

## Educational Policy in Africa

### INTRODUCTION

For educational goals to be realised, they have to be made more concrete and specific in the form of government policy. Thus, in this chapter, we examine educational policy making in Africa and, in particular, where it comes from.

Policy can be understood as the ‘authoritative allocation of values; policies are the operational statements of values, statements of prescriptive intent’ (Kogan 1975 cited in Ball 1990: 3). But policy is the outcome of an essentially political process because it is about the power to determine what is done and therefore, in its formulation, involves disagreement, conflict, power and control. Elsewhere, the nature of politics was described thus:

Disagreement is a marked and inevitable feature of all human groupings. This is true whether it is a family, a group of friends, an institution, a state or an international organisation. Disagreement occurs because people have different attitudes and values, both because they are diverse as individuals and because they differ according to social identities based on factors such as culture, social and economic status, gender, region and religion. There is therefore a need to manage and resolve disagreement and conflict (not necessarily the same as violent conflict) through a decision-making process which provides the rules by which we live. Some have the authority or recognised legitimacy to make decisions on behalf of others while others can influence decisions through the possession of power of some sort—the

ability to influence the action of others through the use of persuasive or coercive means at their disposal such as access to the media, economic power or the threat of force. This, then, is the essence of politics and it is an unavoidable feature of life whether within the family, an institution like a school or university or at the macro level of the nation state or internationally between nation states. (Harber and Mncube 2012: 9)

How, then, does the political process of educational policy making occur in Africa? Where does education policy in African states come from?

### SOURCES OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND POLICY MAKING IN AFRICA

Edwards (2012: 24–25) describes educational policy making as,

...the constitutive interactions among local, national and international actors (governmental, non-governmental, bi/multilateral, and/or for profit) during the evolution of education reform agendas and the production of those official texts that contain education-related material by a government or Ministry of Education.

So official education policy is the outcome of the complex interplay between international and local actors and factors King (2007). One key international influence on education policy in all developing countries, including those of Africa, is the source of funding. Moutsios (2009: 478) argues that ‘Education policy making is no longer the exclusive affair of the nation-state’ (2009: 470) and notes, for example, that the World Bank is the largest external loan provider for education programmes that are implemented in 85 countries and for Africa in the 1990s the loans and funds provided by the World Bank represented 16% of the total amounts made available by African governments. He further points out that once the IMF and World Bank have lent money to a country this also establishes credibility with other institutions and aid agencies and that,

Evidently all this funding is provided on specific terms and conditions, which define directly or indirectly the educational policy lines to be followed. (2009: 470)

In discussing the role of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

and the World Trade Organisation in influencing education policy globally, Moutsios emphasises both the often undemocratic nature of this influence:

Business interests, networked political elites, differential funding capacity and voting rights of states and large amounts of research data shape the context in which policies are produced and diffused across countries. (2009: 474)

And the policies that result from an essentially neoliberal/free market agenda:

...decentralisation of school management, free choice of school, more involvement of the private sector, performance-related pay for teachers, monitoring and evaluation of educational results. (2009: 477)

Tarabini and Jacovkis (2012) argue that the education policy framework for developing countries is established in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers created by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and in particular the guidebook to these published by the World Bank in 2002 which,

...is the unavoidable frame of reference for developing countries to define their priorities, strategies and policies to reduce poverty. (2012: 507)

A key role is attributed to education in facilitating economic growth and reducing poverty as, according to the World Bank,

...it not only generates economic benefits such as increasing salaries, productivity and growth but also produces social benefits such related to social cohesion, political participation and even to fertility and health. (2012: 510)

While the optimism of such claims for education might not be as straightforward as suggested (see Harber 2014), the main concern here is what impact this global viewpoint might have on educational policy making, particularly in relation to Africa. One obvious outcome for policy in Africa is the stress on access to education for all, including the poor—and particularly on primary education which, as a form of social and private investment, is seen as having the highest ‘rate of return’ in terms of the benefits outlined in the above quotation. However, as

Tarabini and Jacovkis note, increasing attention has also been paid by the World Bank to secondary education, the quality of education in terms of learning and teaching and equity of access. Specifically, there is concern with increasing pupil access to books and learning materials and improving the quality of teacher education. In terms of both provision of education and quality of education, emphasis is also placed on private education and NGO provided education. Finally, ‘...a direct relation is established between greater autonomy and decentralisation and higher educational quality’ (2012: 511).

However, as discussed in relation to educational goals in Chap. 1, local factors also play a part in educational policy making in Africa. Indeed, Tabulawa (2009) provides an example of an education policy in an African country (Botswana) shaped by the interplay of *both* the global and local pressures and influences referred to above—and the tensions and contradictions between them. Tabulawa argues that globalisation has created pressures for a new kind of learner, worker or citizen in the ‘new’ global economy who have such attributes as creativity, versatility, innovativeness, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a positive disposition towards teamwork. These are people he describes as the ‘self-programmable worker’ who constantly redefines their skills and are adaptable and flexible. He then discusses the Botswana Revised National Policy on Education—RNPE—(1994) which was supposed to deliver the self-programmable learner via schooling. In justifying this new policy, the Commission behind the reform invoked the economic success of the ‘Asian Tigers’—Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea—attributing their success to investment in education and workforce training. At the centre of the RNPE is a move towards more constructivist, learner-centred classrooms to create the new kind of worker and citizen with the desired attributes. However, Tabulawa argues that the actual model espoused by the reform is more that of the generic learner/worker. This is because,

...a behaviourist model of curriculum development was adopted in the review of all subject syllabi, tending to undercut the preferred constructivist pedagogy...Whilst the constructivist learner-centred pedagogy stresses process, dialogue, cooperative learning and the constructed situatedness of knowledge, behaviourism stresses, on the other hand, product and an atomised view of knowledge. Clearly, behaviourism and constructivism are at odds with each other. (2009: 98)

Tabulawa suggests a number of reasons for this contradiction one of which is that local policy makers in Botswana are not adept at critically analysing concepts such as learner-centredness and behaviourism, but he also suggests that the policy was attractive more because of social, economic and political appeal than its educational one,

Thus casting the value of learner-centredness in educational terms in the RNPE was more of a symbolic gesture than anything else. Its real import lay in its value as a legitimating device or justification for linking general education to the world of work. (2009: 99)

Tabulawa uses the resulting geography syllabus as an example of how the reform exhibits behaviourism rather than constructivism. In the syllabus, knowledge is atomised into separate particles that must be learned, skills are understood as narrow, technical competencies, content is tightly specified, and outcomes are tightly prespecified/predetermined as well as cast in measurable behavioural terms. This tightly and centrally controlled ‘teacher-proof’ curriculum, he argues, is a result of the state’s ideology of monoculturalism, i.e. seeing education as a tool to build a united nation on the basis of the history, values and language of the dominant Tswana-speaking groups. In the education arena, this model was translated into a centralised education system with a standardised national curriculum. Through a highly prescriptive curriculum, teachers could be controlled to ensure that they did not deviate from the monocultural view of society. The RNPE of 1994 further tightened this control. Thus, the language of globalisation that tended towards one model of education (constructivism) was used, changed and adapted to fit local political and educational circumstances in Botswana. (See also Tabulawa 2011 on further tensions between the local and the global in Botswana education policy).

## POLICY BORROWING IN AFRICA

As the above discussion of Botswana suggests, one source of educational policy can be deliberate policy borrowing from other countries. Indeed, Edwards (2012) sets out four useful categories of international policy borrowing—policy attraction, policy negotiation, policy imposition and policy hybridisation. Policy *attraction* is where one country borrows a policy from another or seeks to emulate and implement it in their own

country. Policy *negotiation* is where an educational policy from elsewhere is found attractive and imported but where local interests in the receiving country reshape or negotiate the policy according to local priorities, interests and resources. Policy *imposition* places a greater emphasis on the role of international actors and emphasises the transfer of policies from developed to developing countries via aid and/or international organisations. This emphasises unequal power relationships and the ability of developed countries to impose educational policy, largely because of their control of funding and financial assistance. Whether by persistent persuasion or by direct threat to withhold money ‘...external actors ensure that they can sway, guide, change or determine the decisions of developing countries...’ (Edwards 2012: 31). Policy *hybridisation*, on the other hand, moves away from a clear dichotomy between global forces and the national level and from seeing linear and straightforward relationships between countries. Instead, it sees a situation where it is often difficult to identify the complex, multiple and multidirectional forces at work in policy adoption when many levels of actors are involved and many events take place. As Auld (2014: 996) puts it reviewing Rappleve (2012), this is an

...acknowledgement of the complex nature of educational transfer in our current age, of the myriad and impenetrable ‘black holes’ that conceal its processes and mechanisms, and of the understanding that much theoretical and conceptual work lies before us.

Often, a number of categories of policy influence occur at the same time. Schweisfurth (2006), for example, has shown how educational policies in post-genocide Rwanda have been influenced by dependence on aid from Britain (imposition/negotiation) but also two ‘attraction’ factors further discussed below. However, she also concludes that,

Given that these are just three examples of the international influence being experienced, the complete picture is likely to be even more complex, contingent and potentially contradictory. (2006: 707)

In terms of resulting policy content resulting from international influences, the ideology, values, priorities, purposes and language or discourse of policy statements will reflect those groups and interests (local, national and international) that have been dominant in the policy formulation

process as, sometimes, of minority interests and political compromises. Of interest in educational policy analysis is often what is not said as much as what is said. Here, each of the four categories is taken in turn.

**Policy Attraction and Policy Negotiation.** One outstanding example of policy attraction and ensuing policy negotiation is post-apartheid South Africa. As Jansen (2004: 199) comments,

Almost every national education policy of the post-apartheid government of South Africa has major design elements that originate in another country.

Jansen focusses in particular in detail on ‘outcomes-based education’ (OBE), a curriculum innovation in South Africa borrowed from the competency-based approach to curriculum used in Australia. The attraction was based on a shared history and interest in the relationship between skills and the labour market. Key personnel involved in educational reform in South Africa and those involved with similar questions in Australia shared this interest at a time when South Africa had newly joined a global, neoliberal economic market. However, this attraction and adoption were done in a hurry in South Africa because of the urgency of developing a new education plan to mark the change from the apartheid years and despite the problem that the competency, outcomes approach was a curriculum discourse ‘completely foreign’ to the understanding and practices of South African teachers. Moreover, the final version of outcomes-based education adopted in South Africa was also subject to further international influences (including the influence of a particular American consultant, William Spady) as well as some local influences. Thus,

What South African OBE therefore looked like over time was a curious amalgam of Australian OBE, Spadyan OBE and a highly bureaucratised OBE developed within the government’s Department of Education amidst a stream of other international influences including residual elements of Canadian and Scottish reforms. (Jansen 2004: 211)

As Spreen and Vally (2010) note, much of the policy reform came from countries that were very different to South Africa.

A second example of policy attraction is provided by Schweisfurth (2006) in relation to Rwanda who argues that the many Rwandan exiles from the conflicts in Rwanda lived in not only East Africa (but also in

Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, France and the USA). These were often well-educated Rwandans who were exposed to foreign sets of policies in education. As a result of the diaspora, these exiles, some in senior educational positions, brought back with them educational ideas from the ex-British colonies of Uganda and Tanzania which influenced the policies urgently needed to rebuild the education system after the devastation of the genocide and violent conflict. Also, because of their experience of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, educational policy makers in Rwanda were also influenced by the international field of genocide studies and in particular by the work of a particular British NGO which works on genocide education materials such that their ideas and practices influenced the new Rwandan curriculum.

In terms of policy negotiation, Takyi-Amoako (2012) shows how the government of Ghana haggled and struggled to get secondary, vocational and tertiary education included in the 2003 strategic plan, despite donor emphasis on Millenium Development Goals and Education For All global priorities. However, the willingness of the African Development Bank, the Spanish and Japanese governments and the World Bank to help to finance these local priorities made it easier for the Ghanaian Ministry of Education to negotiate a balancing act between donor priorities and local priorities, despite an uneven playing field strongly favouring the donors.

**Policy Imposition.** Of the key importance to this category is the role of those that give international aid and loans to education. There has been much criticism of the way in which donors have tended to dictate terms and conditions for aid to developing countries in a rather one-sided manner. The imposition of loan conditions by the World Bank's neoliberal structural adjustment policies is a well-known example (see, e.g., Harber 2014: Chap. 7). However, this can also be the case with national development agencies. Brock-Utne (2007), for example, is very critical of the way in which traditionally independent Norwegian bilateral aid to education was strongly influenced by World Bank, free-market thinking and policies on education and developments such as privatisation and school fees—'usually imposed uniformly irrespective of local conditions and preferences' (2007: 1). The ability of the World Bank to influence international aid agencies appears to have continued, despite apparent efforts at increasing participation and consultation in the Bank's policy-making process (Verger et al. 2014). Indeed, Higgins and Rwanyange (2005: 9) argue that,



The history of educational policy in Africa throughout the 1970s and 1980s was heavily influenced by pragmatic economic considerations. It has been argued that during the austerity period of the 1980s, increasing power was given to external agencies in setting the educational agenda. This agenda was set within the dominant framework of modernization and human capital theory and often resulted in the broader goals of national integration, citizenship, self-reliance and self-confidence being eclipsed by objectives which...were narrowly defined and easier to assess. Excessive intrusion of external experts and aid agencies on policy processes and educational practices, and their monopolisation of the research agenda during the 1980s, have often been blamed for the stifling of creativity in African countries.

This unequal relationship continued into the early 2000s. Both Buchert (2002) in regard to Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mozambique and Samoff (2004) in regard to Burkina Faso, for example, write of the continuing unequal power relationships between aid donors and recipients in terms of developing educational policy priorities. In 2005 and 2008, however, important changes took place in the principles governing the relationships between aid donors and recipients. This was in response to a perceived need for greater partnership and equality in aid relationships,

The Paris Declaration (of 2005) promised that donor agencies would align themselves behind the objectives for poverty reduction set by developing countries themselves; utilising local systems to deliver and track aid resources, coordinating and sharing information amongst themselves to avoid duplication, and securing mutual accountability between donor and recipient authorities for the results achieved. Three years later at a follow-on conference in Accra, it was further agreed that donors would provide information on their planned programmes between three and five years in advance, they would use country systems to deliver aid, rather than donor systems, and they would not impose their own conditions on how and when the aid resources would be used – rather they would use conditions based upon recipients' countries own development targets and aspirations. (Colclough and Webb 2012: 263)

Colclough and Webb (2012) provide a useful case study of the attempt to apply these principles in aid to education in Kenya. They point out a number of background obstacles—that the budgetary timetables of donor aid agencies are often determined by their own national parliament; that government ministers responsible for aid in donor countries

have to defend the outcomes of their expenditures and many developing country budgetary systems make this difficult and that developed country aid lobbies and officials often have strongly held views about the best ways of reducing poverty in developing countries. Thus, when a new aid programme was launched in 2005, donor preferences to support the primary education sub-sector were influential in the definition of Kenya priorities. Also, the funding and experience brought by donor organisations meant that they were influential in the allocation of funds for specific programmes.

Milligan (2011) is also critical of the way in which donor global discourses and priorities dominated the introduction of free secondary education in Kenya and argues that,

Bearing in mind who is present at the policy making table when policies are formulated, it is hardly surprising that what is produced reflects international discourses rather than local priorities. Head teachers, parents and other stakeholders are left out of the debate. (2011: 283)

Indeed, in their study of educational reform in Uganda Higgins and Rwanyange (2005: 21) found that while some more senior educationalists had the potential for policy negotiation with international donors, there was nevertheless an element of top-down policy imposition *within* the education system itself so that,

While improvements had been made in the systems and structures of educational reform, there was a need for improved two-way communication and more meaningful dialogue than that which is currently operative in the Ugandan education sector. Funding agencies, senior ministry officials and head teachers all have (and use) the leverage at their disposal, while class teachers and parents are often seen to have only a nominal participative role. It is clear that the criticism levelled against the funding agencies by central officials could equally be made against these same officials in relation to their interaction with district and school authorities ... The culture of mistrust and blame is pervasive with stakeholders furthest from the centre or lowest in the educational hierarchy feeling most marginalised and unheard.

One specific example of this concerns Benin (Fichtner 2010). In 1999, the New Study Programme was introduced into Benin at the time of

a political change from 17 years of Marxist-Leninism to multi-party democracy. This involved a shift from teacher-centred, transmissive pedagogy to learner-centred approaches and was the result of a policy dialogue between the government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the main funder of the reform. This involved the participation of US and Canadian consultants who were sent to Benin as part of USAID's technical assistance programme. This aroused considerable discontent among teachers' trade unions and parents who claimed that the essentially 'Western' new policy was only introduced because of the power of USAID's money. Fichtner argues that the reform shows '...the influence of US-American donors and experts—an influence that was once exerted by French colonial power... the education sector in Benin resembled a real laboratory for international reformers in which the American donors defined the rules of the game' (2010: 521). Indeed, Fichtner argues that this resulted in something of a struggle for ideological independence by the Beninese government restrained by financial dependence on the USA and neocolonial bonds with France. As a result the educational policy-making process was, she argues, as described by (Ball 1998: 126),

...inevitably a process of bricolage: a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashion and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work.

## CONCLUSION

Educational policy rarely comes from one single source. As this chapter has shown, educational policy in Africa stems from international sources such as the attraction of international experience and ideas or the imposition of donor wishes and priorities as well as from local needs and priorities. The resulting policies (and the values and goals shaping them) thus provide a framework for the practice of formal education in Africa. But goals and policy aren't the same as practice, and the remainder of this book examines the nature of education in Africa. It starts, in the light of the influential Millenium Development Goals, with the issue of access—who actually goes to school in Africa?

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