

Striving for quality over quantity: A common challenge for schools around the globe

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CENTERING WHOLE-CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN GLOBAL EDUCATION REFORM

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGENDAS FOR
EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND QUALITY

Edited by
Jaekyung Lee and Kenneth K. Wong



Credit: Routledge

School reform is a challenge faced by nations around the world, each taking their own approach to improve the quality of education within their borders. A new book explores how nine countries address the issue of educational inequity, sharing critical analysis of the school reform policies employed across five continents.

The book, "[Centering Whole-Child Development in Global Education Reform: International Perspectives on Agendas for Educational Equity and Quality](#)," explores the cultural, social and political factors that drive or inhibit the success of holistic school reform initiatives. The text identifies common challenges faced by nations around the world—from underprepared teachers to siloed [government agencies](#)—and will help scholars support global efforts to improve holistic and equitable education.

Published in May, the book is co-edited by Jaekyung Lee, Ph.D., professor of counseling, school and educational psychology in the University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education, and Kenneth K. Wong, Ph.D., Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair for Education Policy at Brown University.

"There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Our premise is that it takes a whole system to raise a whole child," says Lee. "The fundamental premise is that we need systemic reform to nurture all children's well-being alongside traditional measures of academic achievement."

The nations analyzed in the book include Chile, Ethiopia, France, Nepal, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, the United States and Vietnam.

Among the primary challenges for countries is the narrow focus on the quantity of education that children receive, rather than the quality, says Lee. Low-income countries—as defined by the World Health

Organization—such as Ethiopia and Nepal, are focused on attaining universal primary education with high literacy and numeracy rates; and [middle-income countries](#), such as Chile, South Africa and Vietnam, are striving to achieve universal secondary education and [vocational training](#); while high-income countries, which include France, Singapore, South Korea and the U.S., have universal education but prioritize academics over school programs dedicated to well-rounded child development.

"The countries are at different stages of development, and have [different cultures](#) and contexts, so there is no one size fits all solution," says Wong. "Once you focus more on how many years of education children have, you lose sight of what's happening inside the classroom. When governments are focused on attainment, then less attention is given to whole child development."

Another common challenge is how unprepared educators are to teach soft skills and critical thinking that may not be necessary for the curriculum but are crucial for children to succeed in society. Government agencies were also found to work in silos, despite health care and socioeconomic welfare each playing a significant role in child development and education.

Each country faced issues surrounding educational equity as well, with gaps existing between racial or ethnic majorities and minorities, urban and [rural communities](#), and high and low-income families.

The solutions adopted by each nation vary. Chile has worked to reform its education system from a market-driven approach that allowed school choice to a community school model, alleviating the inequality created by wealthy families concentrating resources into select schools. France is addressing growing socioeconomic inequality by concentrating school funding in high-poverty, disadvantaged areas.

"When we talk about educational equity, it was previously an issue of access. Now, we should focus more on quality. Even if disadvantaged children go to school, there is still a lot of inequality in teacher quality and learning opportunities provided," says Lee. "Whole [child development](#) is a [fundamental human right](#). We need to go beyond academic skills for students to not only survive but thrive in a rapidly changing global society. They also need socioemotional, career and life skills. The bottom line is that education reform must be systemic for ensuring equity and quality."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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