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## THE INFLUENCE OF GLOBALISATION ON THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Sajid Ali\*

### *Abstract*

*Globalisation as the most powerful phenomenon of the present time is widely contested for its positive and negative outcomes. This article distinguishes between political, economic and cultural globalisation and argues that globalisation as a process is mostly led and appreciated by the developed countries to meet their desired objectives, whereby underdeveloped countries are hurled into this process. Less equipped and less informed, these underdeveloped countries often stand in a disadvantaged position. The article maintains that several supra national economic, cultural and political organisations are the manifestation of the process of globalisation, which has made the policy making process a complex phenomenon. The nation states have to deal with the pressures exerted by both other influential states and these international organisations, which seriously curtails the capacity of states to formulate its policies independent of any foreign influence and in favour of its citizens. Given this complex context, educational policies, like every other policy formed in underdeveloped countries, respond more to the globalisation process rather than national needs. This article tries to understand the globalisation phenomenon with respect to educational policy in underdeveloped countries and then explores the ways through which globalisation influences national educational policies.*

### **Introduction**

Globalisation is a phenomenon that is characterized by the massive growth in communication, trade, cultural exchange, information flows etc. around the world, with 'decreasing restrictions' in a complex and integrated global society (Crawford, 2003, p. 55). Almost all of us, in one form or the other experience this process in our day-to-day life; for example when emailing, and internet surfing, quite often one may wear shoes manufactured by a company located in Malaysia, owned by the USA using machines manufactured in Europe. Even in remote locations, farmers increasingly use

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farming machinery and technology developed and manufactured in different parts of the world. The world is rightly described as a world wide web; there are hundreds of satellites in space facilitating the easy flow of knowledge and culture around the world. One can receive a message from a remote area to another part of the world within almost no time.

Globalisation is rightly described by Giddens (1990) as a phenomenon characterised by the separation of time and space and their stretching beyond any boundaries, whereby the immediate surroundings are shaped by the distant happenings and vice versa. Waters (1996, p. 3) puts globalisation as a process in which 'the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede'. Taylor et al. (1997, p. 55) describe it simply as 'a set of processes which in various ways – economic, cultural and political – make supranational connections'. They further distinguish between globalisation and internationalisation; the former mostly refers to the processes between the nations and the latter tends to rise above the national boundaries and situate itself in a rather abstract location in cyberspace. Wildings (1997), who is not interested in differentiating globalisation from internationalisation and is skeptical of the different notions attached to the two phenomena, does not describe globalisation in a singular way. He suggests that the term globalisation can '*describe* the trends in economic, political, social and cultural development' and is also used to '*explain* such trends'; and more importantly it refers to a broad ideological stance (p. 411, emphasis original).

The process of globalisation has been led by the European (and more recently by the United States), as Waters (1996) suggests, through the process of 'colonization', 'settlements' and 'cultural mimesis' and to add to his list, the advancement in technology, and economic and military might as in case of United States. Hence, globalisation is also referred as 'Westernisation', which can be noticed by the prevalence of Western norms, clothing (jeans), drinking eating habits (fast food and Coke) etc. across the globe (Yeates, 1999). Marginson (1999, p. 21) summarised different features of globalisation in six aspects: 'finance and trade; communications and information technologies; international movements of people; the formation of global societies; linguistic, cultural and ideological convergence; and world systems of signs and images'.

Let us now discuss the kinds of pressures that the nation state and more particularly public policy have to face as a result of globalisation. This discussion will lead further to analyse the influence of globalisation on national educational policies of underdeveloped countries.

### **Pressure(S) of Globalisation on Nation State and National Policies**

Giddens (1990, p. 65) explains that due to the stretching of time and space the localised instruments to address the problems of life have become irrelevant. Hence there are increasing pressures for 'local autonomy' and 'regional cultural identity' Henry et al. (2001), agreeing with Giddens, argue that the forces of globalisation pressurise nation states from above and below, and limit the policy-making options for any state. From above, there are forces of international alignment, such as

international economic competition, political pressures of more powerful states and invasion of symbols, images and ideas. From below, there are local forces in the shape of cultural ideologies, social movements, traditions and local political conditions (Yeates, 1999). Added to these pressures the creation of supra-national organisations like United Nations (UN) and its subsidiaries, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO), OECD, G-7, along with Multi National Companies (MNCs) has added another complex layer of pressure for nation states, which has to be accounted for. These supranational organisations along with internationally organised agreements, and facilitated by media and technology (Went, 2000, p. 53), act as instruments of global change. Although these pressures are not so severe as to render nation-states totally 'impotent' (Dale, 1999, p. 2), they have certainly curtailed the policy making capacity of nations, hence, one thing is quite sure;

a state can no longer be sovereign ... a state cannot in contemporary globalising circumstances exercise ultimate, comprehensive, absolute and singular rule over a country and its foreign relations (Scholte, 2000, p. 136).

The common ideology promoted by these organisations under many other different labels is summarised by Dale (1999, p. 4) borrowing from Williamson's notion of the 'Washington Consensus'. Its components are: 'fiscal discipline, public expenditure priorities, tax reform, financial liberalization, exchange rates, trade liberalization, foreign direct investment, privatisation, deregulation, and property rights'. He further emphasises that these globalisation ideologies operate with different mechanisms namely: 'harmonization', 'dissemination', 'standardization', installing interdependence' and 'imposition' (p. 5). Depending on the mechanism, its impact varies from country to country.

With the growing power of globalisation forces, the world has witnessed un-equal distribution of wealth amongst nations and within nations, increased poverty in underdeveloped countries, deteriorating working conditions for labour, the disadvantage of pursuing homogeneity of policy and countries' moves to be more attractive to capital than to be more socially beneficial for its population (Green & Griffith, 2002). The traditional tools at the disposal of states to safeguard its populace, like trade tariffs, are becoming less and less useful (Crawford, 2003; Martin & Schumann, 1997). The social policy will continue to be determined by global economic forces as a result of which states will be hollowed out, the balance of power will be shifted in favour of capital in opposition to labour and government priorities will be altered accordingly (Wilding, 1997).

### **Globalisation and Education Policies in the Underdeveloped World**

Dale (1999, p. 2) argues that globalisation indirectly affects public services like education. The market forces like debt conditionalities, which Dale refers to as an 'imposition mechanism' of globalisation, may press some countries to cut down their social services (Ahmad, 2003); although this varies from country to country, given the

unique socio-political and economic situation in each. How far these external forces influence the public policy of underdeveloped countries can be measured by looking at the report of the Economist Intelligence in its forecasts of political and economic trends for 2003. A cursory look over this document would reveal that the economic policies of countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Ethiopia, and Colombia, to name a few, will be shaped in light of the conditionalities of IMF or the World Bank (2003: Country by Country-Forecasts of political and economic trends in over 190 countries, 2002). And, as argued earlier the indirect impact of such conditionalities would be reflected upon public responsibilities of the government.

Policy implies authority that is vested in the governments of nation states through the constitutional process. When nation states themselves face challenges to their authority by supra-national and trans-national political entities (e.g. UN, WTO, IMF etc.), their ability to form effective national policies independent of any influence is also curtailed.

In this regard Taylor et al. (1997) present a marvelous analysis of education policies in Malaysia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). They empirically showed how the market forces shaped the Malaysian higher education policy and how the IMF and World Bank conditionalities manipulated the educational policy of PNG against the wishes and needs of local authorities. The study of PNG and Malaysia presents a case typical of many underdeveloped nations.

The next section will describe some of the implications of globalisation for national educational policies of underdeveloped countries and will try to determine the nature and severity of this influence.

### **1. Education not for knowledge but for market**

Although globalisation has political and cultural facets too, economic globalisation surpasses both of them in terms of its growth. Waters (1996) suggests that it is the economic globalisation that has achieved most of the ideal characteristics necessary for it. In this context education is seen as the most crucial element for the development and growth of market economy. The current economy needs a workforce that should be highly competitive to deal with the requirements of global economy. This approach to education based on human capital theory itself is problematic as it sees education as an industry rather than a body that is meant for the creation and spread of knowledge for its own sake. Another problem with this approach, Marginson (1993, p. 40) argues, is that although free market economy culture encourages more spending on human capital development, the same force places more emphasis on private rather than public spending on education. Hence, education policy face pressure from top and bottom, from top it has to struggle for the maintenance of its role as a knowledge provider as well as human capital developer. From bottom, it also needs to manage itself with decreasing public spending that means less and less protection from the market forces. This problem becomes more severe for underdeveloped countries where education policy cannot afford itself without the public spending. As a result, the ideological focus of education in most underdeveloped countries has shifted towards the preparation of human capital useful for the market rather than for the

creation of knowledge. The impact of this approach has already made severe marks in African context, where the hegemonic features of globalising forces are most cruel and which has been voiced by many scholars (Albeny, 2002).

## **2. Conflict between nationalism vs. global citizenship**

Martin and Schumann (1997) argue that global governance is a myth, which actually provide legitimacy to powerful nations to dominate. In this regard global citizenship as a corollary of same mythical ideology has certain inherent problems. The concept of citizenship is construed around nation-state, which attempts to ensure the welfare of its citizens by providing shelter from external forces in economic, political and cultural domains. Looking from this angle global citizenship seems a concept that situates itself in an imaginary space as opposed to nation state. Hence, national-citizenship seems to compete with global-citizenship. As the world tends to globalise the politico-economic entities like the World Bank, IMF, UN emphasise nation states (especially underdeveloped nations) to align their educational policies in favour of global citizenship. This pressure in turn leads to the problem of curriculum development; devising the curriculum in favour of globalisation seriously curtails the limits of national sovereignty and national education policy finds itself in deep waters. If it tries to work against the globalisation policy it will lose the support and funding crucial for its own existence and if it tries to work for globalisation it will soon be left impotent, as is shown by Taylor et al. (1997) in case of PNG.

## **3. Managerialism and bureaucracy**

Henry et al. (2001) emphasise that the globalisation has created the spirit of managerialism in the governance of education. This spirit is concerned more with the goals, strict regulations, competition and devolution. The welfare-state is now being conceived as competitive-state, which should steer from distance and regularise the services to ensure three E's: economy, effectiveness and efficiency (Mok & Lee, 2000). When this spirit of new public management is applied to the underdeveloped countries for education policy and implementation it meets a half-hearted response. In light of my first hand experience, the development projects as a vehicle of change face resistance to an imposed agenda of change from the educational bureaucracy, hence no positive impact occurs. In addition these projects seem to focus more on the quantitative achievements based on appropriate indicators, which lack any real will towards improvement. This dilemma leads to strengthened bureaucracy which tries to manipulate achievement results and exploit the system. These related issues has resulted in failures of so many educational development project in Pakistan, for example: the Social Action Programme (SAP I & II), the Sindh Primary Education Development Project (SPEDP), the Girls Primary Education Development Project I & II (GPEDP), the Primary Education Curriculum Reform Project (PECRP) etc. (Mustafa, 2004; SPDC, 1997, pp. vii-xii). Countries like PNG face the same kind of fate, whereby the elite bureaucracy manipulate projects leading the poor population deeper into the poverty and under-development as shown by the analysis of Taylor et

al. (1997). As a net result the whole system moves in circles leaving the country deeper into crisis, leaving only few beneficiaries.

#### **4. Short-term experiences do not meet long term needs**

Based on my personal experience of working in the education sector in Pakistan I have observed that the politics of project-based reform experiences in underdeveloped countries is yet another issue for educational policy. The donor agencies often try to fund small reform projects in underdeveloped countries that are mostly practiced in a limited setting. The lessons learnt from these experiences are being pushed to be incorporated into the national policies, without realising their limitations. Often donors agencies push for certain policies to be implemented at national level that are being drawn on the basis of learning from an experience of a project implemented on a very limited scale. As a result there are plethora of failed educational development project in Africa (Albeny, 2002) and Pakistan (Mustafa, 2004; SPDC, 1997, pp. vii-xii).

#### **5. National needs vs. globalisation alignment**

The main argument of this article is that due to external pressure the national policies of underdeveloped countries are distracted from its most immediate needs. For example the societies where substantial populations live on under \$1 per day should need to provide at least free primary education to its young children. The free market economy with its belief in privatisation encourages the private sector to participate in the primary education. As a result, parallel systems of education emerge in these societies like in Pakistan. Private education (a better option) is limited to only those who can afford it, while the poor can only access poor quality public education. This further encourages the class system and the categories of haves and have-nots. Many of the underdeveloped countries are an open example of this process. This leads to greater implications for crime and corruption. This result in another kind of apartheid in Africa, where English, French and Portuguese are considered as languages that ensure prosperity for those who are proficient in them. Due to the usage of these foreign languages instead of local for classroom instruction, a great number of students fail and dropout from schools (Albeny, 2002).

#### **6. Impact of globalisation on higher education policy**

Porter and Vidovich (2000) presented an effective analysis of the impact of globalisation on higher education policy. They argued that the globalisation has weakened higher education with budget-cuts, search for alternate income resources, commodification of knowledge, responsiveness to national economic agenda, introduction of new forms of accountability and an extensive debate over the role of universities in future societies. They mostly kept their analysis to the higher education in Australia and United Kingdom. The situation in other developing and underdeveloped countries is much more problematic. Developing countries like Hong Kong and Taiwan have started feeling the pressure of globalisation on their higher education institutions, which are being forced to alter their curriculum, meet national standards, compete for budgets and bring new governance structures (Mok, 2000;

Mok & Lee, 2000). Underdeveloped countries with their low socio economic status have been trying hard to provide subsidised higher education. However under more constrained financial control by IMF the countries like Pakistan are being forced to withdraw all subsidies including higher education and encourage private sector financing in this domain. The “market driven education system” also emphasise more on technical education and undermines the importance of humanities and social sciences (Ahmed, 2003).

## Conclusions

Through this discussion an attempt has been made to explore the nature and impact of globalisation on national policy in underdeveloped countries especially in the field of education. It is a fact that with the passage of time the world is fast globalising in economic, political and cultural domains together. It is also a revealed reality for the underdeveloped countries that the instruments of globalisation (UN, IMF, World Bank etc) are gaining more and more power while nation states keep losing their control within national boundaries. As Mok and Lee (2000) emphasise that without a proactive and indigenous re-interpretation of globalisation the nation states would enter into an ‘era of re-colonization’ (p. 361). In this scenario what could be a possible way out? Wilding (1997) and Yeates (1999) argue that nation states still have power and scope or regulating globalisation pressures. It might be true for developed or developing nations, however, given the nature of underdeveloped countries, most of whom are indebted to one or the other international agency, it would be quite challenging to exercise their power against these forces. Nevertheless, they can form a joint alliance to safeguard their common interests against globalisation affects. The creation of the European Union (EU), itself a supranational entity, presents an experience that can be worth trying. The EU was created by the nation states of Europe basically in response to globalisation and under the realization that the post Cold War world tended to unite the world under one hegemonic authority (the United States). Perhaps, this joint initiative acts as a filter against the effects of globalisation for individual nations. It is important to note that all globalisation is not considered bad, for example this has been able to effectively handle some global issues like environment and Aids; it is only its hegemonic characteristic that is objected to in this article. Hence, the formation of a joint alliance by underdeveloped countries might ensure the sovereignty of nation states and would enable these states to benefit from the goods of globalisation and reject the negative elements. This protecting layer may provide them an opportunity to formulate their national policies independent of any external influence and according to the real needs of their people.

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