



# A Study on the Possibility and Limitation of Educational Application of John Rawls' Idea

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## John Rawls 사상의 교육적 적용의 가능성과 한계

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### Abstract

This study examined the ideas of John Rawls, who had a profound meaning in social justice, and tried to examine the possibilities and limitations of application to Korean school education. Based on the literature research, I identified Rawls' main ideas, made three elementary school teachers understand the contents, and asked about the possibility and limitations of applying Rawls' ideas to school education. Specifically, teachers were able to respond to the possibilities and limitations in two dimensions: class management and education policy. When Rawls' idea is applied to school education, the most representative possibility is to realize that it is important for his ideas to realize equality, equal opportunity and social justice through school education. When Rawls' idea is applied to school education, the typical limit is that it is difficult to implement excessive education heat, inequality, differentiation, and sequencing in Korea in extreme educational reality. Nevertheless, Rawls' idea suggested that the implications of Korean school education can be found in changes in school management and education policy.

**Key words : John Rawls, Social justice, Equal opportunity, Educational innovation, Educational leadership**

### I . Introduction

Even though society is getting richer, the social benefits of economic growth are declining, although life expectancy may continue to rise, it is hard to see it as a result of economic growth alone. While the happiness felt by members of society is gradually diminishing, social indicators that show anxiety, depression, suicide and obesity continue to increase over the past few generations. And trust, community life, murder, and hostility seem to be separate, but they are not. These are all various measures that measure the fundamental variables of

the quality of social relations. The fact that all these measures are linked to inequality suggests that the quality of social relations may change as a whole depending on the size of the income gap. This is also related to the lower willingness to participate in community life in an unequal society. This is a broader tendency for inequality to increase the discrimination between 'them' and 'us', which increases distrust of the state(Wilkinson, 2005).

This trend is also true for the Korean situation. According to the one press report(KyungHwang Newspaper 2011.11.3.), Korea's social justice level

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is 25th out of 31 OECD countries. The Bertelsmann Stiftung, a nonprofit organization in Germany, said in a report released on February 27 that Korea's social justice index was 5.89, which is below the OECD average of 6.67, ranking 25th among the surveyed countries. The report contains quantitative evaluations based on the Sustainable Governance Indicators(SGI) and the sum of the qualitative evaluations conducted by about 70 experts considering the situation in each country. The survey included six areas: (1) prevention of poverty (2) education opportunities, (3) participation in the labor market, (4) social cohesion and discrimination, (5) health, and (6) fairness between generations. Korea ranked 28th (5.28) in social cohesion and discrimination, 26th (4.26) in poverty prevention, 23th (5.72) in fairness among generations, and 19th in educational opportunities (5.83) in all four categories.

The idea of 'inequality' or 'social justice' is something that can be considered in terms of awareness and reflection on Rawls' idea. In his book *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls has made it possible for scholars and the public to reflect on social justice by implementing a substantial approach to social justice. Based on reasonable theories and grounds, he has suggested how we need to understand social justice from the perspective of the weak. Considering the reality of Korea, where social inequality and education inequality are deepening and polarization is growing, it is social and educational significance to consider how to apply the idea of social justice of Rawls at an educational level to make sense.

However, there has been no study that applied and analyzed Rawls' ideas in an educational context. In fact, if you search for "John Rawls" as a search keyword, many papers are searched, but

almost all of these papers focus on Rawls' ideas. Representative papers in domestic journals include 'A Study of Christian Legacies in the Development of Rawls' Political Philosophy'(Kim, 2017), 'A Study on the Distributive Justice of John Rawls and its applicability to South Korea'(Chung, 2016a), 'John Rawls' Public Reason and the Limitation of Toleration'(Jang and Yoo, 2005), 'Sense of Justice in Modern Society: Concerning John Rawls'(Ko, 2014), 'John Rawls Idea of Toleration within and between Societies'(Mok, 2010), 'A Review of the Ideology of Korean Educational Civic Movement from a Viewpoint of John Rawls' Theory of Justice'(Choi and Kim, 2006), and 'Rawls' Theory of Justice and Property-Owning Democracy'(Chung, 2016b).

As such, most of the studies on Rawls have focused on his ideas, and there is no application or consideration from an educational point of view. Rawls' ideas provide ample opportunity to reflect on social justice. Rawls's ideas also provide opportunities for reflection on equal opportunities, inequality, and courage and participation. Therefore, it is social and educational to examine how John Rawls' idea can be applied at the educational level. The main contents to be examined in this study are as follows.

1. What is Rawls's life and thought?
2. What are the possibilities of educational application of Rawls' ideas?
3. What are the limitations of Rawls' educational application of thought?

## II . John Rawls' Life and Idea

Rawls(1921-2002) was born in Baltimore, USA, and received his Ph.D. in philosophy from

Princeton University in 1950. He served as professor of philosophy and honorary professor at Harvard University since 1962, and died on November 24, 2002. After publishing his thesis titled *Justice as Fair* in 1958, he focused on the issue of modern interpretation of social justice and began to receive attention from academia by publishing articles such as "distributed justice", "citizen disobedience" and "justice". And it was his life's masterpiece, *A Theory of Justice* 1971, 1991, that came to be the fruit of his long-standing inquiry, and it became the classic of the twentieth century(Hwang, 2003).

Through *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls opened the way to civil society theory so that it could develop a framework of justice that suits the specificity of each region as well as the definition of political liberalism and redistributive process. This principle of Rawls allowed many people to see that social and economic inequality is rational to be tolerated under the conditions that make it the benefit of those in the most disadvantaged situation. Also, Rawls' theory of justice is consistent with the theory of modern civil society for a community that aims to be a welfare state that seeks priority and consideration in relation to the social class(Park, 2002).

Here are some of the representative concepts that can represent the idea of Rawls' social justice(Rawls, 1999).

The position of democratic equality is made by the combination of principle of fair opportunity equality and principle of differential. This principle excludes uncertainty in the principle of efficiency by selecting a specific position to judge the social and economic inequality of the basic structure. If the system of institutions required by equal freedom and fair opportunity equality is assumed, the only

condition that the higher expectations of those who are in better condition can be recognized as legitimate is that it acts as part of a system that improves the expectations of the least advantaged of society.

According to the principle of maximin, the superiority of many alternatives is to be determined by the worst possible outcomes they can bring. We would adopt the alternative if the worst result of an alternative is the best result of the worst of the alternatives. The social order should not set or guarantee such prospects unless the benefit of those who do not benefit by allowing more attractive prospects to benefit the beneficiaries is achieved.

The original position corresponds to the natural state of traditional social contract theory. You should not think of this primitive position as a state of existence in history, nor should you think of it as a cultural primitive state. It should be understood as a pure virtual situation prescribed to reach justice. One of the essential characteristics of this situation is that no one knows their social status or hierarchical position, and no one knows what qualities, abilities, intelligence, and physical strength they are born with.

In this veil of ignorance, the principles of justice are chosen. As a result, it is guaranteed that no one is advantageous or disadvantaged by the natural coincidence or the contingency of social conditions in choosing principles. Because everyone is in a similar situation and no one can envision principles that are favorable to their specific conditions, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or agreement. It also enables unanimous choices about a particular definition, and when the veil of mutual indifference and ignorance is combined, it can achieve the same intention as altruism. Because if you combine these conditions,

people in the primordial position are required to consider the line of others.

And in order to understand Rawls' ideas in detail and clearly, it is necessary to find them in his representative book. Here is a brief look at his clear ideas in Rawls(1999)' book A Theory of Justice.

“It is not justified that it is possible to force a small number of sacrifices for greater gain than the majority. Equality civil freedom in a just society is considered to be already guaranteed, and rights guaranteed by justice are not dependent on any political transaction or calculation of social benefits.”(p.36)

“Basic rights and duties must be equal. Social and economic inequality is inevitable, but it should only be justified if it brings the benefits to all, especially the least beneficiaries of society, to compensate for the inequality.”(p.49)

“The social order should not set or guarantee such prospects unless the benefit of those who are not more benefited by allowing more attractive prospects to the benefiter is achieved.”(p.123)

“Inequality in birth or natural talent is unfair, and this inequality must be compensated in some way. To provide true opportunity equality, society should pay more attention to those who have less natural qualities and those who are born in a more disadvantageous social position. For example, you should spend more money on the education of people who are lower than those who are more intelligent.”(p.151)

“The institutions and policies we think are most confidently just satisfy the demands of fraternity, at least in the sense that the inequality that it allows contributes to the welfare of the more disadvantaged.”(p.158)

“What we can admit is that a democratic

system presupposes freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of thought and conscience. In addition, all citizens should have the means to obtain information about their affairs. Citizens should be in a position to assess what proposals affect their welfare and what policies will promote what they think is a public good. Furthermore, citizens should have a fair rally to add alternative proposals to the agenda for political debate.”(pp.305-306)

“Individuals should have equal rights to the most extensive system of equal fundamental freedom that can be compatible with the similar system of freedom of all.”(p.337)

“Freedom can only be restricted for freedom. Less widespread freedom must strengthen the overall system of freedom shared by all, and less equal freedom must be accepted by such citizens with less freedom.”(p.337-338)

“In relation to equal opportunities for education, the government should try to preserve the common social common capital and to provide equal education and liberalization opportunities for people with similar talents and motivations by assisting private schools and establishing a public school system.”(p.369)

“The government must implement and guarantee equal opportunities for economic activities and free career choices. This can be done by setting guidelines for businesses and private organizations and eliminating exclusive restrictions or obstacles to promote a better condition.”(p.369)

“Civil disobedience is a public, nonviolent, conscientious, but against the law, which is done to bring about a transformation in law or government policy. This act shows the sense of justice of the majority of the community, and it can be shown that the principles of social cooperation are not respected among free and equal people in our prudent

state.”(p.475-476)

These quotations are clear to Rawls’ ideas and are used to in-depth interviews with elementary school teachers about the possibility and limitations of the educational application of the Rawls’ idea, the subject of this study.

### III. Possibility and Limitation of Educational Application

I presented Rawls’ educational ideas in 「A Theory of Justice」 to three elementary school teachers and explained them to understand the contents. I and the three elementary teachers met once a week and discussed John Rawls' educational thought for about two hours for about a month. And I held such meetings until the teachers expressed that they understood enough about John Rawls' educational ideas.

The characteristics of the three teachers are as follows.

<Table 1> characteristics of interviewee

Name	Sex	Career	Level of Education
Yoon**	male	15years	master
Kim**	male	18years	doctor
Park**	male	18years	doctor

As for the possibilities and limitations of the educational application of John Rawls’s ideas, I discussed with three teachers. As a result of the discussion with teachers, the reasonable theme that can apply the possibility and limitation of John Rawls' educational thought was the school management and education policy considering the context of the school site. So, in-depth interviews

with semi-structured formats were conducted on the theme of school management and education policy. The results are summarized as follows.

#### 1. Possibility of Educational Application

The possibility of educational application of John Rawls' idea is as follows.

First, when we look at the possibilities of school management, Rawls’ justice theory is that it is like a "naturalist lottery" as a result of pure coincidence who is born with what potential and what kind of family. Therefore, a person who is born with a good or good family needs to make a certain amount of enemy selection to the person who is disadvantaged by the wrong lottery ticket, which should be done through school education. For example, it is necessary to develop basic learning skills for preschool children in need, so that they can take steps to prevent them from falling behind in school education, or establish school management policies to establish the school's work organization and operation methods, the planning and evaluation of teaching-learning processes, and the social relations structure within the class. The foundation for this set of policies should also be focused on equality in the basic policies of school management so that teachers can practice egalitarian classes, appropriate regulation and compensation for students. In particular, how to organize the curriculum equally according to the contents of education, the composition and unit allocation of the subjects applied to the students, the interest, aptitude, and hope of the individual is a top priority in the viewpoint of school management.

Second, when looking at the possibilities related to educational policy, Rawls said that in relation to equal opportunities for education policy, the

government should establish a public school system to ensure equal education and liberalization opportunities for people with similar talents and motivations. The current educational opportunity means the opportunity of school education, and the actual condition of our school education is the actual condition of education opportunity. In terms of equality of educational opportunities, elementary and junior high schools have implemented policies that give the nation educational opportunities to all the people through compulsory education, and the 'equality strategy' to eliminate social discrimination and inequality will lead to a rapid increase in school education and equality of educational opportunities. But this brought about a discussion of equality at a new level. In other words, although the students tried to achieve the improvement and equality of school facilities and education contents, the school grades did not achieve equality, suggesting that the higher school entrance rate, employment opportunities after school graduation, and equalization of life opportunities were not realized.

Therefore, in order to more clearly dissolve Rawls' theory into education policy, it can be seen that equality of results should be kept in mind. The National Statistical Office's survey on private education expenses in 2017 suggests that the polarization of private education expenditures is increasing according to the income level of households and the level of local and parent education, suggesting that the difference in educational performance of children according to income and academic background in Korean society is as inequality in educational results. It is worth noting that even if the legal equality of educational opportunities is guaranteed, the difference in the level of achievement is the difference of the level

of achievement of the parents and leads to the difference of the academic performance of the child. In the end, it can be suggested that a series of educational policies that can be balanced between classes should be drafted and applied, in addition to the equality policy of education opportunities, which should be linked to future career choices, provide more compensation for students with low abilities, and balance between classes.

In order for Rawls' justice to be applied in terms of educational policy, free education should be provided to all students in all fields of educational activities. Because selective support creates invisible discrimination. Currently, education policies are provided free of charge in the regular curriculum. In other educational activities, there are efforts to preserve educational opportunities for those who are subject to social consideration (such as basic recipients, single parent families, and multicultural families). For example, after-school classes, caring classes, and school excursion expenses are provided free of charge. However, free education opportunities such as after-school classes, which are provided only to those who are subject to social consideration, may act as discriminatory factors. For example, the invisible discriminatory elements between the free lunch recipient and the paid lunch recipient have bruised the children's minds due to the selection process of the free lunch target.

Currently, free education is being provided within the regular curriculum from kindergarten (only in public kindergartens) to middle school, but parents are paying for after-school classes and on-site experiential learning. In this part, discrimination occurs between students who are supported free of charge and students who are not supported, so a

policy that can be provided free of charge to all students should be made.

As we have seen in the above, Rawls' idea suggests a reflection point in the reality that Korean school education operates as inequality, differentiation, and sequencing. In other words, even if the market economy logic of capitalism dominates outside the school, it makes us realize that the value of equality, equal opportunity, and diversity should be respected and implemented at least within the school. To this end, it can be seen that teachers can reflect on and apply various ways to practice equality of classes, expand free education, and expand opportunities for disadvantaged students.

## 2. Limitation of Educational Application

The limitation of educational application of John Rawls' idea is as follows.

First, when we look at the limitations related to school management, it is difficult for Rawls' justice theory to be applied to school education at the school level unless autonomy is achieved in school management. Currently, the school seems to be autonomous by the unit school management responsibility system in management, but in practice, it is not fully autonomous and is controlled by curriculum and budget.

In terms of curriculum, the state provides a national level of curriculum and autonomously reconstructs it at school, but it is difficult to reconstruct the amount of national level curriculum. In addition, most of the contents are designated as core achievement standards in the evaluation, so that the achievement criteria are evaluated. These are the controls of the school curriculum in the invisible part, making it difficult to manage the

school truly autonomously.

In terms of budget, the budget for students' learning is basically organized, but the amount is fixed. In addition, it is difficult to organize because there is a lack of budget even if teachers try to support more students for experience or learning. In addition, a specific budget is classified as a purpose budget and can not be budgeted where it is out of the relevant purpose.

These are invisible, but because they limit the autonomy of school management, there are many limitations for Rawls' theory to be applied to school.

Second, considering the limitations of education policy, Rawls' theory emphasizes the compensatory egalitarian position toward equality of outcomes, which is advantageous in that it is a reduction of minority elitism and a balanced development between classes. But it is not free from the fact that overall students are under equalized and competitive. Rather, it is criticized as weakening public education, activating private education, and limiting autonomy, and it is one of the inevitable criticisms that it is reverse discrimination of excellent students and schools.

In addition, the current education system in Korea is a public education system in which the state controls the establishment and operation of schools, the qualifications of teachers, and the contents of education. Overall, the excessiveness of education competition is always a problem, and the dependence of higher education abroad is serious. In the end, before establishing and implementing the equality policy of education, it is necessary to give members the belief that the above criticism can be solved rationally through the change of the education system. The basic direction of education policy should be set so that everyone has the

opportunity to acquire the higher status they want in society, regardless of gender, race, class, or residence. It is a reality that it is not realistic to fuse two values of freedom and equality that have a very contradictory personality with only simple principles, and it is impossible to apply the theory to all educational policies. There is also the risk that people will not reject or join these societies.

Education on social justice is difficult due to the control means of 'political neutrality' of education officials. This logic is against the law to resist educational issues when they are distorted by political logic, and to teach students to look at social issues as critical thinking. For example, if the city government declaration is made due to the Seowall incident, or if the students are educated for the time being, they are subject to discipline.

In order for the education policy of equal opportunity by the justice of Rawls to be implemented, free education should be carried out. As a prerequisite for this, the social consensus should be made in paying the change of people's perception of free education and the cost of free education. Because if people's perceptions do not have changes and compromises of various groups of society, it takes a lot of time for resistance to occur or to settle properly due to costly problems.

In particular, when the policy is to be implemented, the negative perception of free education by people causes resistance or distortion in the implementation process of the policy, and the cost-effective cooperation is not achieved, which causes a problem that takes a lot of time even if the policy is not settled or settled properly. For example, due to the negative view of the so-called conservatives on free meals, some areas have caused resistance, such as the abolition of free meals, and as a result, it took considerable time

and energy to settle down.

It is difficult to effectively implement the policy unless people's perceptions change when they want to implement the free education policy. Therefore, the implementation of free education in education is not a benefit or consideration for the difficult people, but a shift in perception and a confrontation of various groups of society are needed in terms of raising the members of society that will lead our country.

As we have seen in the above, Rawls' idea is excellent, but it is limited to the fact that Korean school education is operated by inequality, differentiation, and sequencing. In other words, it is not easy to reflect Rawls' idea in school management in the reality that schools and teachers want to practice in order to realize the value of equality and opportunity equality, but they are strictly controlled in curriculum and budget. Therefore, it is impossible to expect and demand Rawls' idea to be applied only to the school site by the power of the teacher, so it is necessary to further strengthen the value of equality and opportunity equality in terms of education policy, and to strengthen the authority and autonomy of the teacher's curriculum so that equality and opportunity equality can be practiced at the school site.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Discussion**

The conclusions and discussions of this study are as follows.

First, inequality in birth or natural talent is unfair, and this inequality must be compensated in some way. To provide true opportunity equality, society should pay more attention to those who

have less natural qualities and those who are born in a more disadvantageous social position. For example, you should spend more money on the education of people who are lower than those who are more intelligent. In relation to equal opportunities for education, the government should try to preserve the common social common capital and to provide equal education and liberalization opportunities for people with similar talents and motivations by assisting private schools and establishing a public school system.

Second, Rawls' idea suggests a reflection point in the reality that Korean school education operates as inequality, differentiation, and sequencing. In other words, even if the market economy logic of capitalism dominates outside the school, it makes us realize that the value of equality, equal opportunity, and diversity should be respected and implemented at least within the school. To this end, it can be seen that teachers can reflect on and apply various ways to practice equality of classes, expand free education, and expand opportunities for disadvantaged students.

Third, Rawls' idea is excellent, but it is limited to the fact that Korean school education is operated by inequality, differentiation, and sequencing. In other words, it is not easy to reflect Rawls' idea in school management in the reality that schools and teachers want to practice in order to realize the value of equality and opportunity equality, but they are strictly controlled in curriculum and budget. Therefore, it is impossible to expect and demand Rawls' idea to be applied only to the school site by the power of the teacher, so it is necessary to further strengthen the value of equality and opportunity equality in terms of education policy, and to strengthen the authority and autonomy of the teacher's curriculum so that equality and

opportunity equality can be practiced at the school site.

In an unequal society, everyone has more conflicting relationships. Inequality is more self-centered, less friendly, antisocial, stressful, violent, weakening community ties, and encouraging social strategies that exacerbate health. On the other hand, an equal society is friendly, less violent, mutually supportive, inclusive, and makes it possible to have a better health condition. In addition, the more equal society shows the higher the quality of social relations. And the more unequal society, the more the nature of social relations is determined by power and status, and social interactions are increasingly encroached on the logic of power, domination and obedience.(Wilkinson, 2005)

This is why we need to move to an equal society, not an unequal society, and this is the significance of the Rawls' idea that established equality and opportunity equality as an important value of social justice. Given the four potential goals of equality, which Fredman(2008) suggested, equality must promote equal dignity and value for all, equality must embrace, actively acknowledge, and encourage the unique identity of a particular group in society, and equality must be done to encourage and encourage all groups to participate in the disadvantage chains associated with the marginalized group. The value of such equality should be implemented at the school site.

However, it is true that it is difficult for teachers to freely practice Rawls' ideas in the school scene in the reality that excessive education, inequality, differentiation, sequencing and control of Korean society are widespread. Therefore, in the first place, education policies such as school selection system and level class(ability grouping)

that encourage inequality and sequencing in terms of education policy should be abolished or reduced. School selection and level-specific classes have already been demonstrated in many studies that have shown that their problems (not helping students improve their academic performance, encouraging private education costs, and enhancing inequality and sequencing among students and schools). In addition, by expanding free education in terms of education policy, equal opportunities and welfare in education should be settled naturally at the school site.

Secondly, it is necessary to expand autonomy in the curriculum in order to teach and practice equality and social justice in education. According to current education laws, teachers have little autonomy in their curriculum(the content of education). In fact, the national level of education must be followed almost as it is. Since students learn a lot through class, teachers should be able to teach students the reality and alternatives to equality and social justice through the curriculum. This is why teachers should be able to have practical autonomy in the curriculum.

The social justice of equality and equal opportunity is important in the educational policy as mentioned above. But the most important thing is the equality of teachers, equal opportunity, and genuine attitude of social justice that directly or indirectly affect students by teaching and interacting with students. Therefore, it is important to reflect on who the true educator should be, along with efforts to have a conscious awareness of the individual teacher.

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