

## Analysis of Priorities for Affirmative Action Policy Measures in Education

Ji-Hyun Jang

Associate Professor, College of Liberal Arts, Sangmyung University, Korea

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify priorities among the policy measures for affirmative action in the field of education by means of consulting ten Korean education administration experts, and thereby to obtain valuable information to assist policymaking in the field of education. For this purpose, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method of analysis was employed. The findings show that education administration experts in Korea believe that the affirmative action policy should be widely applied in universities. In addition, in terms of policy measures it is appropriate for universities to use the admission quota system, but it is recognized that for elementary and middle-school students financial support is more important.

**Keywords:** AHP, affirmative action, education policy.



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### Introduction

Today, many developed countries have implemented specific policies to reduce social disparities and ensure a dignified life for the socially underprivileged. Special policies for the socially underprivileged are being implemented in all areas of public administration, including education, employment and social welfare. Many researchers emphasize the need for special measures for the socially underprivileged in various fields, especially in the field of education. The reason is that the difference in educational opportunities and educational achievements faced by the socially underprivileged eventually has a practical impact in many areas, such as their future employment or career choices. For this reason, many countries have introduced policies, especially in the field of education, that artificially expand opportunities for these socially disadvantaged people to enter good schools, rather than just providing tuition support.

Many people sympathize with special dispensation measures in the field of education for the socially underprivileged. However, if these policies are excessively promoted, people who do not benefit from these policies are bound to be dissatisfied, which may further lead to social conflict. Therefore, some countries have ended the various special policies they had previously introduced for the socially underprivileged in the field of education and have changed direction to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Providing special benefits for the socially underprivileged in the field of education is a social and political issue, because it necessarily deprives other „ordinary“ people of opportunities.

Even in Korea, where all citizens have an enormous interest in the field of education, there has been a great deal of

controversy over the range of special benefits available for the socially underprivileged. In particular, there has been huge controversy over the expansion of admission opportunities for the socially underprivileged through the quota system in school admissions. Against this background, this study aims to analyse perceptions of affirmative action in the field of education, specifically targeting experts who have specialized in research in the field of educational administration over a long period. Thereby, we intend to obtain, from a professional source, practical information necessary for implementing affirmative action policies in education in Korea in the future.

Our main research aim is to discover which students should be given the most weight and which policy implications to draw on. For the analysis, ten Korean educational administration experts were targeted so we could ascertain their professional opinions; for this we utilized the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), a research method that is applied to prioritize policy alternatives.

### **Theoretical Discussion**

Affirmative action is a policy aimed at compensating a certain social group who have been discriminated against by society (Frymer and Skrentny, 2004; Hansivsky, 2005; Kurtulus, 2012). It has three main characteristics. First, it refers to government policy that, directly or indirectly, grants employment, school admission and other social benefits to disadvantaged groups owing to the social discrimination they face: in sum, it is a policy that pursues equality of outcome and substantive equality, rather than equality of opportunity. Second, it is a concept that focuses on groups rather than on individuals. Third, the affirmative action policy is not a permanent policy, but a temporary one (Chang and Yamamura, 2006; Choi et al., 2017; Pew Research Center, 2018).

The advantage of the affirmative action policy is that it can temporarily grant more benefits to minority groups who have been deprived of opportunities for various social reasons. Social polarization can thereby be resolved, which can contribute to creating an inclusive society (Wong et al., 2011; Wu, 2014). There are, however, several disadvantages to such a system. It goes against the principle of equal opportunity, and there is also a problem in that people who do not belong to minority groups may also be social victims, yet cannot be compensated (Neville et al., 2013; Poon et al., 2019). Therefore, affirmative action as a policy is seen as sensitive and controversial in many countries (Bacchi and Eveline, 2009; Chang et al., 2004), especially in the field of education. Against this background, it is valuable to examine how Korean education experts view this issue in a country which places special importance on education.

There are two specific policy means regarding affirmative action in education. One involves providing financial support, such as assisting with the school expenses of students who are socially disadvantaged. The other is a policy measure that allows these students to enter good middle schools, high schools and universities even if they are relatively lacking in academic ability. The latter case, however, deprives other students of the opportunity to enter these institutions, and so can have a very large impact (Torres, 2015; Tran and Curtin, 2017).

In Korea, there is a policy aimed at providing student loans to socially disadvantaged university students from rural areas. This provides low-interest loans towards students' full tuition and living expenses. In addition, there is a system for supporting the educational expenses of elementary, middle- and high- school students from low-income families. There is also a system that assists with Internet communication costs so as to guarantee the right to free classes and after-school care programmes (Park et al., 2016).

As a different form of financial support, there is also a policy for supporting students from rural or fishing villages by

providing special admissions to college entrance exams so that they can easily enter universities. This is referred to in terms of preferential treatment for rural students. This policy was created with the intention of providing fair and just admission opportunities to students from rural areas, given the premise that rural areas in Korea are generally characterized by lower levels of economic power on the part of parents, a poorer educational environment, and fewer educational opportunities than urban areas. In addition, designed to expand university entrance opportunities to students in non- metropolitan areas, there is the Act on Local Universities and Talent Development from a Regionally Balanced Perspective, which is aimed at implementing a kind of admissions quota system. As we have suggested above, all these policies currently constitute a social issue, because Korea implements a quota system for admissions to good schools, as well as financial support for students from socially underprivileged and lower-income classes.

## Research Design

### Applicants for AHP

Since the affirmative action policy issue in the field of education is a complex one, analysis of which requires considerable expertise, simply conducting a survey targeting the general public may not have much meaning. Since the general public is a stakeholder, it is difficult to imagine policies being viewed from a neutral point of view. Therefore, this study intends to ascertain the views of professional researchers who have studied educational administration over a long period, seeking opinions from ten experts in the field and analysing them. In the case of a general survey the number of subjects should be large, but AHP analysis is specifically designed to target a small number of experts.

### Analysis method

The AHP analysis method described above classifies decision-making goals or evaluation criteria when they are multiple and complex, decomposes them into main factors and the detailed factors making up the main factors, and compares these factors using pairwise comparison. It is an analysis method that calculates importance, and is often used when seeking professional opinions from experts. The analysis program itself is I MAKE IT. This program has the advantage that it is very convenient to use.

### Decision-making objectives to be analysed

The decision-making alternatives to be analysed in this study exist in two dimensions. The first of these concerns which student age groups should be privileged in affirmative action. In other words, which of the three groups of students – elementary-school students and younger children, middle-school and high-school students, or college students – should be thought the most appropriate beneficiaries of this policy. The second dimension is the issue of policy measures regarding affirmative action. When considering means of support for the socially underprivileged, is economic support more important, or is the admissions quota the more important of the two means?

### AHP model composition

In this study, the AHP analysis model was configured as shown in Figure 1.

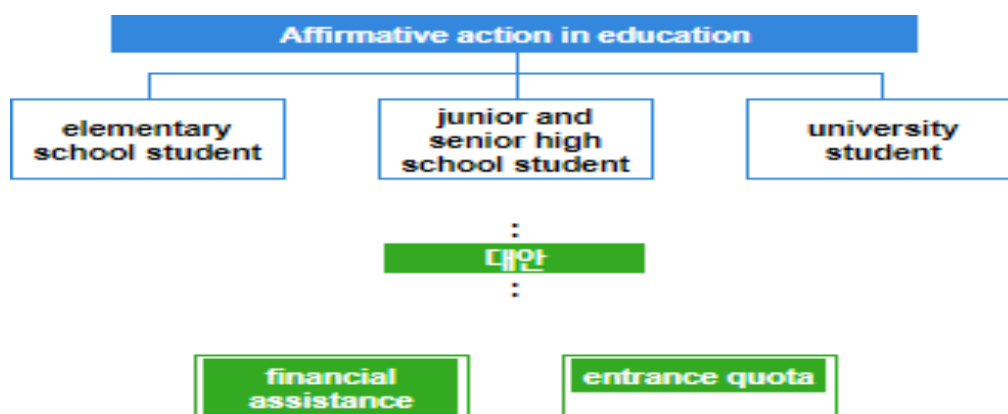


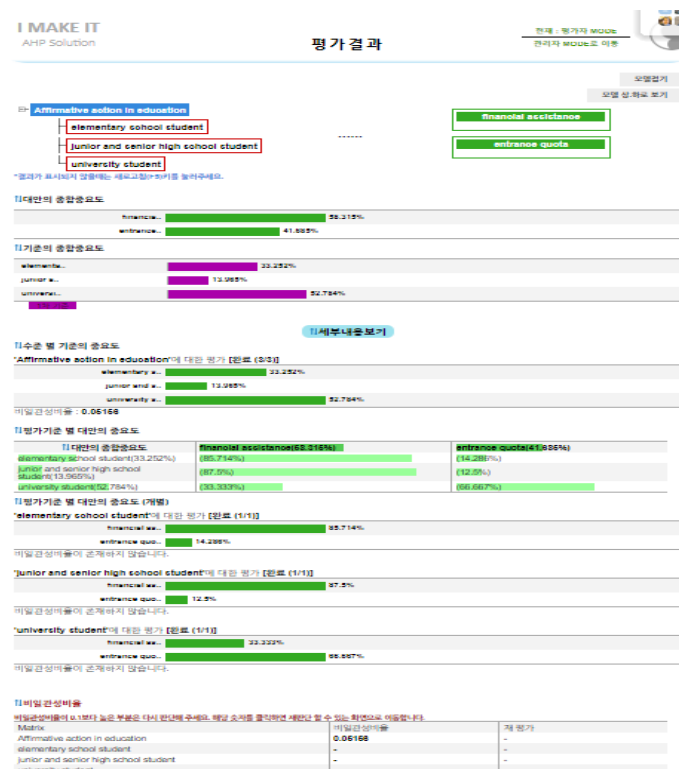
Figure 1 AHP model used in this study

As Figure 1 shows, when affirmative action is applied using the model, threegroups of students are set up – elementary-school students and pre-schoolers, middle-school and high-school students, and college students. This, then, is a matter of determining priorities. Next, the affirmative action is related to whether to provide financial support for these students, or to grant admission privileges tothe socially underprivileged via a quota system.

## Analysis Results

### Comprehensive analysis results

As a result of applying AHP analysis to the views of the ten experts, the following comprehensive research results were obtained (Figure 2).



Note. Analysis results printed using the I MAKE IT program.

Figure 2 Overall AHP analysis result

The consistency ratio in this analysis was 0.06. This shows that there is no methodological problem with the resulting analysis. (Only if the consistency ratio is above 0.1 is there a methodological problem.)

## Detailed analysis results

### Priority among students

As regards which students should be prioritized for affirmative action, Korean educational administration experts say that it should be college students, as indicated in Figure 3. Next in terms of priority are elementary-school students, with middle- and high-school students assigned the lowest weight. In other words, Korean experts believe that the affirmative action policy should be applied first to university students: if there is a resource of 100, 52.78 per cent of this resource should be distributed to college students, 33.25 per cent to elementary-school students, and 13.96 per

cent to middle- and high-school students.

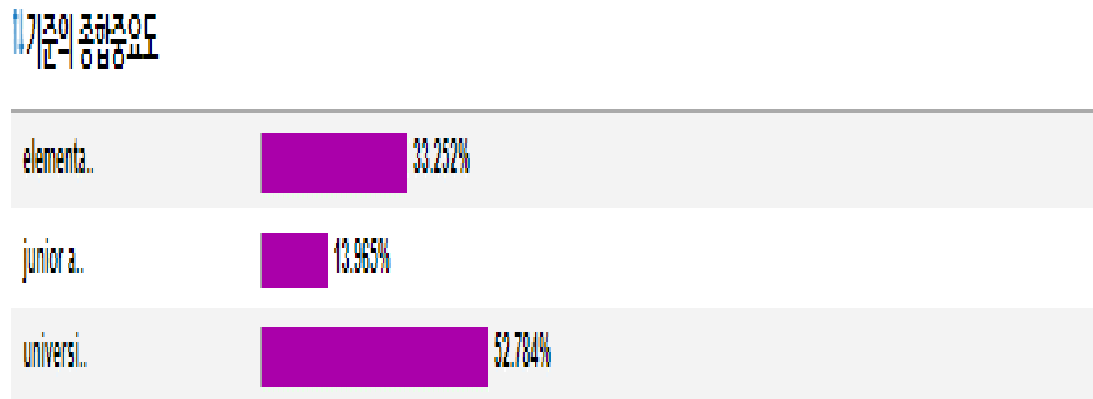


Figure 3 Priority among students

### Priority among policy measures

The priorities among the policy measures for affirmative action are shown in Figure 4. The financial support share is 58.31 per cent, and that of the admission allocation system 41.68 per cent.

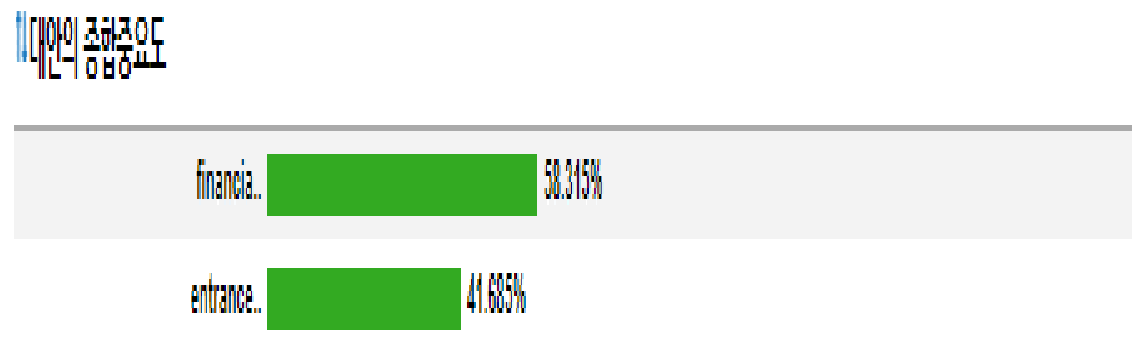


Figure 4 Priority among policy measures

### Priority among policy measures by school level

Turning next to the priorities among policy measures at each school level, those for elementary-school and pre-school children are set out in Figure 5.

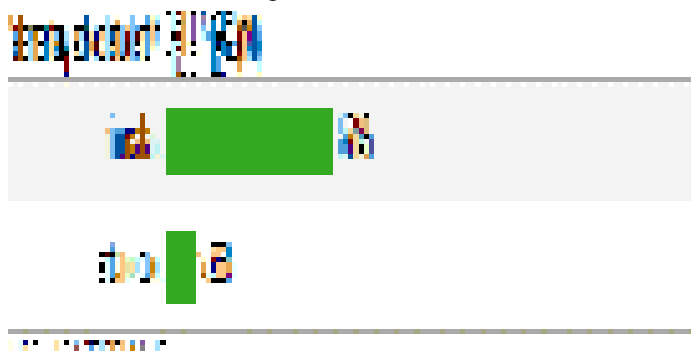


Figure 5 Policy Measures in elementary schools

As Figure 5 shows, educational administration experts believe that at the elementary-school level it is appropriate to provide 85.71 per cent of support by financial means, and to distribute 14.28 per cent to the admission quota system. Figure 6 shows the criteria for resource allocation at secondary-school level. Here, experts suggest that middle and high schools should allocate around 87.5 per cent of their resources to financial means and 12.5 per cent to their admissions quotas.

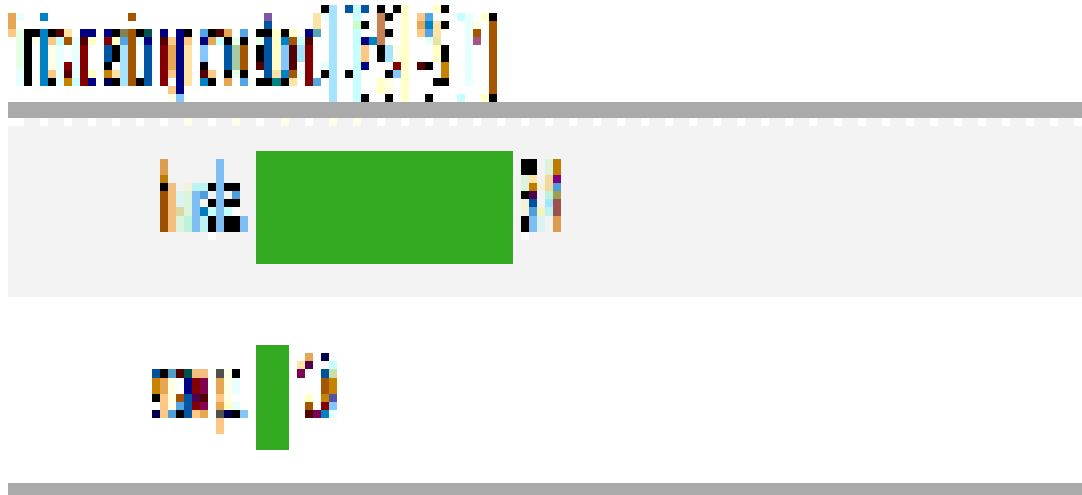


Figure 6 Policy measures in middle and high schools

As regards universities, the opposite phenomenon is apparent. Here, experts believe that at university level it is reasonable to allocate 66.67 per cent of resources to admissions quotas and only 33.33 per cent to financial support, as indicated in Figure 7.

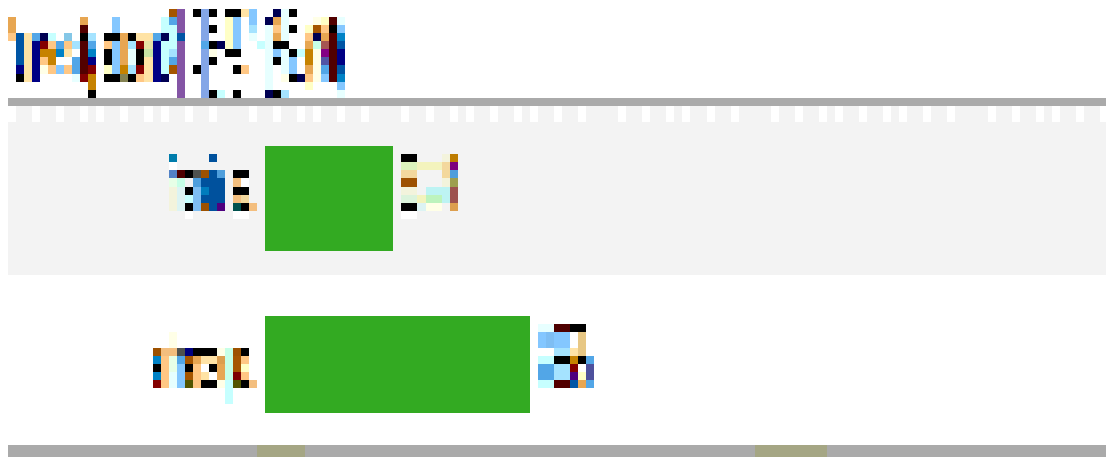


Figure 7 Policy measures in universities

## Conclusion

Educational administration experts in Korea take the view that affirmative action should be applied extensively at university level. In terms of policy means for affirmative action they consider that, in general, financial support should be provided, and recommended lowering the weight of the admission quota system. However, at university level, strengthening the admissions quota system is seen as more in line with the purpose of the system than financial support.

Affirmative action policy in the field of education as viewed by experts maybe different from that seen by the general public. Affirmative action policy is a complex phenomenon that cannot be considered simply in terms of benefiting the socially underprivileged. In addition to the aspect of equal educational opportunities, it is necessary to consider the fact that Korean society is based on a free market economic system, and against such a background (if we take constitutional values as an example) values may conflict with each other, such as the belief that all citizens have the right to happiness. Balancing these competing values in policy terms is not an easy task, because they are mixed. Nevertheless, considering that Koreans have both a duty and the right to live together sharing a sense of community, all members of society need to make an effort to consider the socially underprivileged along with upholding the principles of competition.

In particular, in Korea, the issue of how far to set the scope of the socially underprivileged is becoming hugely important. South Korea must implement educational support for those who have fled from North Korea. Citizens who have escaped from North Korea are required to enter school and receive financial support in accordance with the Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of North Korean Refugees. In addition, in accordance with the Ordinance on the Designation and Operation of Special Purpose High Schools in Korea, science-related high schools, foreign-language-related high schools and international high schools must accord more than 20 per cent of their admission quotas to students from low- income classes and other classes recognized as requiring equal educational opportunities. As outlined above, this issue will continue to receive public attention in the future as the number of people to whom educational benefits should be granted increases and standards become more complex. Given this situation, more efforts are required to consult the opinions of experts in depth.

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