. Data mining is an analytical approach that extracts, organizes, and identifies meaningful patterns, trends, and relationships from large volumes of existing data and published research. In this context, data mining is applied to examine and synthesize findings from empirical studies, policy reports, journal articles, and academic publications related to education policy reforms implemented in Asian countries. This method is appropriate as it facilitates the identification of recurring themes, reform strategies, implementation challenges, and educational outcomes reported across different national contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education policy reforms

Education policy reform is the most frequently mentioned factor in the studies reviewed. Across Asia, countries have introduced reforms to improve the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of public education. For example, the Philippines launched the K–12 Program to extend basic education and align the curriculum with international standards. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on holistic learning, foundational literacy, flexibility, and competency-based education. Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) reform emphasizes student-centered learning, flexible curricula, and teacher autonomy. These reforms across Asia generally focus on updating curricula, building twenty-first-century skills, promoting inclusive education, and encouraging lifelong learning. Overall, these efforts reflect how governments are preparing students for changing social and economic needs.

Educational funding and financial resources

How education is funded plays a key role in the success of policy changes and the progress of public schools. Countries that invest more in education can usually provide better facilities, higher quality materials, stronger teacher development, and more technology. In recent years, several Asian countries have increased their education budgets to support curriculum reforms, improve learning environments, and expand access. However, research shows that funding is still unevenly distributed between urban and rural schools, which often affects the quality of education and student outcomes. While more funding has led to higher enrollment and participation, poor and unequal resource allocation continues to limit the impact of education reforms in some countries.

Teacher quality and professional development

Teacher quality is essential to the success of education policy changes. Many Asian countries have introduced teacher certification programs, ongoing training, mentoring, and performance reviews to improve teaching. India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and others have invested heavily in teacher training to support curriculum updates and new teaching methods. Research shows that education reforms work better when teachers receive thorough training, continuous development, and strong support from their schools. On the other hand, weak teacher preparation and limited professional development opportunities often make it harder to implement policies and reduce benefits for students.

Curriculum reform and learning outcomes

Curriculum reform is an important part of education policy changes in Asia. Many countries have shifted from traditional teaching focused on content to learning based on skills like critical thinking, creativity, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Examples include the K–12 Program in the Philippines, India's NEP 2020, and Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar, all designed to make education more relevant to today's society and job market. Research shows these reforms have helped students become more interested and develop better thinking skills. However, studies also find that curriculum changes alone are not enough to improve academic results without strong teacher training, enough learning materials, and good execution.

School governance and educational management

Changes in how schools are run and managed have become more important in Asian education systems. Many countries have introduced policies that give schools more control and encourage local management to improve responsibility, efficiency, and involvement from everyone involved. These changes allow schools to make more decisions on their own and encourage teamwork among school leaders, teachers, parents, and local communities. Studies show that strong management helps schools better meet local needs and improve their results. However, differences in leadership skills, readiness, and support often affect how well these changes work. In places where management systems are weak, these changes are often applied unevenly and are less successful.

Educational access and equity

Making education more accessible and equitable remains a key goal of policy changes across Asia. Governments have taken steps to get more children into school, reduce dropout rates, and offer more chances for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Research shows these changes have helped more people, especially in primary and secondary education. However, big challenges remain in fixing differences between city and rural schools, income groups, and other vulnerable communities. UNESCO reports regularly highlight ongoing unfairness in educational opportunities and outcomes across the region. These findings show that, although access has improved, making education fully fair and inclusive is still a big challenge for policymakers.

Educational infrastructure and learning facilities

In Asian public schools, having enough educational facilities is very important. Governments have invested in building classrooms, improving facilities, improving sanitation, and providing more learning materials. The need for digital infrastructure has increased, especially since the pandemic. Even in richer countries, there has been significant progress in updating school environments, but rural and poor areas still often lack enough classrooms, equipment, internet access, and educational technology. Studies consistently show that adequate infrastructure leads to more students attending school, better academic results, and more effective new education policies.

Technology integration and digital learning

Using technology is a key part of education changes across Asia. To promote digital skills, governments have introduced policies supporting online learning platforms, educational tools, and classroom technology. These efforts grew significantly during and after the pandemic, when schools had to find new ways to teach. Research shows technology can improve teaching, expand access to learning materials, and keep students more engaged. However, the gap in digital access still exists and is a major problem, especially in rural areas where equipment, internet access, and digital skills are limited. Because of this, not all schools and students benefit equally from technology-based changes.

Barriers to the implementation of educational reforms

Research often highlights major problems in implementing educational reforms. Even though many policies are well planned, many countries struggle to apply these changes in classrooms. Main problems include insufficient funding, teacher shortages, lack of teacher training, poor management, limited facilities, and differences between urban and rural schools. Also, there is a clear gap between making policies and implementing them, as reforms decided at the policy level often face major problems when put into action. These issues lower the success of reforms and lead to different results in education depending on the situation.

Implications for the development of future educational policy in Asia

The results show that future changes to education policy in Asia should focus on improving teacher quality, ensuring adequate funding, strengthening management, and promoting equal access to education. Although many reforms have increased participation and updated the curricula, their success depends on schools and teachers being able to apply these changes. Research has reliably shown that teacher training is one of the most important factors in improving student success and sustaining educational reforms.

It should remain a key concern for policymakers to ensure sufficient and fair funding, as this helps schools improve their buildings, provide learning materials, support teacher training, and use technology in teaching. Special attention must be given to rural and poor areas, where limited resources frequently prevent policies from being implemented and keep education standards low. Reducing funding gaps can greatly help reduce differences in education among students.

The findings also show how important it is to have better systems for executing policies and monitoring progress. Even though many countries have created detailed reform plans, implementation challenges undermine their success. Governments and education leaders should create strong monitoring and review systems so that reforming goals leads to real improvements in schools and classrooms. Also, more involvement from everyone involved,

like teachers, school leaders, parents, and local communities, can help support effective action and ongoing progress in education.

Using technology should remain a top priority in future reforms. By expanding digital infrastructure, improving internet access, and increasing digital skills among teachers and students, education systems can face new challenges and offer more learning opportunities. At the same time, policymakers ought to address the digital divide to ensure all learners have fair access to new technology.

Future educational reforms must be based on facts and careful decisions. Policymakers should learn from successful reforms in different Asian countries and then adapt the best ideas to fit their local needs. Current research, review, and cooperation between countries can help create education policies that are more flexible, inclusive, and lasting and that meet the changing needs of students and society.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at recent research to understand how changes in educational policy have affected public schools in Asia. The most common reforms were curriculum updates, teacher training, changes in funding, better school management, more technology, improved facilities, and efforts to make education more inclusive. These changes aim to improve access, learning quality, school performance, and student achievement.

The review showed that these policy changes resulted in a higher number of students enrolling, better access to education, more robust teaching program, improved teacher qualifications, and more efficient school management. However, the outcomes in terms of learning vary greatly from one country to another. Problems which still exist, including insufficient funding, inequality, limited teacher training, weak management, and difficulties in implementing the policies—continue to hinder progress.

Teacher training had the greatest impact on pupils' achievement and the standard of education. However, increasing schools' independence and updating the curriculum also helped; this only happened when there were sufficient funding and clear plans in place to carry out the changes. The findings indicate that effective education reform requires firm policies, continuous support, and the development of skills and resources.

To sum up, most improvements in public schools in Asia have resulted from changes in education policy. Success in this area relies on careful planning, sufficient funding, effective management, qualified teachers, good facilities, and continuous evaluation. Fensuringms should aim at ensuring that all students, in particular those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, have equal access to a good education. It is also important to achieve a fair distribution of resources, take effective action, and improve learning outcomes. If ongoing efforts are made and policies are based on evidence, Asian countries will be able to continue improving their public education and promoting fairness and inclusion.

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