

Chapter 1

Globalisation and Competitiveness-Driven Education Reforms for Academic Excellence and Standards



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Abstract This chapter analyses major and on-going trends in education reforms for academic excellence, standards, equity and global competitiveness. The chapter critiques and evaluates a neo-liberal and neoconservative education policy, meta-ideological hegemony and paradigm shifts in education, together with major globalisation processes impacting on education and policy reforms, both locally and globally. Meta-ideological hegemony dictates economic competitiveness, academic standards, and global monitoring of educational quality and standards.

Keywords Education policy reforms · Globalisation · The global-local-dialectic · The globalised meta-ideology · Global university rankings · Human capital · Human rights education · Ideological shifts in education · Higher education policy · Models of governance · Neo-liberal higher education policy · Social stratification · Global university rankings · Internationalization · Quality education

Globalisation and Education Reforms: Introduction

Globalisation as a Cultural Transformation of Modernity

Using a critical theory discourse, we could argue that the teleological purpose of the global economy and globalisation in general, is to consolidate, maintain, expand and protect wealth, power, and privilege. Some authors argued that globalisation is also propelled by a dominant neo-liberal and bourgeois hegemony, which legitimates an ‘exploitative system’ (Apple, 1999; Klees, 2002; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Zajda, 2021). A number of factors, including neo-liberal ideology, with its logic of accountability, efficiency, performance indicators and profit-maximization have contributed to ‘high and rising inequality’, as reported in the 2019 *Human Development Report*. Growing economic

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inequality is causing ‘alarm in industrialized as well as developing countries’ (Krishna, 2020, p. 3).

According to the Oxford dictionary, the word ‘globalisation’ in the modern sense, was first employed in 1930. It was widely used by researchers in the 1960s. Furthermore, Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian professor of English at the University of Toronto, who analysed the media, coined the term ‘the medium is the message’, in his cutting-edge book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964. He also coined the term ‘global village’. Since then, a number of social theorists (Wallerstein, 1989; Giddens, 1990; Robertson, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Castells, 2000; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Sklair, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002; Rust & Jacob, 2005; Ritzer & Rojek, 2020; Fan & Popkewitz, 2020; Ampuja, 2021) argued that globalisation was one of the outcomes of modernity, which was characterised by the nexus of new structural political, economic, cultural, and technological developments (Wallerstein, 1979; Castells, 1989; Apple, 2002; Biraimah et al., 2008; Zajda, 2021). Globalisation, according to Ampuja (2021), is now the ‘most important keyword’ of the global triumph of neoliberal capitalism. He argues that these concepts have become ‘dominant in the social sciences, to the point of establishing a new theoretical orthodoxy that we can define as globalisation theory’ (Ampuja, 2021). Consequently, globalisation has also acquired a new meta-ideology that carries strong elements of Western ideologies (Daun, 2021).

Some critical theorists tended to refer to globalisation as a new form of cultural imperialism (Carnoy, 1977; Apple, 1999; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012; Boyd-Barrett, 2018; Gómez García & Birkinbine, 2018; Gudova, 2018). This new cultural and economic imperialism is represented by a *standardisation of commodities*—the same designer labels appearing in shops around the world. Globalisation results, at times, in a global recomposition of the capital-labour relations or the subordination of social reproduction to the reproduction of capital. In addition, globalisation leads to the globalisation of liquid capital, the deregulation of the labour market, the outsourcing of production to cheap and more competitive labour markets, and the intensified competition among transnational corporations (Held & McGrew, 2000). This idea is supported Wallerstein and others (Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Robertson et al., 2002; Daun, 2021) who also suggest that globalisation is the ultimate expression of the ideology of consumerism, driven by market expansion and profit maximisation (UNDP, 1999; see also UNDP, 2019). In critiquing globalisation and its impact on education and policy reforms, we need to know how its ‘ideological packaging’ affect education practices around the world. As Carnoy and Rhoten (2002), argued, there was a need to assess a possible nexus between globalisation, ideology, education reforms and their impact on schooling:

In assessing globalization’s true relationship to educational change, we need to know how globalization and its ideological packaging affect the overall delivery of schooling, from transnational paradigms, to national policies, to local practices (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002, p. 3).

Current education and policy reforms globally target academic standards, education quality and global competitiveness, as described below, in particular standards-driven and outcomes-defined policy change, as well as marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms.

The Impact of Globalisation on Education Policy and Reforms

There is no doubt that economic, political, cultural and social dimensions of globalisation have a profound effect on all spheres of education and society, both locally and globally. The on-going economic restructuring and policy reforms among nation-states, propelled by global competition, together with the ubiquitous global monitoring of educational quality and standards, are some of the imperatives of the globalisation process (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Bologna Process, 2020; Zajda, 2021). Global monitoring of educational quality and standards in the higher education sector was initiated by the *Bologna Process*, during the 1998–1999 periods. Bologna Process is an intergovernmental higher education reform process that includes 49 European countries and a number of European organizations, including European University Association (EUA). Its main goal is to ‘enhance the quality and recognition of European higher education systems and to improve the conditions for exchange and collaboration within Europe, as well as internationally’ (Bologna Process, 2020). It was launched in 1998–1999, to establish goals for reform in the participating countries, such as the three-cycle degree structure (bachelor, master’s, doctorate), and ‘adopted shared instruments, such as the European Credits Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)’ (Bologna Process, 2020).

Standards-Driven and Outcomes-Defined Policy Change

One of the effects of forces of globalisation is that educational organisations, having modelled its goals, priorities and strategies on the entrepreneurial business model, are compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of the efficiency, accountability and profit-driven managerialism. Hence, the politics of education reforms in the twenty-first century reflect this new emerging paradigm of standards-driven and outcomes-defined policy change (Zajda, 2015). Some policy analysts have criticized the ubiquitous and excessive nature of standardization in education, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to implement the UNESCO 2015 *Education for All* (EFA) policy goals, promoting equity and quality education for all (Carnoy, 1999; Beyers, 2002; de Vries & Egedy, 2007; Odeh, 2010; UNESCO, 2015c).

Globalisation and the competitive market forces have generated a massive growth in the knowledge industries that are having profound effects on society and educational institutions. In the global culture, the university, as other educational institutions, is now expected to invest its capital in the knowledge market. It increasingly acts as an entrepreneurial institution. Such a managerial and entrepreneurial re-orientation would have been seen in the past as antithetical to the traditional ethos of the university of providing knowledge for its own sake (see also Sabour, 2005; Zajda, 2015). It can be said that globalisation may have an adverse impact on education. One of the effects of globalisation on education in all spheres is that it is compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of the efficiency and profit-driven managerialism. This is particularly evident in higher education. The new entrepreneurial university in the global culture succumbs to the economic gains offered by the neoliberal ideology (Saunders, 2010; Rizvi, 2017; Zajda, 2021).

Rizvi (2017) suggests that the current discourse of educational reforms, driven by a neo-liberal ideology, has resulted in the intensification of ‘social inequalities’ (Rizvi, 2017, p. 10). He argues that globalisation while bringing ‘great benefits to most communities’, at the same time reinforces inequalities:

Global mobility of people, ideas and media has brought great benefits to most communities, but clearly in ways that are uneven and unequal (Rizvi, 2017, p. 12).

The emerging challenges for education and policy reforms include a drive towards improving academic achievement in secondary schools. Our key findings indicate that current trends in most BRICS countries’ treatment of governance in education rely on the discourses of accountability, performance and output driven schooling, and that they are characterized by the new high-stakes testing through the final year tests in secondary schools (Dervin & Zajda, 2021). The drive for global competitiveness means that recent education policy reforms in secondary education tend to be standards- and (global) accountability- driven. BRICS governments’ and MoEs’ push for high academic achievement in secondary schools has been influenced by the emerging standardizing regimes of global educational governance such as the OECD PISA assessment (Johansson, 2018, Rinne, 2020).

Globalisation, Marketisation and Quality/Efficiency Driven Reforms

Globalisation, marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms around the world since the 1980s have resulted in significant and major structural and qualitative changes in education and policy, including an increasing focus on the “lifelong learning for all”, or a “cradle-to-grave” vision of learning and the “knowledge economy” in the global culture. Governments, in their quest for excellence, quality and accountability in education, increasingly turn to international and comparative education data analysis. All of them agree that the major goal of education is to enhance the individual’s social and economic prospects. This can only be achieved

by providing quality education for *all*. Students' academic achievement is now regularly monitored and measured within the 'internationally agreed framework' of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This was done in response to the growing demand for international comparisons of educational outcomes (OECD, *Education policy outlook 2015: making reforms happen*). Yet, not all schools are successful in addressing the new academic standards imperatives, due to a number of factors, both internal and external. Cohen (2011), for instance, attributed failure of education reforms in the USA due to fragmented school governance and the lack of coherent educational infrastructure.

To measure levels of academic performance in the global culture, the OECD, in co-operation with UNESCO, is using *World Education Indicators* (WEI) programme, covering a broad range of comparative indicators, which report on the resource invested in education and their returns to individuals (OECD, 2020, *Education at a Glance – OECD Indicators*).

Since the 1980s, higher education policy and reforms globally have been influenced by the grand narratives of globalisation, neo-liberalism, human capital and economic rationalism. Higher education policy reforms in the 1980s represented a drive towards economic rationalism, where the increasingly traditional role of the university was replaced by a market-oriented and entrepreneurial university. It has led to entrepreneurial university awards. For instance, the University of Huddersfield has been awarded the prestigious *Times Higher Education Entrepreneurial University of the Year* award for 2013. The neo-liberal university, as noted by Saunders and others, emphasizes the "role of the faculty not as educators, researchers, or members of a larger community, but as entrepreneurs" (Saunders, 2010, p. 60). Accordingly, the current redefinition of academics into "entrepreneurs is widespread and is consistent with neo-liberal ideology as is the commodification, commercialization, and marketization of the fruits of faculty labour" (Saunders, 2010, p. 60; see also Parker, 2011; Gulbranson, 2019).

Discussion

Globalisation, marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms around the world since the 1980s have resulted in major structural and qualitative changes in education and policy, including an increasing focus on academic standards and global competitiveness. Governments, in their quest for excellence, quality and accountability in education, increasingly turn to international and comparative education data analysis. All agree that the major goal of education is to enhance the individual's educational, social and economic prospects (UNESCO, 2015a, b). This can only be achieved by providing quality education for *all*. Students' academic achievement is now regularly monitored and measured within the internationally agreed framework of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This was done in response to the growing demand for international comparisons of educational outcomes (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2020). To measure levels of academic performance in the global culture, the OECD, in co-operation with UNESCO, is

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The above critique of globalisation, policy and education suggests new and evolving economic, social and political dimensions of cultural imperialism (see Zajda, 2020b). Such hegemonic shifts in ideology and policy are likely to have significant economic and cultural implications for national education systems, reforms and policy implementations (see Zajda, 2020a, b). For instance, in view of GATS constrains, and the continuing domination of multinational educational corporations and organisations in a global marketplace, the “basis of a national policy for knowledge production may be eroded in a free-market context of a knowledge-driven economy” (Robertson et al., 2002, p. 494; see also Brown et al., 2002; Armstrong, 2001). This erosion signifies the corresponding weakening of the traditional role of the university, being the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Nisbet, 1971; Metz, 2019; Sabour, 2021). Sabour (2021) in his chapter ‘The impact of globalisation on the mission of the university’, argues that the strategic role of the university had “shifted away from its principle mission of acquiring knowledge and searching for the ‘Truth’ to a new position where it sought to defend political convictions and social rights” (Sabour, 2021). Furthermore, the university was ‘expected to invest its capital in the knowledge market’. It had to act as an ‘entrepreneurial institution’ (Sabour, 2021).

Conclusion

The above trends in globalisation, education and society, and their overall impact on individuals in different cultural settings, may also reflect both a growing social and cultural alienation and a Durkheimian sense of anomie in the world invaded by forces of globalisation, cultural imperialism, and global hegemonies that dictate the new economic, political and social imperatives and the regime of truth. These newly constructed imperatives in educational policy tend to operate as global master narratives, playing a hegemonic role within the framework of economic, political and cultural hybrids of globalisation. The above analysis of education policy reforms shows a complex nexus between globalisation, ideology and education reforms – where, on the one hand, democratisation and progressive pedagogy is equated with equality, inclusion, equity, tolerance and human rights, while on the other hand, globalisation is perceived, by some critics at least, to be a totalising force that is widening the socio-economic status (SES) gap, and cultural and economic capital between the rich and the poor, and bringing increasing levels of power, domination and control by corporate bodies and powerful organisations. We need to focus on solving the crucial issues at the centre of current and on-going education reforms, especially the provision of authentic democracy, human rights and social justice. Such actions will contribute to the emergence of a genuine culture of learning, and transformation, characterised by wisdom, compassion, and intercultural understanding.

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