

Research on the Construction of Evaluation Criteria for Balanced Development of Compulsory Education Policy in China

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Abstract: - Educational policy evaluation is a factual and valuable judgment of the educational policy process and its effects, and educational policy evaluation criteria determine the direction and effects of educational policy evaluation. At present, there is a lack of research results on the evaluation of education policies based on OECD/DAC evaluation criteria in China, and the construction of theories on the evaluation of education policies is still weak. Most scholars are limited to analyzing basic education data released by the OECD or focusing on basic theoretical research on education policy evaluation. This study adopts qualitative research and collects data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, consults experts in relevant educational institutions and other fields many times, takes into account China's regional differences and the reality of educational development, and adopts the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria that are widely recognized in the international arena, in combination with the "Measures for Supervisory and Evaluation of Quality and Balanced Development of Compulsory Education in County Areas" of the Ministry of Education of China, and constructs a scientifically reasonable evaluation criteria system of the policy of balanced development of compulsory education in counties in China. The results show that five groups of people, including government officials, school teachers, students' parents, experts, and social stakeholders, have a high degree of acceptance of the evaluation criteria and believe that the four criteria of effectiveness and relevance, coherence, and impact in the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria are the core criteria for evaluating China's policy of balanced development of compulsory education (referred to as BDCE). The results of this study show that the evaluation criteria system is suitable for evaluating the BDCE policy in China, and provides a useful reference for the evaluation of the BDCE policy in China.

Key-Words: - Balanced Development, Compulsory Education, Policy Evaluation, OECD/DAC, Evaluation Criteria, Evaluation Framework.

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1 Introduction

Internationally, the concepts of "educational balance" and "compulsory education balance" are hardly used directly in the official texts of educational policies and related academic research

results, and the research results of international scholars mainly focus on "educational equity" or "educational equality". In China, the goal of balanced development of compulsory education is educational equity, which is the basis for achieving educational equity, [1].

Since 2002, the government of China has determined the balanced development of education as an important strategy for compulsory education at this stage. With the continuous development of the social economy, people's demand for high-quality educational resources is growing daily, leading to social phenomena such as "choosing schools" and "rural population migrating to cities". To solve these social problems, the Chinese government has formulated a series of relevant policies to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, [2]. However, have these social problems been solved? Some scholars pointed out that we need to evaluate the implementation effect of the BDCE, [3]. To evaluate the effect of policy implementation, authoritative evaluation criteria and a scientific and reasonable evaluation index system are needed. The selection of evaluation criteria will directly affect the rationality and objectivity of the evaluation conclusion, so it is of great significance to construct a criteria system suitable for evaluating China's education policy.

In order to deeply understand the implementation effect of the BDCE, researchers began to build an evaluation criteria system. First of all, they set out from multiple dimensions, including the allocation of educational resources, education quality, education equity, and education management, and established a preliminary framework for evaluation. On this basis, the researchers further refined the evaluation indicators through extensive research and expert consultation to ensure that these indicators can fully reflect all aspects of the balanced development of education.

To sum up, the evaluation of the implementation effect of the BDCE is a complex and long-term process. By constructing a scientific and reasonable evaluation criteria system, we can more accurately grasp the effectiveness and existing problems of policy implementation and provide a basis for policy adjustment and improvement. Only in this way can we truly realize educational equity and let every child enjoy high-quality educational resources.

2 Policy Background

To solve the problem of the unbalanced development of compulsory education, China has successively introduced a series of important policies for the BDCE, such as "attending nearby schools," "teacher exchanges," "choosing schools," and so on. These policies are guidelines for action formulated by the Chinese government to promote the BDCE in a specific historical period, and they

have evolved with the times and are constantly developing and innovating, [4]. In 2017, to enable the effective implementation of these policies, the Chinese Ministry of Education formulated the "Measures for Supervisory Evaluation of the Quality and BDCE in County Areas, which actively carried out the supervisory evaluation of the quality and BDCE in counties, [5].

Policies for the BDCE should be adjusted promptly in light of socio-political, economic, and cultural changes to effectively lead and guide educational reform and development. The main basis for policy adjustment and improvement is to monitor and evaluate it and to make systematic value judgments on the whole process of policy operation and its benefits. Through the problems identified in monitoring and evaluation, policies are adjusted promptly to ensure their rationality and effectively guide and direct the BDCE.

3 Research Objectives

The monitoring and evaluation of policies cannot be separated from a scientific evaluation index system, and only by constructing a scientific and effective evaluation system can we objectively reflect the implementation effect of policies. Therefore, the goal of this study is to construct an evaluation index system suitable for the BDCE in Chinese countries, taking into account the regional differences and the actual situation of compulsory education development in China.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation is a political act of judging the effectiveness, efficiency, and value of a policy based on certain criteria and procedures to obtain relevant information as a basis for policy change, policy improvement, and the formulation of new policies, [6]. Reference, [7], argues that policy evaluation does occur throughout the process and not simply as the last stage of the policy process. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) sees policy evaluation as an ongoing process of collecting and analyzing data, comparing the difference between how a project, program, or policy is being implemented and the expected outcomes, [8]. Reference, [9], argues that policy evaluation focuses primarily on the implementation process, from intervention theory to data collection and evaluation. Policy monitoring

can be an important part of policy evaluation, which is defined as a broader set of methods for determining the merit or value of public policy or the products of the process, [10]. There are many different types of evaluation (ex-ante, mid-term, during implementation, thematic, and ex-post), each of which plays a specific role in the policy cycle, [11]. Reference, [12], states that evaluation is a process, and this process lies in determining the scope of important decisions.

This study argues that evaluation is an important component of effective policy development and program implementation and that they have complementary and interdependent roles. Evaluation is the systematic collection of performance data to assess the progress and achievement of policy goals against stated objectives and to identify and remove implementation bottlenecks. Policy evaluation is the objective evaluation of the design, implementation, and results of future, ongoing, or completed public interventions. Evaluation provides data and evidence for decision-making, and the data collected through evaluation is a reliable source of information that can help guide us in the right direction for successful policy implementation.

4.2 Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the policy implementation effect cannot be separated from the evaluation of the policy and how the implementation effect is. It is necessary to use authoritative evaluation criteria and a scientific and reasonable evaluation index system, and the different choices of evaluation criteria directly affect the rationality of the evaluation conclusions. The historical perspective of Western policy evaluation criteria helps to understand the logic of policy evaluation criteria setting and reveals the mechanism of policy evaluation criteria change. The evaluation criteria often include effectiveness, efficiency, efficacy, and adequacy, [13]. Reference, [14], argues that the criteria of policy effectiveness can be measured by effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, appropriateness, fairness, responsiveness, and implementation capacity. Reference, [15], proposes that policy evaluation criteria can be analyzed in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, adequacy, fairness, responsiveness, and appropriateness. The evaluation criteria proposed by OECD/DAC form the basis of what has been used by the evaluation community for a long time, [16]. Reference, [17], critically examines the five OECD/DAC criteria, proposes major changes, and discusses the importance of the criteria and how to get them right.

China's research on education policy began in the 1990s, and although evaluation research on education policy has begun to attract the attention of the government and the academic community, there are still relatively few scholars and results. Reference, [18], proposed seven criteria: policy efficiency, policy effectiveness, policy impact, responsiveness, development of social productivity, social justice, and sustainable development. Reference, [19], proposed the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, and feasibility. Reference, [20], proposed five criteria: productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, and policy responsiveness. From the evaluation criteria proposed by international and Chinese scholars, the researcher can see that effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, impact, and sustainability are the core criteria for evaluating policy effectiveness. The monitoring and evaluation of policies are indispensable for the evaluation of policy implementation effects, and authoritative evaluation criteria and a scientific and reasonable evaluation index system should be used to assess the implementation effects.

4.3 OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said in the Global Education Monitoring Report that over the past 20 years, the OECD has made innovative contributions to international education, and few organizations have been able to make such an impact, [21]. Some researchers have bluntly stated that the OECD plays a central role in international education policy-making, rivaling or even surpassing governments in terms of influence, [22]. This is a slight exaggeration, but it does reflect the OECD's influence to some extent. The OECD has an increasingly strong influence on education in countries around the world. The OECD leads and influences the direction of international education policy by strengthening research on international education indicators and exploring international education indicators that are internationally comparable, highly credible, and of high quality.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) published in 1991 definitions of five monitoring and evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, [8]. Over the past 30 years, these criteria have shaped the design and development of international development evaluations and are a solid foundation for policy and program evaluation, [17]. These five criteria were further adapted in 2018–2019. The

revision process drew on nearly three decades of learning by members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) along with the wider global evaluation community, [23]. A new set of definitions, including six evaluations, was published in December 2019. The OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) has defined six M&E criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, [24], as shown in Fig. 1. These criteria provide a normative framework used to determine the merit or worth of an intervention (policy, strategy, program, project, or activity). They serve as the basis upon which evaluative judgments are made.

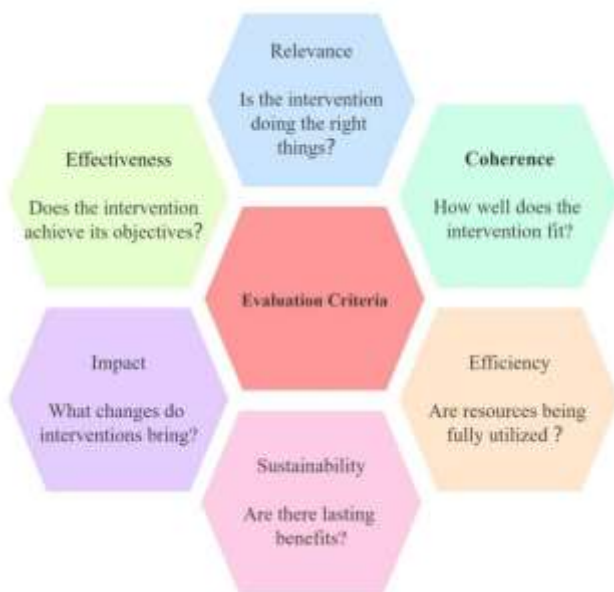


Fig. 1: OECD Evaluation Criteria, [24]

1) **Relevance:** Is the intervention doing the right thing? To what extent do policy objectives and policy implementation respond to the needs of individuals, groups, or organizations that directly or indirectly benefit from development policy, and to what extent do they continue to do so as circumstances change?

2) **Coherence:** How well does the intervention fit? Compatibility with other policy measures in the country, sector, or institution. The extent to which other policy measures support or undermine the policy measure, and vice versa.

3) **Effectiveness:** Does the intervention achieve its objectives? The extent to which the objectives of the policy measure have been achieved or are expected to be achieved, taking into account the relative importance of the different objectives.

4) **Efficiency:** Are resources being fully utilized? To what extent is the intervention able or likely to

achieve outcomes in an economical and timely manner?

5) **Impact:** What changes do interventions bring? The extent to which the policy has had or is expected to have significant positive or negative, intended or unintended effects.

6) **Sustainability:** Are there lasting benefits? The extent to which the net benefits of the policy are sustained or likely to be sustained.

5 Research Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research and collected data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, and social stakeholders, all of whom are policy stakeholders. To ensure the correctness and applicability of the interview questions, the researcher consulted experts in the fields of education supervision organizations, education administration departments, education research institutes, and the field of education practice several times. The degree of importance of an indicator judgment was analyzed based on five categories of people: government officials, school teachers, students' parents, experts, and socially relevant persons. If 90% or more of any three or more categories of people in the interview consider an indicator to be the most important, the researcher will list the relevant criteria as the most important criteria in the system of criteria for evaluating the BDCE policy for systematic examination and research. In particular, taking into account the degree of awareness and concern about education among different people in society, especially school teachers and parents as close stakeholders in the BDCE, this study considers that if more than 85% of school teachers and parents consider a certain criterion to be the most important, then this study will classify the relevant criterion as the most important criterion in the system of criteria for evaluating the BDCE policy for research.

6 Evaluation Framework for the BDCE Policy

Based on the interview data, the actual situation of compulsory education in China, and the characteristics of the evaluated policies, the researcher adopts the internationally widely recognized OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, combines them with the Measures for Supervision and Evaluation of Quality and Balanced Development of Compulsory Education in County

Areas published by the Ministry of Education, and takes the four dimensions to construct an evaluation framework for the policy of BDCE, as shown in Fig. 2 (Appendix). Through the evaluation framework, the researcher can comprehensively and objectively evaluate the effects of the BDCE policy. Reference, [25], argues that borrowing OECD evaluation criteria can help the construction of China's compulsory education evaluation system and promote the sustainable development of China's compulsory education.

To more accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the policy of balanced development of compulsory education from the perspective of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, the researcher has elaborated on the evaluation components of each criterion, as shown in Table 1 (Appendix). These contents are intended to assist the evaluator in making a scientific and rational evaluation of the implementation of the policy, to ensure the validity and reliability of the evaluation results.

After a comparative analysis of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and the Chinese Ministry of Education's evaluation criteria, the researcher found that the OECD/DAC evaluation content actually covers the four major level 1 indicators of the Chinese Ministry of Education's evaluation criteria. Therefore, the researcher integrates the advantages of the two evaluation criteria and constructs a framework of evaluation criteria suitable for China's policy of BDCE, as shown in Table 2 (Appendix).

7 Finding

This study found that all interviewees considered the effectiveness criterion to be the most important indicator for evaluating the BDCE policy, and it was often used as an overall measure of the success of the policy implementation. They were very concerned about the effectiveness criterion. Some interviewees considered the coherence criterion to evaluate the complementarity, coordination, and cooperation among different policies, including aspects such as whether the BDCE policy is contradictory to other policies, whether it is articulated with other components in the education system, and whether it is coordinated with the overall policy objectives of the country. Their level of concern for the coherence criterion was also very high. Interviewees who felt that the relevance criterion evaluates whether the policy is coherent with the country's educational needs and goals, the extent to which it takes into account the needs and values of different groups and whether it is in line

with the country's long-term educational strategies and goals, were highly concerned with the relevance criterion. Some interviewees pointed out that due to the characteristic long-term, exclusive, and lagging nature of the educational activity itself. The model of compulsory education in China is nine years, and the cycle for an educated person and his or her family to realize the benefits of an investment in education is at least nine years. Therefore, the evaluation of the efficiency of the policy of balanced development of compulsory education requires a much longer period to make a systematic and objective evaluation of the efficiency of the policy. Some interviewees consider the impact criterion as an evaluation of the extent to which the policy of equalizing the development of compulsory education has produced or is expected to produce significant positive or negative, intended or unintended effects. As the policy is still in the process of implementation, it is difficult to evaluate what changes in the economy and society will be brought about by the implementation of the policy in the short term. Some respondents pointed out that while the sustainability criterion requires an evaluation of the extent to which the net benefits of a policy are sustained or likely to be sustained, the evaluation of sustainability requires rich data over a long period, covering such aspects as the long-term academic performance of students, the professional development of teachers, the allocation of educational resources, the state of the economy, societal changes, and technological developments. Therefore, to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of sustainability evaluation, researchers and policymakers must adopt a multidimensional analytical approach to capture long-term trends and cyclical changes.

In summary, interviewees generally agreed that the six dimensions of effectiveness, coherence, relevance, efficiency, impact, and sustainability constitute a systematic framework for evaluating the policy of balanced development of compulsory education. Evaluation of the BDCE policy requires a combination of dimensions, not just a single criterion. Only policies that excel in all six dimensions of effectiveness, coherence, relevance, efficiency, impact, and sustainability can truly achieve balanced development in education and meet the needs of the state and society.

8 Conclusion

This study adopts the internationally recognized OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, combined with the Supervision and Evaluation Method for the BDCE

in Counties issued by the Ministry of Education of China, and constructs an evaluation criteria suitable for the BDCE in China. Most scholars in China use quantitative research to construct evaluation criteria, while this study uses evaluation criteria constructed by qualitative research, which can tap into the potential intrinsic motivations, feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions of policy implementation of stakeholders in the process of policy implementation to evaluate the policy of balanced development of compulsory education in multiple dimensions, perspectives, and levels and to discover the problems existing in the implementation of the policy. The results of this study make up for the one-sidedness and shortcomings of the evaluation criteria of BDCE in China, make China's education evaluation criteria benchmark international criteria, promote the internationalization of the education evaluation system, and better promote the continuous optimization and improvement of education policy, thus providing a useful reference for the evaluation of BDCE in China.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors wrote, reviewed and edited the content as needed and They have not utilised artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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- Sirisak Laochankham, Investigation, Supervision.
- Wei Yang, Conceptualization, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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APPENDIX

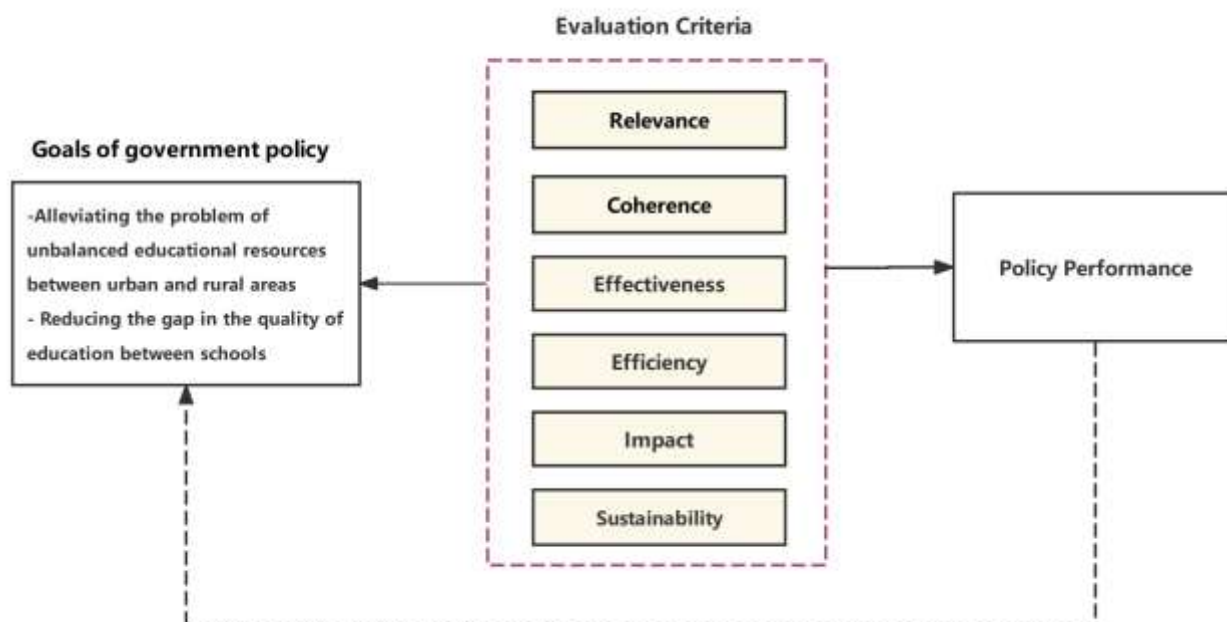


Fig. 2: Evaluation Framework

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria Content

Evaluation Criteria	Main Content
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is the policy formulation in line with the needs and priorities of the country? ● To what extent does the policy formulation reflect the rights of stakeholders and include a range of interests, including marginalized groups?
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does the policy contradict other policies? ● Is the policy coherent with other components of the education system? ● Is the policy coherent with the objectives of the overall national policy?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent have the objectives been achieved/likely to be achieved? ● What are the main factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the ratio between the costs and effects of policy implementation? ● To what extent were resources utilized? ● Were the policy objectives achieved on time?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent has the policy produced or is expected to produce significant positive or negative, intended or unintended effects? ● How are stakeholders affected?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent have the benefits of the policy been sustained? ● What are the main factors affecting the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the policy objectives?

Table 2. The BDCE Policy Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Main Content
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The degree to which the policy is consistent with national education strategies and goals ● The extent to which the Government fulfills its responsibilities by the law ● The degree to which the needs, preferences, and values of different stakeholders are met
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Synergies and complementarities between policies ● Coherence between policies and public values
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Degree of achievement of policy objectives and expected outcomes ● Degree of fairness in the results of policy implementation
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The level at which inputs of educational resources, including money, labor, time, and other resources, are efficiently transformed into results.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilization of educational resources ● The impact of the policy on students' families, including whether it changes families' attitudes towards choosing prestigious schools, etc. ● Impact on teacher development and professional identity ● The impact of the policy on the development of the school's operation level, including the quality of education, school management, school characteristics, etc. ● Impact of the policy on stakeholders, including their attitudes and opinions on the implementation of the policy.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quality of education ● Professional development of teachers ● Resource allocation for education ● Social, economic, and environmental sustainability