Critical Analysis of the Educational Policies of Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study evaluates the local and global trends of education policy in Pakistan. This critical analysis revolves around the framework of all the policies, implemented in Pakistan. The focus on the current education policy development process, which was initiated by the Pakistan Ministry of Education in 2005 and which culminated into a White Paper on education in 2007 and a subsequent education policy in September 2009. The research suggests the dire need to bring reformations in the policies and to integrate global policies into local context.

Keywords: Education, Privatization, Decentralization, Pakistan

Introduction

The processes of globalization have arguably led to the emergence of global education policy field which supposedly pushes for a common world agenda for education. The development of global educational targets, international testing regimes, popularity of English language and import-export of higher education programs across the globe are some of the evidences that support this argument. The growth of common set of educational policy values indicates the emergence of 'global education policy field'[1] While there is a push from this emerging global education policy field towards nation states in favor of certain policy preferences, the nation states are also engaged in an active process of negotiation and trade-offs with this global field through a set of contextual value preferences and what may be referred as 'national education policy field'. An important task for the policy analysts today is to understand these fields and the cross-field effects so as to better understand the effects of globalization. The policy effects of globalization can only be understood in relation with contextual specificities,[2] though an analysis of a particular case – in this case Pakistan, has important lessons for other similar contexts.

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The approach of the research paper will be of critical policy analysis[3] with, which requires focus on broader questions of social justice and power and not simply looks at increasing the efficiency of policy. Thus the central focus will be to explore the scope of national (in) dependence in wake of global education policy trends.

Education Policy Context of Pakistan
Pakistan emerged as a postcolonial nation in 1947 after the departure of British from India. Education was considered as one of the most important factor in the development of the new nation by its founders as visible in the first education conference held as early as November 1947 (3 months after the independence). The nation's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his inaugural address said:

> *"There is no doubt that the future of our State will and must greatly depend upon the type of education we give to our children and the way in which we bring them up as future citizens of Pakistan."* [4]

However, later events show that this priority to education could not move beyond rhetoric. Several educational plans and policies have been put forward since then but without remarkable results. The current adult literacy rate is 55% and those who go to school either drop out early or suffer a largely low quality learning experience, save better off private schools. There are some pertinent education policy issues that need to be highlighted to understand any debate about education in Pakistan.

Foremost is the issue of ideology – the role of Islam in curriculum and instruction. Since, Pakistan came into being as a homeland of Muslim Indians; the sentiments towards the position of Islam in education are always high. One can argue for it or against it but the question remains central to this date.[5] The current education policy has a whole chapter dedicated to Islamic education.[6] The other significant issue deals with the language of education – whether it be Urdu, the national language; English, the global language; or a local language. Finding the right mix of these important language choices have remained a flaring issue often raising high emotions.[7] While there are those who see a national language as a symbol of national unity, others argue for mother tongue for identity and familiarity reasons. The role of English for ensuing financial gains is also significant. Third major issues relates to the class based education system – high quality private schools for elites, low cost private and public schools for poor, and madrassa schools for the poorest of the poor.[8] Although this divide is not that simple and there are many shades between these apparently simple divisions, it shows the nature of problem. Last but not the least is the issue of government's non-seriousness to improve this educational

system for the disadvantaged – rural, poor and females. The government allocates approximately 2% of GDP for education, which is often not fully disbursed. Policy documents are produced by each subsequent government with high promises but little achievements.[9]

Recently, some significant constitutional changes have occurred that affects education and need mention here too. In 2010 the 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed by the parliament which has devolved many powers from central to provincial governments. Pakistan has a federal structure with four provincial and federally administered area governments. Historically, the federal government has retained most of the powers with weaker provinces. The 18th Amendment has given more autonomy to the provinces in several arenas; education being one of them. Thus each province is now supposedly free to devise its own educational priorities and curriculum with minimum federal coordination. This is a significant move for a country where historically curriculum has been tightly scrutinized at federal level. The effects of 18th Amendment are yet to be seen, though administratively, the federal Ministry of Education has been abolished – a significant move by the government.

About the Research
The research from which this chapter draws from was carried out during 2005-2009 focusing on the policy development process that resulted in a pre-policy document titled 'Education in Pakistan - a White Paper' in 2007 followed by a final policy paper in 2009. The research utilized the methodological resources of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Norman Fairclough.[10] The central focus of the research is the policy text 'Education in Pakistan – a White Paper'. Other data sources included 46 policy or policy related documents comprising official policy texts, policy review documents, feedback on policy, official ministerial reports, international organizations' strategy papers and past education policies. This resulted in scanning thousands of pages of text over a long period. The documentary data was supplemented with 26 interviews with policy review team, officials of the ministry, planning commission, academics and representatives of donor agencies, NGOs and INGOs. Following Fairclough's approach a three dimensional analysis framework was designed to synthesizedata linguistically, discursively and structurally.

Global Education Policy Field
The idea of global education policy field maintains that a consensual set of education policy themes and processes are emerging above nation states, which have serious effects on national education systems.[11] This is

also noted by various other scholars too, Rizvi et. al.[12] refer to an emerging 'educational policy terrain'. A logical extension of this assertion would therefore suggest that there ought to exist a national education policy field that contests this global field. The result of this interaction of global and national policy fields may yield a unique vernacular policy.[13] It is thus important to chart the terrain of this emerging global education policy field and see its manifestation at local/national level to understand the effects of globalization on national education policy.

The global education policy field comprises several value preferences in education policy at a global scale. At the same time it is important to note that there are multiple value preferences that compete for their hegemony and thus we might think of several possible globalization.[14] The current hegemony of these preferences is maintained by what is referred as Neoliberalism. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as follows:

> *"Neo-liberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."* [15]

However, these value preferences and practices manifest differently in different countries based on their unique contextual realities. In the next section an attempt is made to have very brief understanding of this emerging (neoliberal) global education policy field and its manifestations in the Pakistani context. This will be then be followed by a discussion on how this field makes its way into the national space and what are the responses of the Pakistani state.

Privatization
A consensus is emerging globally in favor of private and quasi-private provisions of educational services compared with public provisions. This is a cornerstone of neoliberal policy priorities also referred as 'Washington Consensus'.[16] This policy priority has given rise to privatization of certain components of educational services, for example in the building of physical facilities, teacher provision or private adoption of school with some public support.[17] A more compromised preference has appeared through the policies of public-private-partnerships.

It is interesting to note that while neoliberal globalization seeks higher investment for education, it does not want increase in the public expenditure for that purpose. Cutting down on government budgets while

demanding increased education investments for education consequently leading to private involvement in educational services' provision. It is no longer the case that private education means 'elite education' there is a whole range of private schooling from most elite to an educational facility working on bare minimum across the world now.[18]

In Pakistan, the privatization is also on rise. The governmental census of educational institutions reveals that 33% of educational institutions were in private sector in 2005.[19] The trend of privatization is on rise and it is estimated that majority of educational institutions in urban areas are in the private hands. There are also several initiatives by the government to encourage private participation to support public education, most prominently through the work of Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF). A recent project by the SEF is titled 'Promoting Private Schooling in Rural Sindh (PPRS)'. The national public expenditures on education are quite meager and on average stayed around 2% of GDP. This gives rise to the call for private provision of education and an image among masses that private education is better than public. A World Bank sponsored study recently showed that the private provision of education even in poor rural communities is a relatively better option.[20]

Decentralization

There is a rise in decentralized forms of government structures across the globe most prominently since 1990s.[21] The governments are involved in more networked and joined-up forms of governance, which involves several members not only from public but also from private and non-governmental sectors.[22] This is a move often referred as the movement from 'government to governance'.[23] The decentralized governance is generally preferred to ensure effectiveness and equity. There is also some truth that the states are also losing their traditional strong control over its institutions and thus resorting to more hands-off government. This new reality has also resulted in governments adopting new technologies of governance, for example governance through developing a system of targets and benchmarks, which is referred by some as 'policy by numbers'.[24] The collection and publication of various statistics over performance standards provide alternate tool to the governments to demand higher performance and thus manage the system through distance.

The decentralization reforms were introduced in Pakistan in 2001 by the then president Pervez Musharraf. The reforms particularly in education sector targeted to restructure the centralized bureaucratic structure organizing education and devolve the decision making to district level for increasing efficiency and increased autonomy at local

level.[25] However, the insufficient capacity of educational managers at the district level raised doubts about the achievement of decentralization objectives at its early stages.[26] In 2010 the 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed by the parliament, which devolved power to the provinces in several domains, including education. There is also a substantial rise in the development and maintenance of educational statics in Pakistan resulting in several publications like: National Education Census 2005; National Education Assessment System's (NEAS) results; Provincial assessment results; reports on the achievement of targets of Education for All (EFA) and MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and annual reports on state of basic education indicators by the Education Management Information System (EMIS) at national and provincial levels. The plethora of statistics does suggest a move towards 'policy by numbers'. To avoid exaggeration, I do acknowledge the inherent problems in the way the statistics are collected and presented and their effect on governability by authorities. However, the pattern of growth in these statistics does suggest a rising trend, which will be further enhanced as the need for such statistics in governance get increased after educational decentralization through 18th Amendment.

Vocationalization

A global acceptance and push for curriculum to be more oriented towards skills, that can help graduates to be productive in the world of work, is increasingly visible. The competency in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and English language are considered two of the most important global skills.[27] Although, there still exists a difference between 'knowledge about ICT' prevalent in developing world and 'knowledge through ICT' quite common in developed world. The curriculum is also devised in such a way that it can be offered globally thanks to the advancements in technology. The ICT certifications offered by Microsoft, Cisco and accounting certifications by ACCA can be attained anywhere in the world. The English language has almost reached the level of a world *lingua franca* and thus both developed and developing countries give special space to the learning and teaching of English from early stages. There are special courses offered to learn it and special examinations to certify it proficiency like the TOEFL and IELTS.

        The language of higher education in Pakistan is also English. ICT and English courses dominate the vocational courses in Pakistan. There is a recent push towards vocational education in Pakistan. In the province of Sindh a huge vocational program 'Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program' has been operational for last two years

and another World Bank financed project on 'Skill Development' is in planning. A National Vocational Education authority has been created with provincial branches along with the formulation of National Vocational education policy. It is important to note that as a society, the vocational education stream is not valued in Pakistan as much as the academic streams leading to university qualifications. Hence promotion of vocational education in Pakistan also has some class undertones.

Standardization
One of the most prominent features of the global education policy field is the importance attached to measurement of outcomes over certain well defined indicators. This has caused a huge surge of various educational statistics at a global level of various sorts. The performance over educational targets is being measured, the tests are conducted to benchmark several countries over a standardized scales for example Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). As already shared, Grek calls this phenomenan 'governing by numbers'[28] whereby various statistics are used for governing education sector and for demonstrating performance.

These test scores and indicators show the relative quality of human capital of any particular country and thus are very important factor in developing the image of a country in global knowledge economy. These benchmarks also has potential of creating standardization through assessing performance in particular areas and of particular skills and thus leading to potential narrowing down of curricular and pedagogical alternatives. Such homogenizing trends have already been noted at least at a European scale which claim to lead to a unified 'European education policy space'.[29]

There have been some developments that indicate a move in Pakistan towards standardization and benchmarking. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has recently notified a committee NACTE (National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education) to maintain standards in teacher education. The Sindh government has notified an agency called STEDA (Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority). HEC has also established standards for teachers in Pakistan. The length of degrees has also been stretched to fulfill international requirements. Programs for students' assessment at particular grades are also on rise. The government of Sindh province recently conducted assessment of grade four students in the areas of language and mathematics through its department Provincial Education Assessment Centre (PEACE). There are plans to extend the assessment to other subject and other grades.

Continuation

As the requirements of work are changing and the knowledge is growing exponentially, there is felt a need to continuously engage the workers in up-skilling their levels of proficiency. The key to economic growth today is considered to be knowledge and not simply labor. The new working conditions require workers to be flexible, multitasking and continuous and lifelong learners.[30] Thus education does not simply need to finish at traditional graduation levels but continue as lifelong. The lifelong education conception has been popularized by UNESCO and OECD, though with differing objectives.[31] The European Union defines lifelong learning as 'all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence'. The lifelong education conception has put another set of demand from the higher education institutions, which is fulfilling it through a growing set of Continuous Professional Education (CPE) programs.

The up-skilling and continuous development trends particularly for teachers are also very visible in Pakistan. There has been a growing trend among engineers and doctors to also attain a degree in MBA in order to be more competitive. The teachers have also realized the fact that continuous professional development is the only way they can survive in the competitive market. However, the situation in government schools is not as competitive. Although there are opportunities for the government teachers to go through in-service continuous professional development, the result of such programs on their performance is not visible. The Punjab government is actively thinking of linking salary of public teachers with their performance, most like be measured through students' exam results.

How Global Education Policies Seep into National Space?

So far I have tried to establish the education policy context of Pakistan and have argued that a global education policy field is emerging whose effects are also visible in the national education policy space of Pakistan. Briefly the global education policy field privileges the role of knowledge for the service of the economy; emphasizes competition, measurement and standardization and promotes the governance of education through decentralized and privatized structures. These trends are quite apparent in Pakistan as have been discussed above. It is also important to note that there are various versions of globalization that compete for their hegemony and which are at the moment been taken up by Neoliberal globalization.[32]

It is imperative now to investigate how these neoliberal policy preferences are making their way in Pakistani policy. Dale[33] has highlighted this point brilliantly and showed that there are various

mechanisms through which global policy field makes its way into national policy field. These are: harmonization, dissemination, standardization, installing interdependence and imposition. Apart from 'imposition' other mechanisms largely follow non-coercive processes like: persuasion, agenda setting, collective agreements and membership requirements. Broadly, it can be argued that global education policy field seeps within national educational policy field through discursive means, of course aided through material means as well.

The participation of various prominent policy actors particularly from international organizations also suggest a way through which the policy preferences of the global neoliberalism seeps into the education policy of Pakistan. One of the representatives of a donor agency said during interview,

> *"Well, I have to say that this probably the first time we've seen a highly consultative process for development of any policy. An elaborate process was engaged by the Ministry of Education and I'm not going to repeat them [showing the White Paper document], I'm sure you must have seen them. The stakeholders, the interviews, I mean that was a district wide processes where the show went on road, so to speak and provinces and districts were taken into confidence on this particular issue. On the various key areas of education – Green Papers were developed. I think the donors were engaged hugely in reading, commenting and providing feedback on the Green Papers."*

A special Donor Education Group (DEG) was established where the NEPR team and MoE officials interacted with them numerous times. This obviously affects the preferences of the NEPR team which was given the task of proposing new education policy. Several donor sponsored roundtables were also organized on the basis of key interest of particular donor agencies. For example JICA (Japanese development agency) sponsored a roundtable on technical and vocational education; UNESCO organized roundtables on the themes of literacy and non-formal education, early childhood education, gender and education and teacher education and accreditation.

The Response of the State
In order to understand the response of the Pakistani state towards global education policy field, we need to first recognize that the global or 'travelling policy' does not simply arrive into the national space without being tackled by 'embedded policy'.[34] There are national specificities, histories, cultures and politico-economic priorities that interact with the global policy to create a new hybrid form of policy that is unique and vernacular in many ways.[35] Above all, there is a national pride that national bureaucracy cherish to feel in-charge and this pride does not

allow being subdued by any international pressure. The following comment of the former federal education secretary signify the control that Pakistan state feels (or want to feel),

> *"Donors have to align with us. I'm very clear about that. We don't align with donors, donors have to align with us. So that's not an issue. The way things happen or should happen, and we try to make sure that it happens, is that we as a government decide. We may consult the donors, but we as government decide what we want."*

Nevertheless, the interaction of global education policy field with national education policy field does create tensions. In case of Pakistani education policy, such tensions are visible in various ways. For example there is a constant pressure for Pakistan to achieve EFA and MDG targets set for 2015, which it is most likely going to miss with a big margin. Both material and discursive frames created by the donor agencies seek Pakistan's commitment towards these targets in order to borrow development money. The country finds it difficult to meet competing demands. Pakistan has set for itself the vision to be transformed into a 'knowledge economy' by 2030, which certainly requires a heavy investment in the higher education sector. The demand by donors which supply crucial money for education development is in favor of basic education that helps meet EFA and MDG targets more equitably. There are also tensions found around the issue of ideology, which is quite central to the Pakistani education policy since the inception of the country. The events of 9/11 and subsequent pressures on Pakistan have also posed serious challenges for Pakistani education policy for its stance towards Islamic ideology and its space within overall curriculum. The government has mostly used Islamic symbolism in the curriculum to create an imaginary community that is otherwise quite diverse in its ethnicity and cultural practices. The official curriculum has always equated 'good Pakistani' with being 'good Muslim'.[36] The global criticism on Pakistan's overly Islamized curriculum and religious schools have created a tension for national policy which have used Islamic rhetoric for generating nationalistic feelings.

Having understood that the state does not generally receives the global policy as a docile agent and that the Pakistani case show tensions that the state has to encounter within its policy purview, it is appropriate now to see how has Pakistani state interacted with the global education policy field as is visible through this research on policy process and the content of the White Paper.

The research data shows that the Pakistani state has broadly used the alignment and negotiation as the two main strategies in dealing with global policy preferences. For example, in case of targets of EFA and

MDGs, the policy prescriptions of the White Paper show that government has largely accepted these global priorities and have recommended ways to achieve them. While in the case of ideology, the White Paper shows a negotiating strategy as it does not simply accepts the global discourse due to its domestic peculiarities. In order to achieve an appropriate balance the White Paper tries to create a discursive rupture between fundamentalist and moderate Islam and has shown tremendous energy in its initial pages to suggest that the current government would be in favor of moderate Islam, which is indeed more aligned with the democratic principles. The below assertion of the White Paper attests to this observation,

> *"The Education Policy of every State has an ideological basis at least for a predictable timeframe…. in the context of Pakistan, this ideological base is essentially and historically provided by Islam as an ideology derived from Islam the religion.... However, Islam is not and cannot continue to be treated as a static religious dogma, thriving on ignorance and nostalgia."[37]*

In order to settle tensions due to global and national pressures on the issue of language, the White Paper highlights the significance of English over national languages and tries to shed the colonial memories attached with English language and thus says,

> *"So English was the official language of authority and the language of the elite and was understandably perceived as a vehicle for social and economic advancement. After 1947, English has continued to enjoy privilege of the British times, though no more considered imperialistic in dispensation. In the meantime in the last half a century or so, the influence of English language has broadened way outside the original English speaking countries. It is no more the language of Anglo-Saxon descent but is now a language of international communication, cosmopolitan life and transnational trade and commerce. English has grown from its colonial aura of luxury and prestige to an international necessity in the globalized world."*

These examples have demonstrated how the Pakistani state tries to align and negotiate with the global education policy and tries to mitigate the tensions arising due to the interaction of global and national education policy fields. This is also true that sometimes the government uses global discourses and policy preferences to seek support for its own policy stance and to calm down national resistance.[38]

However, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the authority of the state depends on what Bourdieu has termed as 'national capital'[39] i.e. the overall capacity of the country determined by a joint effect of finance, material, human and political resources possessed by a country.

The developing countries possess lesser amount of these resources and hence lower 'national capital' to 'fire back'. Due to the weak national capital the negotiation of the Pakistani state seems to have relied heavily on discursive resources utilized in the consultation processes and language of the White Paper, resulting in unique and negotiated national education policy priorities.

Conclusion
In this chapter I have tried to explore the way the global education policy field interacts with the national education policy field through the case of national education policy formulation in Pakistan. A brief context has been provided for the reader to get sense of national peculiarities. This is followed by a detailed discussion to chart the terrain of global education policy field with its policy priorities of privatization, decentralization, vocationalization, standardization and continuation of learning throughout working life-span. The national policy making case of Pakistan shows how the global education policy priorities seeps into the national space through the consultative processes and through various discursive resources of global field. A response by the Pakistani state has been shared in the end to demonstrate that the arrival of global policy in the national space is not simply an alignment process, rather it has to go through a process of negotiation resulting in a unique national policy response. Though, this is dependent upon the national capital that the country possess, developing countries like Pakistan are in difficult situation here.

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