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Recommended Citation

Lee, Jung Eun (2010). "Implementation of Lifelong Learning Policies in South Korea: A World Society Perspective4," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2010/papers/45>

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Implementation of Lifelong Learning Policies in South Korea: A World Society Perspective⁴

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Abstract: *This study examines the process of the implementation of lifelong learning policies in South Korea, and builds on a world society perspective, which views international organizations as major agents that diffuse the norm of lifelong learning across nations. Analysis of literature reveals that UNESCO through international conference on adult education (CONFINTEA) played a decisive role in South Korea's adaptation of lifelong learning as a national agenda.*

Introduction

Over the past decade, lifelong learning has increasingly become a prominent element of education policies worldwide (Dale, 1999; Jakobi, 2009). International organizations, such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Union (EU) and World Bank have been observed as major agents that diffuse the norm of lifelong learning (Jakobi, 2007; 2009; Lee, & Friedrich, 2008). Among these international organizations, UNESCO has played a decisive role in establishing the foundation and norm of lifelong learning (Lee, & Friedrich, 2008). For example, UNESCO published two seminal books, “*Learning to Be*” and “*Learning: the treasure within*”, which suggest the foundation of lifelong learning.

However, little is known about whether UNESCO indeed affects a nation's or state's policy implementation regarding adult education and lifelong learning. UNESCO's policy influence has been estimated as normative rather than substantive (Lee, & Friedrich, 2008). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the UNESCO on the nation state's lifelong policy implication. In particular, this study focuses on analyzing the influence of the CONFINTEA on South Korea's adaptation of lifelong learning policies as an instrument of policy diffusion. This study builds on a world society perspective which views international organizations as major agents that diffuse the norm of lifelong learning across nations. Therefore, I first describe “what is the world society perspective.” Next, I discuss “how UNESCO is advocating lifelong learning as an international organization in world society.” Finally, I address “how UNESCO's global policies actually influenced and what implementation they caused at the national level” by examining the case of South Korea.

World Society Perspective

The world society perspective is derived and developed from neo-institutionalism (Koo, 2007). Neo-institutionalism suggests that the behaviors of actors can be understood by considering external environments (Koo, 2007). Neo-institutionalism regards institutionalized rules as a broad consensus in society and public opinions that are taken for granted or supported.

⁴ The earlier version of this paper was presented at 54th Annual Conference on Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) in Chicago, March 2, 2010.

These institutionalized rules are considered to be efficient and legitimate, and organizations tend to adopt these rules, which can result in similarities among organizations. Similar to neo-institutionalism, the world society perspective regards the nation-state as a unit of analysis, and assumes that the nation-state also acts as an organization in the external institutional environment (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). As influenced by world models or world norms, a nation state embraces these world approaches similarly to other nation states. Having that in mind, world society theorists are interested in inter-government organizations, and multilateral organizations which play critical roles in carrying, embodying, and diffusing world culture to national states.

World society theorists, e.g. Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez (1997) noted that “many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes” (pp. 144-145). They explain four major mechanisms through which the world society influences the individual nation-state including (1) world meeting or conferences, (2) norm cascades or bandwagons, (3) the international treaty, and (4) the international organizations (i.e., including multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organization) (Boli & Thomas, 1999; Koo, 2007; Wotipka & Ramirez, 2007).

International conferences function as focal points to articulate world standards which are urged to be adopted at the nation-state level. They affect nation-state enactment of world standards through process of anticipatory, on-site, and subsequent socialization. Wotipka and Ramirez (2007) noted the conferences function as “moral revitalization sites for international norm entrepreneurs” (p.314). Moreover, the international organizations play a critical role in disseminating world cultural principles (Boli & Thomas, 1999). The following section introduces the role of the UNESCO in the dissemination of lifelong educational policy across nations.

UNESCO and Lifelong Education

UNESCO was established in 1945 by 37 founding member states (UNESCO, 2010). Today UNESCO has 193 member states and seeks to contribute to peace and security through educational, cultural and scientific exchange among member states (UNESCO, 2010). UNESCO endeavors to deliver world norms and standards in various areas through standardizing instruments, such as convention, recommendation, and declaration (Jakobi, 2009). Generally speaking, conventions are subject to ratification and are accepted by a two-thirds majority. On the other hand, recommendations are not subject to ratification but are intended to influence law and practice of nation states. They are accepted by a majority vote at the general conference. Declaration follows formal procedures as do recommendations, but they tend to address fundamental issues that concern high moral authority (UNESCO, 2007).

With regard to UNESCO’s promoting lifelong learning, UNESCO published two seminal books on lifelong learning in 1972 and 1996. Specifically, *Learning to be*, so-called Faure Report suggested that lifelong education could adequately address the needs of society, the democracy, and individual development (Faure, 1972). Called one of the most remarkable education policy documents in twentieth century (Jakobi, 2009), this report outlined reform principles that recognize all forms of learning, including formal, informal, and nonformal education, and the report proposed lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies. The other publication is *Learning: the treasure within* (Delors, 1996). This report

underlined the importance of lifelong learning for future education systems as a foundation. These publications are considered good instruments for diffusing world norms and standards (Jakobi, 2009).

In addition to these seminal books, UNESCO has advocated policy implementation for adult education and lifelong learning through world conferences. UNESCO has organized the International Conference on Adult Education known by the French acronym, CONFINTEA that has met every 12 years since 1949 in Elsinore, Denmark. Since adult education in UNESCO is very closely related to lifelong learning (Finger, 1995; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009), CONFINTEA has been an instrument to diffuse the norm and discourse of lifelong learning to nation states.

The conference has maintained as its primary agenda a global concern for advocacy for adult education and learning, and CONFINTEA has made significant contributions to the development of relevant discourses and the establishment of global adult education standards (UNESCO, 2009). Since the CONFINTEA is an intergovernmental meeting that invites policy makers from several related areas, it is assumed that the suggested policy recommendations have been reflected in revised national policies.

Each CONFINTEA meeting has important meaning and reflects the global context and concerns during that time. In particular, the 3rd, 4th and 5th CONFINTEAs are regarded as the important ones in the history of the organization. In 1972, the 3rd CONFINTEA integrated the concept of lifelong learning and attempted to secure the position of adult education inside lifelong learning (Lee & Friedrich, 2008). During the 3rd CONFINTEA, adult education was asserted as a critical component of lifelong education. The 3rd CONFINTEA highlighted the importance of providing the educational opportunities for all and suggested several government policy recommendations. The recommendations from the 3rd CONFINTEA was accepted in 1976 in the Nairobi general conference and pronounced as UNESCO's recommendation which advised the member states to establish the legislation and policy framework for adult education and lifelong education in the broad sense (UNESCO, 1976).

Compared to the 1970s, there were few the international discussions in 1980s. Sometimes, the time between mid 1970s to early 1990 is described as "valley of decreasing interest" in adult education and lifelong learning (Dehmel, 2006, p. 51 as cited in Lee & Friedrich, 2008). However, UNESCO tried to propagate the norm and standards of lifelong learning through CONFINTEAs (Lee & Friedrich, 2008). The 4th CONFINTEA in Paris in 1985, declared "the right to learn". The right to learn is somewhat different from the right to education which is part of Human rights' declaration in 1948. The right to learn is "to read and write, to question and analyze, to imagine and create, to read one's own world and to write history, to access to educational resources, and to develop individual and collective skills" (UNESCO, 1985, p. 67). The 4th CONFINTEA reaffirmed the importance of the right to learn as one of fundamental rights. It recommended implementing this rights and creating the necessary conditions for its exercise (UNESCO, 1985).

In the 5th CONFINTEA in 1997, the "Hamburg declaration on adult learning" was pronounced, which called attention to the importance of adult learning as a key for the 21st century. The 5th CONFINTEA created avenues with various issues, such as gender, and equity. It also promoted the building of partnerships among state, civil society and the private sector in developing and sustaining adult learning and education (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1997). Additionally, UNESCO also promoted the International Adult Learners' Week to mobilize and encourage learners to participate in educational activities (Schemmann, 2007). The latest

CONFINTEA in Brazil in 2009 abandoned the traditional rhetoric of the conference and motivated member states to take action. Member states agreed on the Belem Framework for Action which suggested some policy implementations.

Korea's Policy Implementation on Lifelong Education

Korea established the first Lifelong Education Act in 1999. This act succeeded the social education act of 1982 and amended the social education act reflecting the context in which the concept of lifelong education is more commonly discussed globally (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, & National Institute for Lifelong Education, 2009). The aim of the lifelong education act is to provide everyone with access to suitable learning opportunities anytime and anywhere and thus improve the quality of life and social development of Korea's citizens. The major outcome of the Lifelong Education Act in 1999 was the establishment of an administrative structure that would provide lifelong education to all citizens. Under the Ministry of Education, the national lifelong education center was established. At the local level, the lifelong learning centers were established to support of the continuous learning activities of all citizens. To create the condition for providing lifelong education to all citizen showed that the right to learn, which was declared in 1985 in 4th CONFINTEA was embedded in the Lifelong Education Act.

In 2007, the Korean government amended the first Lifelong Education Act and enacted the second Lifelong Education Act. In the second Lifelong Education Act, lifelong learning is defined as all types of systemic educational activities other than traditional school education (Ministry of Education and Human Resource, 2007), which include education for diploma achievement, basic adult literacy, vocational capacity-building, liberal arts, culture and arts, as well as education on civic participation. The second Lifelong Education Act also reinforced lifelong education support policies for the educationally underprivileged (e.g. poorly educated, elderly, handicapped) married immigrant women, migrant workers, and North Korean defectors (MEST & NILE, 2009). At the same time, it promoted structured study activities in the workplace and activated vocational lifelong education. The amended Lifelong Education Act granted employee's paid study leaves or non-paid study leaves to expand access to lifelong learning opportunities or pay study expenses for book purchases, education, and research (MEST & NILE, 2009).

It should be noted that the second Lifelong Education Act provided an article on adult literacy education, which mandated stipulated state and local governments to equip adults with a basic academic capacity required for social life. The act also stated that adults who successfully complete the approved literacy education programs may be recognized for their educational attainment. In addition to the special article on adult literacy in the Lifelong Education Act, the government started the Adult Literacy Education Support Project in 2006, which provided 2.5 million (USD) to support 178 literacy education organization (benefitting about 14,668 adult learners) and 3.9 million (USD) to support 365 literacy related organizations (33,000 adult learners) (MEST & NILE, 2009). Moreover, the government started the Adult Literacy Education Textbook Development project. Though adult literacy was one concern in this field, the government announced it as an Act and provided more systematic support (MEST & NILE, 2009).

Together with the lifelong education act, Korea developed the Academic Credit bank system in 1999 and established the Act on Credit Recognition in order to recognize all the other

types of learning activities (MEST & NILE, 2009). Learning activities from formal institutions to nonformal institutions and even informal learning, such as apprenticeships and certificates were all recognized and counted as academic credits. When individuals accumulated certain credits, they could pursue two year college degrees or bachelor's degrees. Since the credit bank system was established in 1999, the numbers of participants have been constantly increasing (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2005)

Another policy implementation example is the promotion of an annual national lifelong learning festival. Since 2001, the Korean government has held a lifelong learning festival annually. Local governments and local lifelong education centers and other organizations that provide lifelong learning activities participate in the festival (MEST & NILE, 2009). Learners also present their works that reflect their accomplishments in learning. During the festival, awards are given to the organizations and learners who contribute to and actively take part in lifelong education. Recently a few municipalities have been hosting their own local lifelong learning festivals in addition to the national festival. The annual lifelong learning festival has started in response to a recommendation from the 5th CONFINTEA in 1997 (MEST & NILE, 2009). The learner's week was promoted as one way to encourage adults' participation in the lifelong learning activities. As following the recommendation from CONFINTEA, the lifelong learning festival is the policy effort of the Korean government to encourage participation in lifelong learning.

As mentioned earlier, UNESCO has been recognized as one of the important international agencies to advocate lifelong education (Jakobi, 2009). However, its policy influence on the field often was underestimated. Lee and Friedrich (2008) noted it is partly because of UNESCO's "lack of legal authority to initiate particular educational programs" in member states. However, from analyzing policy documents, acts and articles, UNESCO's influence on policy implementation in Korea has been found. Since late 1990s, education policies were heavily influenced by neo-liberalism, knowledge-based society and market discourse (Han, 2008). Education and learning, in general, become more individuals' matters. The context of Korea was not so much different. However, UNESCO has asserted the importance of governments' role in adult education and the importance of adult basic education as well as the right to learn through the discursive events, CONFINTEAs. UNESCO's humanistic and democratic approaches were reflected in lifelong learning policies in Korea. Though policies in Korea are adapted by neoliberal ideology and market discourse, the key issues and recommendations from CONFINTEA were reflected and adopted in Korean context.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has extended relevant literature on lifelong learning policy and world society theory by suggesting how an individual country is influenced by the international organization in terms of policy implementation of lifelong learning and adult education. UNESCO's promotion of lifelong education and the policy implementation process of Korea show that UNESCO plays a critical role in diffusing the norm of lifelong learning to member states in various ways. In particular, CONFINTEA meetings have served as focal points where the global standards were articulated. The case of South Korea suggests how UNESCO's discourse on lifelong education influenced policy implementation at the local level. UNESCO provides the general directions and promoted certain policy programs which the Korean government adopted at the national level. Salient points regarding UNESCO's policy diffusion to Korea include the following:

First, “Right to learn” was adopted and embedded as a foundation of educational policies. The right to learn was proclaimed in the 4th CONFINTEA meeting and has been highlighted ever since then. The Lifelong learning Acts of 1997 and 2007 clearly addressed the right to learn. In particular, in 2007 many policies that support learning for underprivileged groups have formed.

Second, adult basic education and literacy has been stressed in educational policies. Adult literacy was considered a foundation of lifelong learning and its importance was highlighted as a special article in the lifelong education act. Additionally, the ministry of education began to provide financial support for the textbook development projects and organizations which provide adult literacy programs.

Third, lifelong learning has been adopted as a principle in overall education policies and has developed an overarching policy framework across various ministries. Depending on the characteristic of the policies, various ministries collaborate and implement policies. Considering legislation and establishing administrative structure was one of recommendations from the 3rd and 5th CONFINTEA Nairobi general conference meetings, it can be understood that the recommendation was adopted.

This study has limitation to answer the question of how international contexts and local contexts converse in policy diffusion and show their dynamics. The conversion of global discourse on lifelong learning to local context needs to be further studied in future studies.

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