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Sajid Ali

Aga Khan University, sajid.ali@aku.edu

Malik S. A. Tahir

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## **Reforming Education in Pakistan – Tracing Global Links**

Sajid Ali, Malik S. A. Tahir

**Abstract:** This paper is about tracing global links in national education reforms in Pakistan. The paper tries to describe globalization and its general effects on national policies. It particularly highlights the effects of globalization on education reforms, which are: competitiveness-driven, finance-driven and equity-driven. In light of these global education reform patterns the paper explores the major educational reforms being pursued in Pakistan since 1990s. The paper argues that globalization has seriously challenged the national reform policies, which are now becoming more and more globally driven. Rather than outrightly rejecting all global policies, engaging critically with them is the stance of the authors.

**Keywords:** globalization, education reform, national policies, policy convergence

### **Introduction**

The 1990s can be described as the decade of globalization. Different parts of the world came closer economically, culturally and politically. This interconnectivity is not as strong in some parts of the world as it is in others and the so called digital divide is still apparent in many parts of the world which are simply off-line. Despite this, the continuous growth in information and communication technology has certainly increased the possibility of furthering these connections. Put simply, globalization refers to these processes of interconnectivity. Globalization has affected the political, cultural and economic landscapes of most countries. It has also given rise to the centrality of information and knowledge as the key economic commodities for progress – the so called knowledge economy. Within this knowledge economy the field of education takes the central stage for developing needed human capital essential for this new economic form. Education has itself become a tradable commodity within this changed economy as reminded by Ozga, Seddon and Popkewitz (2006).

Because of this centrality of education, countries of the world have given

tremendous importance to the issues of education. The supra national organizations like the United Nations, OECD and the World Bank have remained instrumental in highlighting the global importance for education. A joint conference organised by the World Bank and UNESCO agreed on ensuring Education for All by 2015. The United Nations declared 2003-2012 as the decade of literacy. Lingard et al (2005) argue that the involvement of such supra-national organizations within the education and the importance given to their recommendations have created a global education policy field. The policy discourses of decentralisation, equity, efficiency, quality human capital and privatisation are quite common around the world as the major policy prescriptions. Likewise the references to Education For All (EFA) movement sponsored by the UNESCO, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) sponsored by UN, Educational standards set by OECD and economic benefits of education as researched by the World Bank are commonly referenced in many country's education policies. It is therefore important to understand the national policy reforms not only within the national but global context.

Coming to the situation of Pakistan, we observe that there have been number of educational innovations and reform efforts since 1990s which seems quite related to the issues posed by globalization. This paper tries to take account of the major educational innovations and reforms introduced by different Pakistani governments since 1990s within the global context. This will help us see the global link in national reforms. This understanding is important because an informed decision is always better than an ignorant one. This analysis will hopefully explain how the global affects the national policy field. The point is not to argue for or against globalization but to help us understand the broader global framework that need to be accounted for national education policy making.

The paper is divided into three major parts. The first part will describe the kinds of educational reforms caused due to the process of globalisation. The second part will explore the major educational innovations and reform initiatives taken up by Pakistan since 1990s. This will be followed by a discussion based on the two sections to

understand the national reforms within a global perspective. To whatever extent possible, the discussion will also ponder on how best to engage with globalisation for national educational reforms.

### **Globalization**

Globalisation is a phenomenon that is characterised by the massive growth in communication, trade, cultural exchange and information flows around the world, with ‘decreasing restrictions’ in a complex and integrated global society (Crawford, 2003, p. 55). Despite being a continuously debated concept, globalisation is largely understood as a process or set of processes that have brought the distant parts of the world closer to each other so much so that the concepts of time and space which used to be imagined collectively became disjuncted (Giddens, 1990). Held et al (1999, p. 16) in their seminal work define globalisation as follows:

A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.

Majority of these social relations and transactions are performed within the domains of economy, culture and politics. There is no shortage of literature praising or opposing the globalization, Held et al (1999) have divided these thinkers into sceptics, hyperglobalists and transformationalist. The sceptics see globalisation as a negative process that undermines national sovereignty and historical social order. Hyperglobalists takes a very positive attitude towards globalisation and predict the beginning of world government. Transformationalists try to take a balanced view of appreciating the positives and critiquing the negatives of globalisation processes. The Portuguese social scientist Boventura de Sousa Santos suggests that there is not one kind of globalisation but at least two – hegemonic globalisation and counter-hegemonic globalisation (Dale & Robertson, 2004; Santos, 2002). This is to highlight the continuous struggle between the opposing forces of market versus social justice. Thus while there are apparent global policy convergences, there are also continuous struggles by the locals to assert the diversity (Appadurai, 1996).

Henry et al. (2001), agreeing with Giddens (1990), argue that the forces of globalisation pressurise nation states from above and below, and limit their policy-making options. 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. Thus the nations today are not absolute sovereign in the traditional sense in deciding their national policies (Scholte, 2000).

With respect to the situation of the developing countries Tikly (2001) argue that the globalisation theory mainly take consideration of the developed countries and ignores the context of developing countries which can also be referred as a postcolonial world. Hoogvelt (2001) also shares the same view and consider globalisation as a neo-imperial condition that has curtailed the national authority of previously colonised world. The underdeveloped world feels particular difficulties in their national policy decisions pertaining to education in the presence of global pressures (Ali, 2005). It is therefore important to understand the processes of globalisation within the specific context of the developing world and hopefully this article contributes to this discussion in some ways.

### **Globalization and Educational Reforms**

In order to understand the effects of globalization on education and the subsequent reforms, this article draws mainly from the work of Martin Carnoy (1999) who mainly focuses on the economic aspect of globalization. He suggests that globalization affects education in five major ways.

First, globalization has changed the nature and organisation of work. The new economy is knowledge driven and requires high level of skills from the work force. The new job market is flexible and contractual which requires labour to be more skilful and

more generic. The changed economy has increased the rate of return for highly educated specially for graduates from higher education. Thus there is high demand for secondary and higher education. Also there is growing demand from education to develop generic professional skills among the graduates. There is also demand for continuous or life-long learning.

Second, in order to attract global capital the governments need to build its human resource but at the same time the logic of global capital or market economy instigate government to have low public investment and more privatisation (Marphatia, Moussié, Ainger, & Archer, 2007). Thus governments are in a fix on how to improve its human resource without increasing public finance on education.

Third, there is huge growth of international comparison for measuring the quality of education. This has placed more emphasis on mathematics, science and English language curricula in most nations. To compare quality education there is great push for developing national testing system that can be compared internationally. In order to be comparative the national testing has to keep the ideological part of education separate from the educational management content.

Fourth, the growth of information technology has and will continue to have huge impact on the organisation and delivery of education. The possibilities of innovative means of distance education and improved learning experiences within existing classrooms are real utilising internet technologies. So information technology will have huge impact on education.

Fifth, globalization especially the market driven globalization – also called neo-liberal globalization – has its opposition from various social groups at local levels over the issues of identity, culture, diversity etc. This will pose challenge for national education systems (and also internationally) over the meaning and ends of education.

Although economic globalization has the most profound effect on education, we cannot rule out the effects of cultural and political globalization. Tomlinson's (1991) analysis alludes that two important cultural artefacts i.e. language and media has a direct bearing on the field of education. The hegemony of English language around the globe has certainly affected the curriculum and schooling experiences. Likewise the post 9/11

global politics has hyped the security concerns, which has resulted in global alliances to counter terrorism. Education is also used as an important front where security battles are being fought (Robertson et al., 2007).

The above mentioned effects of globalization have led to different kinds of responses from education around the world. Many nations have been reforming their education systems to be able to benefit from the processes of globalisation. Carnoy (1999) classifies the reforms caused by globalisation into three categories: competitiveness-driven reforms; finance-driven reforms and equity-driven reforms.

### **Competitiveness-Driven Reforms**

‘Reforms that respond to shifting demand for skills in both the domestic and world labour markets and to new ideas about organizing the production of education achievement and work skills’ are referred as competitiveness-driven reforms (Carnoy, 1999, p. 37).

Competitiveness-driven reforms aim to improve the quality of the labour force to maximise the economic benefit. Such reforms focus on introducing the measures that increase the productivity and skills of the labour and the institutions responsible for provision. These reforms include such initiatives as decentralisation of educational governance, privatisation of educational provision, development and enforcement of national standards, increased provision and better management of educational resources, hiring of competent teachers and their continuous professional development.

### **Finance-Driven Reforms**

‘Reforms that respond to cuts in public-sector budgets and private company incomes, reducing public and private resources available for financing education and training’ are referred as finance-drive reforms (Carnoy, 1999, p. 37).

The finance driven reforms are mainly advocated by international financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank and the regional banks (African Development

Bank, Asian Development Bank and Inter-American Development Bank). The major crux of such reforms is to adjust the country's economy by reducing the size of public sector spending, balancing domestic and international accounts and trade balance. Since education takes the major public spending in most countries the structural adjustment programmes of these banks ultimately cut on education budgets. Paradoxically, at the same time emphasising governments to invest in its human resources for being globally competitive (Robertson et al., 2007). The finance driven reforms include three major reforms pertaining to education: first shifting public funding from higher to lower levels of education, second privatisation of secondary and higher education and reduction of cost per student at all schooling levels. The aim of these reforms like the competitive driven reforms is towards improving the productivity of the labour and the institutions responsible for doing this in cost effective ways.

### **Equity-Driven Reforms**

'Reforms that attempt to improve education's important political role as a source of social mobility and social equalization' are referred as equity-driven reforms (Carnoy, 1999, p. 37).

The equity-driven reforms' main goal is to increase the equality of opportunity for the neglected section of population. One of the major global reforms pursuing this direction is the movement for Education For All (EFA) which is jointly sponsored by the UNESCO and the World Bank and is supported by almost all donor agencies, NGOs and financial institutions. The focus of EFA is to improve access to education, increase adult literacy and remove gender disparity. The education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations are also equity-driven. Carnoy (1999) suggests that globalisation tends to push governments away from equity-driven reforms because of the dominance of competitive and finance driven reforms. The competitive-driven reforms encourage government to invest at higher education level while finance-driven reforms push government to cut their public sector spending.

It is important to note that the above outlined categories are helpful theoretical constructs but they may not separate cleanly from each other. For example the privatisation and decentralisation of education has both competitiveness-driven and



finance-driven justifications. Likewise the decentralisation reforms can also be justified on equity grounds.

## **Major Educational Innovations and Reforms in Pakistan**

### **1 Privatisation**

The privatisation as a viable public policy choice made its way in the education policy discourse in Pakistan during 1990s. It is true that apart from 1970s the government never discouraged the private sectors' involvement in education, however the 1990s saw an active encouragement of privatisation policy. The 1998 education policy observes that 'the government alone could not carry the burden of the whole education process' (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 108) and hence the 'private enterprises will be encouraged to open education institutions, particularly in rural areas' (p. 108). The 1998 policy further alludes to a change in government thinking, which then started to see education as an 'investment rather consumption' (p. 107) and thus wishes to provide education to all its population which requires that 'private sector should participate actively to supplement the resources of the government' (p. 107). The Education Sector Reforms (ESR) 2001-2004 actively encourage the public private partnerships in order to increase 'access to quality education' and to meet the increased 'demand for education' (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 2002a, p. 52). The ESR also see education as a key element in reducing poverty and ensuring economic growth and is fully integrated with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) prepared by the Finance and Economic division of the government as a development plan. The latest policy paper in education called the White Paper also attests the continuation of the public-private partnership at various levels of education provision (Aly, 2006).

The privatisation reforms include several proposals. The 1998 policy encourages the role of National and Provincial Education Foundations in supporting the lower strata of private schools which target lower economic classes in the country. The reforms package proposed in ESR encourages the involvement of private sector in education, formation of community managed schools and other innovative partnership arrangements between public and the private sector in education. The various education foundations

established by the government at federal and provincial levels actively support private participation in public sector schooling.

## **2 Decentralisation**

The 1998 policy emphasised decentralising educational management structures in order to improve delivery of educational services. The decentralised structures of implementation and monitoring were also authorised in the policy for improving the policy implementation. The policy recommended the establishment of National and Provincial Councils for Educational Development to work with the District Education Authorities and down to the level of School Management Committees for this purpose (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 1998). The ESR 2001-2004 is very explicit about its decentralisation policy, which is part of the overall devolution plan of the then government through its devolved District Governments in 2001. The ESR sees decentralisation as a strategy to introduce good governance within the education sector which would ensure rapid decision making, sensitivity to the local environment, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and equity (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 2002a, pp. 15-16 and pp. 32-33). The White Paper on education in Pakistan identifies issues with the working of devolved governance and management structures. It endorses the continuation of decentralisation of educational governance but recommended further clarity of roles between different tiers of the government from federal to the district (Aly, 2006, pp. 5-7).

## **3 Universal primary education and literacy campaigns**

Providing access to all for mandatory basic education has remained a continuous target for all the education policies and plans so far developed in Pakistan and in fact one of the constitutional requirements. The 1998 Education Policy sees elementary education as a fundamental human right and ‘the bedrock and foundation of the entire educational pyramid’ which has the ‘highest rates of return as compared to other sectors and levels of education’ (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 25). The goals and targets set for the elementary education were in line with the requirements of ‘international commitments such as, World Declaration on Education For All (1990); Delhi Summit Declaration (1993) and subsequent E-9 Ministerial Review Meetings, and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)’ (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 1998, p.

26). The ESR 2001-2004 also considers the achievement of universal primary education as the utmost priority and challenge for the government. The reform document claims that the challenge for achievement of UPE is not only an internal requirement but an international commitment that Pakistan has made at international forum for Education For All at Dakar in 2000. The ESR also launched some innovative programmes for increasing enrolment like the *Tawana* Pakistan: School Nutrition Package (SNP) for girls and the introduction of early childhood classes in primary schools. The White Paper also endorsed the continuous efforts to achieve universal primary education but have gone a little further to highlight the issues with earlier policy provisions and suggested some ways to improve them. Again the White Paper reminds us of our international commitments of EFA and Millennium Development Goals to achieve universal primary education.

Both the 1998 policy and the ESR have made special provisions for increasing the literacy. The 1998 policy introduced the Non-Formal educational programmes and also established the Prime Minister Literacy Commission (PMLC). The ESR sees literacy as instrumental to reducing poverty and thus also set up a President's Task Force on Human Development to launch and manage the campaign on literacy.

#### **4 Higher Education Reforms**

The Higher Education has historically been quite a decentralised structure in Pakistan whereby each public sector university work quite independently with minimum outside interference. In 2001 the Ministry of Education launched a Task Force on the Improvement of Higher Education in Pakistan. The Task Force after a year long deliberation submitted its recommendations to the Ministry, which resulted in huge restructuring of the Higher Education in Pakistan (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 2002b). The Task Force see Higher Education a key pillar for the economic growth of the country and an investment in developing the human capital. The key recommendations of the Task Force were: establishment of a Higher Education Commission with more funding and power at its disposal; restructuring of universities' management and governance structures; linking with industry; strong emphasis on science and technology; building research culture and the revision of curricula. Interestingly the recommendations

of the higher education task force in Pakistan appear following directly from the recommendations of the International Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries (The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000).

## **5 Generation and Maintenance of Numbers**

The introduction of several educational reforms, the concern to meet local and international targets and requirements to show the achievement, increase the requirements for data against which the progress can be judged and monitored. Throughout 1990s we also see a rise in types and availability of educational data. Although one cannot deny the doubts over the quality of data, the efforts to collect numbers and produce multiple reports for various purposes is on rise. The most noticeable change is the establishment of National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) with its provincial subsidiaries. NEMIS collect data from all the schools across the nation and produce annual reports. One of the biggest exercises conducted by NEMIS was the National Education Census with the support of National Bureau of Statistics. The Census started in 2005 and published its final reports right up to the district levels in 2007.

Both the 1998 policy and the ESR also emphasise the importance of national level assessment system to gauge the national educational standards. This resulted in the establishment of National Educational Assessment System. The 1998 policy also recommended the establishment of the National Testing Service on the patterns of American GRE to assess college graduates for professional higher education institutions.

## **Discussion**

The paper has so far delineated the process of globalisation and its effects on educational reforms generally. Later we have tried to describe the major educational reforms introduced by several Pakistani governments since 1990s. Considering the various educational reforms against the global educational reforms we can quite easily realise that many of these national innovations are in fact following global patterns. Some refer to this phenomenon as policy convergence (Green, 1999), which suggest that there

is growing similarity between problems and policy recommendations among different countries of similar status. Despite the convergences and apparent similarities national variations do exist (Lingard, 2000), nevertheless the national policies do have to keep the global policy field in close watch.

The privatisation of education in Pakistan seems driven by finance-driven reforms. All of the policy documents of Pakistani education referred in this paper have clearly sought for privatisation because the government simply do not have resources both human and capital to ensure universal access to primary education for all. The private sector share of primary enrolment has increased from 14% in 1991 to 23% in 1998 (World Bank, 2002, p. 49 quoted in Farah & Rizvi, 2007). The recently conducted education census by NEMIS reports the share of private education somewhere around 33% and the government seems committed to increase it further (Pakistan. Ministry of Education, 2006).

The decentralisation reforms are patterned on both competitiveness-driven and to some extent equity-driven reforms. The decentralisation on the one hand supposed to make the delivery of education much better and hence improve the quality of the product – student. On the other hand it is also supposed to make education system more responsive to local needs. The introduction of the local government system in 2001 in Pakistan strengthened the process of educational decentralisation, which is now structured at district level.

The educational reforms to achieve universal primary education and literacy targets seem to be equity-driven reform. The same reforms also have a financial side to it as well. Various policies emphasise that the rate of return to investment in primary education is higher than any other level.

The higher education reforms and the push for the generation of numbers are pre-dominantly competitiveness-driven reform. Higher education reforms can also be justified on financial grounds as the tertiary education prepares human capital which is very much sought after by global capital. In fact there is growing recognition that the growth of higher education is needed equal encouragement by the governments to be able

to ensure sufficient human capital growth for the country.

Lingard et al (2005) argue that globalisations has created a global education policy field which increase the chances of having similar problems and solutions being tested around the world in similar situations. Andy Green (1999) refers to these similar or different trends as convergent and divergent policy trends. These trends can be assessed at two levels i.e. at the level of policy and structure.

If we look at the education policy prescriptions in various developing countries we see quite a convergent trend particularly since 1990s. The policy discourses of decentralisation, equity, efficiency, quality human capital and privatisation are quite common around the world as the major policy prescriptions. Williamson (1993) refers to these kinds of policy prescriptions as following the 'Washington Consensus'. Such policy trends have been globalised under the auspices of supranational organisations like the OECD and the United Nations and the international financial institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank. Two of the major mechanisms used for popularising the global policy discourse within the field of education are borrowing and imposition (Dale, 1999). The wide-spread international networks of consultancy firms, international conventions on education spur the policy borrowing phenomenon, while the conditionality imposed by banks for qualifying for development loan is a form of imposition.

Looking at the situation of Pakistan we argue that the education reforms in Pakistan are tainted by the global education policy field. The privatisation, decentralisation, universal primary education, generation of numbers and higher education reforms appears to have imbibed within the logic of globalisation. In fact the higher education reforms have a very apparent global look (Ali, 2006). Most other policies also appear influenced by global developments, however they rarely mention that the objectives pursued and solutions offered in the policy are externally driven. It is perhaps because globalisation has also created similar conditions around the world that particular policy prescriptions do not seem external rather appear indigenous. The decentralisation reform seems like a home-grown idea that respond to local needs, however broadly speaking this idea has already been declared a part of so called 'Washington Consensus'. Similarly the privatisation of education is also part of the

global policy field. The pursuance of universal primary education is no doubt the most important policy requirement, however the silence on ‘what after achieving the UPE?’ is avoided not only in Pakistan but at an international level (King, 2004). Is this really home-grown?

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have tried to explain the educational reforms that have been caused due to globalisation around the world. We then went to see the situation in Pakistan from 1990s reviewing some of the policy documents. Some major reform initiatives were described. The discussion revolves around the concept of global convergence and critical policy engagements for educational reform. It is argued that national reforms have become globalised and should be seen in that perspective and need to be dealt with critically.

It is important for the education policy and reform initiatives in Pakistan to keep a global perspective while focusing on national policy priorities. We do not want to suggest that global prescriptions are always wrong. Many of them do make sense but they should always be checked in local context. For example Farah and Rizvi (2007) have critically questioned the policy of partnerships and privatisation of education in Pakistan. Such critical analysis should be a corner stone for analysing any educational reform in Pakistan.

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### Correspondence

Sajid Ali  
Email: [sajidali@gmail.com](mailto:sajidali@gmail.com)