

Chapter 10

Research Priorities and Developments in Education Reforms Globally



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Abstract The chapter offers a synthesis of current research findings on globalisation and education reforms, with reference to major paradigms and ideology. The chapter analyses the shifts in methodological approaches to globalisation, education reforms, paradigms, and their impact on education policy and pedagogy. The chapter critiques globalisation, policy and education reforms and suggests the emergence of new economic and political dimensions of cultural imperialism. Such hegemonic shifts in ideology and policy are likely to have significant economic and cultural implications for national education systems, reforms and policy implementations. The chapter also evaluates discourses of globalisation, and the ubiquitous trend towards the international large-scale assessment, and global educational standards. It is suggested there is a need to continue to explore critically the new challenges confronting the global village in the provision of authentic democracy, equality, social justice, against the background of education reforms.

Keywords Academic achievement · Authentic democracy · Business-oriented model of education · Competitive market forces · Critical discourse analysis · Cultural imperialism, discourses of globalisation · Economic inequality · Education reforms · Global citizenship · Globalisation · Human capital · Human rights education · Ideology · Intercultural understanding · Macro-social perspective · Marketisation · Neo-conservatism · Neo-liberal ideology · Paradigms · Performance indicators · Progressive pedagogy · Quality education for all · Social inequality · Social justice · Social stratification · Transformative pedagogy

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Research Priorities and Developments in Education Reforms Globally: Introduction

Economic, political, cultural and social dimensions of globalisation continue to have a profound effect on education and society, both locally and globally. The ongoing economic restructuring among nation-states, together with the current education hegemonies shaping dominant discourses as to how education policy, standards and curriculum need to be reformed, in response to the ubiquitous global monitoring of educational standards and quality are some of the outcomes of the globalisation process. In critiquing globalisation and its impact on education, we need to know how its 'ideological packaging' affect education practices around the world. As Carnoy and Rhoten (2002), wrote, 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 and Rhoten 2002, p. 3)

Globalisation impact on educational reforms strategies have resulted in at least **four** macro-social policy responses of the higher education sector globally, to the market forces and competitiveness:

- Competitiveness-driven reforms due to shifting demands for skills, commodities and markets
- Finance-driven reforms in public/private sectors, budgets, company income, cuts in educational spending
- Equity-driven reforms to improve the quality of education and its role as source of upward social mobility) to increase equality of *economic opportunity*
- Market forces-driven reforms for dominance globally. (see also Carnoy 1999)

Globalisation and Competitiveness-Driven Reforms

Globalisation, marketization and *competitiveness-driven* reforms both locally and globally were productivity-centred, involving privatization, decentralization, standards and improved management.

Globalisation and Finance-Driven Reforms

Globalisation resulted in increased competitiveness among nations and adjustment to a new globally dictated "structural" reality – structural adjustment. The main goal is to reduce public spending on education. In competitiveness-driven reforms the goal is to improve the productivity of labour and efficiency of resource use.

Market Forces–Driven Reforms for Dominance Globally

Globalisation resulted in competition for global dominance among nations. It has created economic leagues tables, favouring the few major economies and promoting academic elitism.

Equity-Driven Reforms

The main goal of equity-driven reforms in education and society is to increase economic capital and economic opportunity for all. Because educational attainment is a crucial factor in determining earnings and social positions, equalizing access to high-quality education can play a significant role here. Globalisation-driven higher education reforms tend to “push governments away from equity-driven reforms” (Carnoy 1999, p. 46; Zajda 2015a). This is due to two reasons. Firstly, globalisation tends to increase the pay-off to high-level skills relative to lower-level skills, reducing the nexus between equity and competitiveness-driven reforms. Secondly, finance-driven reforms dominate education and policy reforms in the global economy, and consequently increase inequity in education.

Globalisation has resulted in an aggressive competition for global dominance among nations. This is characterized by a relentless drive towards performance, global standards of excellence and quality, globalization of academic assessment (OECD, PISA), global academic achievement syndrome (OECD, World Bank), global academic elitism and league tables for the universities, and academically performing secondary schools. The latter signifies both ascribed and achieved status, the positioning of distinction, privilege, excellence and exclusivity. In recent education policy documents in the OECD, the World Bank, and elsewhere, policy reforms appear to be presented as a given, and as a necessary response to economic globalization and global competitiveness.

The impact of globalisation on education policy and reforms around the world has become a strategically significant issue, for it expresses one of the most ubiquitous, yet poorly understood phenomena of modernity and associated politico-economic and cultural transformations. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that forces of globalisation have contributed to a new dimension of socio-economic stratification, which offers immense gains to the very few of the economic elite in developed nations and in the emerging economies, especially in Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS). At the same time, it creates a growing and visible socio-economic divide between the rich and the poor globally, thus planting seeds of discontent and conflict for the future.

Standards-Driven and Outcomes-Defined Policy Change

One of the effects of economic forces of globalisation is that educational organisations, having modelled its goals 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 2015a, 2016, 2018). Some policy analysts have criticized the ubiquitous and excessive nature of standardization in education imposed by the EFA framework (Carnoy 1999; Torres 1998).

Whether one focuses on their positive or negative effects, at the bottom line, there was an agreement that the policies and practices of educational development had converged along the consensus built at the multilateral forum. (Carnoy 1999)

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 2015; Zajda 2015a). 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 neo-liberal ideology (Zajda 2015b).

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. 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.

Globalisation, Marketisation and Quality/Efficiency Driven Reforms

Globalisation, marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms around the world since the 1980s have resulted in 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, attributes 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 2019 *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).

Current Developments in Education Reforms: Case Studies

In addressing the nexus between globalisation, ideology and politics of education reforms, Johansson analyses the international large-scale assessments (ILSA), which have been criticized for spreading isomorphic ideologies. He discusses the use and possibilities of ILSA data and how results on ILSA's impact education and policy reforms world-wide. Rinne also suggests that states are increasingly incorporated into the global accountability regime, which defines academic achievement, standards and desirable educational outcomes. Wright, on the other hand, critiques PISA, as an instrument of the OECD, and suggests that it needs to provide better information to participant countries about the strengths and weaknesses of students in relation to the assessment frameworks, be more transparent about its methods, including the items used, and how measurement error is calculated, and broaden the assessment focus to include a broader range of competencies. Daun in his case study, analyses the results of almost 30 years of education reforms in Sweden, and notes that the most apparent feature is declining results in the international tests. In another comparative case study, Michael H. Lee & S. Gopinathan provide a critical review of education policies and reforms in both Singapore and Hong Kong to see how they can be refined and adjusted in order to cope with challenges facing both education systems. Both Singapore and Hong Kong have been ranked top (first and second) in international rankings such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in recent years. As such they are thus widely admired as high performing education systems (HPES) and, not surprisingly, among the best education systems in the world. The success stories of Singapore and Hong Kong education have aroused widespread attention among different stakeholders such as policymakers, researchers and practitioners internationally.

Zajda is moving away from assessment instruments and discusses current and dominant models employed in values education in schools. It is suggested that values education, in addition to focusing on moral education, is connected to democracy, active citizenship education, social justice and human rights education. Drawing on current research, he suggests how to improve the effectiveness values education in classroom pedagogy. Hyde, with reference to constructivist pedagogy, notes in particular, the positive contribution of constructionism in bringing about educational reforms and in taking a critical view towards the taken-for-granted notion of globalisation discourses. Vissing, with reference to human right education, analyzes how for-profit honor societies target vulnerable students around the world. Many such organizations are run under different names by the same individuals. The government does not monitor or penalize them for their exploitative activities. Original data from admissions and financial aid departments at dozens of highly prestigious universities indicate these "honors" are worthless and never considered as part of the college application or financial aid process. Such practices are in violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Brook-Napier, on the

other hand, offers her analysis of the two aspects of concern over the vulnerability of Mr. Mandela's legacy. First, in the so-called "born free" generation, the post-apartheid generation of South Africans whose profile reveals significant evidence of how many more "hills to climb" there are in the overall route to transformation in South Africa. Secondly, is Mr. Mandela's legacy vulnerable to political expediency and to societal amnesia?

Finally, Zajda, offers a synthesis of current research findings on globalisation and education reforms, with reference to major paradigms and ideology. The chapter analyses the shifts in methodological approaches to globalisation, education reforms, paradigms, and their impact on education policy and pedagogy. The chapter critiques globalisation, policy and education reform and suggests the emergence of new economic and political dimensions of cultural imperialism. In analysing the shifts in methodological approaches to globalisation and education reforms and their impact on education policy and pedagogy, by the above authors, we can make the following observations. First, some authors discuss international large-scale assessments (ILSA). They discuss how results on ILSA's impact education and policy reforms world-wide (Johansson 2020; Rinne 2020; Wright 2020). Second, some authors, like Lee & Gopinathan, provide a comparative case study of education policies and reforms in both Singapore and Hong Kong, and their impact on standards. Third, some examine international models of values education, and the use of constructionism in bringing about educational reforms globally. Others focused on more specific topics such for-profit honour societies and how they target vulnerable students around the world, and the relevance of Mandela's legacy for social reconstruction and transformation in South Africa. All of these authors, in one way or another, debate the nexus between ideology and education reforms, and their impact on educational policy, and academic standards.

Conclusion

The above analysis of education policy reforms in the global culture 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 power, domination and control by corporate bodies and powerful organisations. Hence, we need to continue to explore critically the new challenges confronting the global village in the provision of authentic democracy, social justice, and cross-cultural values that genuinely promote a transformative pedagogy.

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