

Chapter 2

Multicultural Education Policy in the Global Institutional Context

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Introduction

While multicultural education is still a contested concept with multiple meanings (May and Sleeter 2010; see also Banks in this volume), few would disagree that envisioning an inclusive education toward social justice and equity for all children regardless of their cultural group memberships is an integral part of what may be called multicultural education. Multicultural education, in such a rather loosely defined sense, has emerged as an important policy issue in an increasing number of countries around the world (Banks 2004; Cha et al. 2012). As the pace of economic and cultural globalization has accelerated, the importance of multicultural competence demonstrated by schoolchildren has been receiving increased attention from educational policymakers and researchers, as immigrant populations are increasing rapidly in a growing number of countries.

In recent decades, multicultural education has been widely depicted as an educational approach to deal with the social and cultural diversity that exists within individual countries. Enhancing schoolchildren's multicultural awareness has been conceived as a vital means for promoting social unity, especially in countries with a high level of diversity. Although systematic research on the cross-national adoption

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of multicultural education policies is less extensive than might be expected, conventional perspectives tend to assume that there exist a range of intrasocietal needs that constitute the major factors driving countries to adopt relevant policies in their education systems.

Obviously, such views convey useful insights on cross-national variation. However, they often have difficulty accounting for the influences from the wider environment that provides institutional rules and values to which nation-states are likely to conform to promote their structural legitimacy (Meyer et al. 1997). In this respect, we offer an alternative conceptualization of the cross-national adoption of multicultural education policies from a macrophenomenological perspective. Different from popular understandings of a policy adoption as a rational choice to optimize its immediate concrete benefits to a given country, an alternative explanation is that the adoption of policies for multicultural education is becoming an *institution* or an institutionalized routine whose legitimacy is closely associated with an evolving reconceptualization of citizenship in global civil society.

By institution, we mean a set of cultural rules that “exist as external reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 60) and give “collective meaning and value to particular entities and activities” (Meyer et al. 1987, p. 13). Applying this concept to the world-level context of education, we argue that the growing emphasis on multicultural education across national education systems in recent decades is a phenomenon that is deeply embedded in the larger institutional environment, where the collective meaning and value of multiculturalism is taken for granted as a legitimate policy agenda. As such a policy agenda is based on the highly rationalized discourse that multicultural education will empower future citizens to become more capable and responsible members of a “postnational” society (see Ramirez, Bromley, and Russell in this volume), its immediate usefulness within individual countries may not become a primary issue in most education systems.

Conceptualizing Multicultural Education as Policy

The cross-national adoption of multicultural education policies around the world provides a concrete context to which different conceptual perspectives on multicultural education policy can be applied. Three different perspectives are briefly presented here, which provide useful insights into the mechanisms through which multicultural education policies are adopted by national education systems. They represent a sociocultural perspective, an international economic perspective, and a world-polity perspective. This categorization, as many taxonomic frameworks do, probably overstates the degree of difference between perspectives. It should be noted that exceptions and complexities abound within each theoretical approach. Despite this limitation, we believe that it will be helpful to identify the main defining qualities of different approaches and their underlying assumptions so that we may derive some hypotheses that can be empirically tested and further explored.

First, the most popular account of a country's adoption of a multicultural education policy comes from a sociocultural perspective, in which formulating a multicultural education policy is understood as a necessary step toward accommodating the cultural diversity that exists within a given country in order to maintain its social cohesion (Gradstein and Justman 2002; Joshee 2004). Since an indispensable "precondition for a cohesive and peaceful society is mutual acceptance and respect" (Castles 2004, p. 25) among diverse sociocultural groups, multicultural education policies can be seen as part of broader social policy frameworks to address issues around intercultural communication and accommodation. Based on the logic of functionalism, this perspective posits that initiating a policy to support multicultural education in a country is a result of a deliberate policy decision influenced by concrete societal needs for it.

Despite the various ways to define the concept of societal needs depending on theoretical orientations, one might reasonably speculate from this perspective that multicultural education policies are likely to be formulated to the degree of a given country's intrasocietal cultural diversity. On the basis of this perspective, one might plausibly postulate that *multicultural education policies are more likely to be present in countries with a high level of sociocultural diversity* (Hypothesis 1). For example, countries that are ethnolinguistically diverse may have concrete reasons for adopting a policy to support multicultural education. Similarly, countries where immigrant populations are highly concentrated may be in need of a policy to increase multicultural awareness through education. A close relationship between educational policies and the concrete societal conditions of a given country is a central assumption of this perspective.

Second, from an international economic perspective, a country's economic relations with other countries may account for a great deal of the extent to which multicultural education is given emphasis in the country. With the increasing consolidation of the global economy and the intensification of complex economic interdependency between different countries (Castells 2000; Henderson et al. 2002), promoting multicultural education is often regarded as a rational policy response to the growing needs for multicultural competence in the global marketplace (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1998; Wotherspoon and Jungbluth 1995). Some countries may be more likely to incorporate multicultural education into educational policies than other countries depending on the degree to which their economies are dependent on—or integrated into—the global economic system.

For example, countries with a strong orientation toward international trade might have concrete reasons to make efforts to promote multicultural education; as part of attempts to facilitate economic exchange, national governments might want their future citizens to be better sensitive to different cultures around the world. In a similar vein, countries with more inflow of foreign investment would be more likely to adopt a multicultural education policy because the successful attraction of foreign investment reflects the concentration of economic activities in the global economic system, where multicultural competence plays an important role in international communication. Thus, one might reasonably expect that *multicultural education policies are more likely to be present in countries whose economies are highly*

dependent on international economic relations (Hypothesis 2). Despite a unique theoretical orientation, this perspective shares a central underlying assumption with the sociocultural perspective that there exists a close relationship between educational policies and concrete societal conditions.

Finally, a world-polity perspective posits that “education is an institution... that at a deeper level is strongly affixed to global norms and rules about what education is and how schools should operate” (Baker and LeTendre 2005, p. 8). Understanding education as deeply grounded in global institutional ontology and rationalization, this perspective highlights that national education policies are constantly influenced by institutional dynamics of the wider environment in which general models of education are constituted and elaborated globally. From this perspective, a country’s adoption of a multicultural education policy is understood largely as an institutional embodiment of world-level educational norms and values and not simply an instrumental means to meet concrete intrasocietal needs (Cha et al. 2012; Ramirez and Meyer 2012).

Indeed, the institutional environment in the modern world system emphasizes the centrality of the individual as a primordial member of larger civil society, providing solid ground for the cross-national adoption of multicultural education policies (Ramirez 2006; Sutton 2005). Multicultural sensitivity is becoming in many countries another type of basic competence required of tomorrow’s world citizens; multicultural education’s major goals are frequently elaborated in terms of how to help children “develop global identifications and a deep understanding of the need to take action as citizens of the global community” (Banks 2007, p. 24). In this respect, it is reasonable to expect that *countries with more ties to global civil society are more likely to formulate a multicultural education policy* (Hypothesis 3). Extensive empirical evidence suggests that educational policy discourses often flow through expanding networks of global civil society, where worldwide epistemic models of education are constantly elaborated and diffused.¹

Data and Method

To examine what national-level characteristics are associated with multicultural education policies across education systems around the world, we used a cross-national research design. Data on multicultural education across countries were available from the third edition of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which measured policies to integrate international migrants in many countries as of 2010 (Huddleston and Niessen 2011). One of the policy areas measured was education, scored on a scale of 0–100, which constituted the dependent variable for this study (divided by 10 to make 10 as one unit). As a

¹See, e.g., Ham and Cha (2009), Schofer and Meyer (2005), and Wotipka and Ramirez (2008). See also Boli and Thomas (1999) and Ramirez and Meyer (2012) for related discussions.

Table 2.1 Description of national-level characteristics

Variable	Description	Mean	SD
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	Ethnolinguistic fractionalization index, ranging from near zero for no fractionalization to near one for high fractionalization	0.44	0.26
International migrants	International migration stock as a percentage of the population	7.45	11.78
International trade	International trade as a percentage of gross domestic product	86.59	42.43
Foreign direct investment	Net flows of foreign direct investment as a percentage of gross domestic product	5.20	8.38
INGO memberships	Number of international nongovernmental organizations to which individuals or organizations belong in a given country, logged	6.34	0.91
Higher education enrollments	Gross enrollment rate in tertiary education	24.35	19.70
Internet users	Number of Internet users per 1000 people, logged	2.82	2.06

Note Descriptive statistics are based on data for 161 countries. The ethnolinguistic fractionalization index is from Roeder (2001); data on INGO memberships are from the Union of International Association (1996); and the rest variables are from the World Bank (2001). Missing values were imputed by the expectation–maximization algorithm (Dempster et al. 1977)

reference guide that made an international comparison of educational policies concerning immigrant integration, the MIPEx education index rated extensive laws and policies against a set of educational standards for immigrant integration developed within each country.²

For independent variables, we used three composite variables constructed by Cha and Ham (2014) to explore the three theoretical perspectives discussed earlier: a sociocultural perspective, an international economic perspective, and a world-polity perspective. Specifically, based on a range of national-level characteristics described in Table 2.1, they found three composite factors derived as reported in Table 2.2. We used these three factors as independent variables, which were *sociocultural diversity* (highly correlated with the country’s ethnolinguistic fractionalization and the influx of international migrants), *international economic relations* (highly correlated with the degree to which the country participates in international trade and attracts foreign direct investment), and *linkages to global civil society* (highly correlated with the country’s INGO memberships, higher education enrollments, and Internet users).³ Two additional variables, GDP per capita and public spending on education as a percentage of GDP, were used as

²Detailed information about the index is available at its official website (www.mipex.eu), where you may also access all raw data. For recent studies that used the MIPEx data for educational research, see, e.g., Yang et al. (2015) and Yang and Ham (2015).

³Similar categorizations of variables pertaining to national characteristics are also found in other cross-national sociological studies of the rise and diffusion of policy models. See, e.g., Cha and Ham (2011), Ham et al. (2011), Schofer and Meyer (2005), and Suarez (2007).

Table 2.2 Exploratory factor analysis of national-level characteristics

	Factor loading		
	Sociocultural diversity	International economic relations	Linkages to global civil society
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization	0.707	−0.277	−0.344
International migrants	0.716	0.352	0.261
International trade	0.043	0.880	−0.074
Foreign direct investment	−0.005	0.692	0.179
INGO memberships	−0.015	−0.119	0.877
Higher education enrollments	−0.046	0.089	0.928
Internet users	0.005	0.389	0.828

Note Principal component extraction and varimax rotation were used. Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. Bartlett’s weighted least squares method was used for factor score estimation (see Raykov and Marcoulides 2008)

control variables. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in this study are reported in Table 2.3.

Results

Table 2.4 reports the results of the regression analysis explaining the institutionalization of multicultural education as a government policy agenda item across countries. First of all, it is notable that all three variables considered in the present study—i.e., *sociocultural diversity*, *international economic relations*, and *linkages to global civil society*—were positively significant as hypothesized. However, the effect of *sociocultural diversity* was rather weak (std. beta = 0.235, $p \leq 0.10$), giving only partial credence to Hypothesis 1 derived from the sociocultural perspective. For the effect of *international economic relations*, it was fairly significant (std. beta = 0.363, $p \leq 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 2 of the international economic perspective. Yet, the magnitude of this effect was far less than that of

Table 2.3 Descriptive statistics for variables

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
MIPEX education index	4.18	1.90	1.20	7.70
Sociocultural diversity	−0.31	0.92	−1.42	1.60
International economic relations	0.42	1.41	−1.25	5.28
Linkages to global civil society	1.31	0.65	−0.19	2.25
GDP per capita, logged	9.48	0.95	7.35	10.74
Public spending on education, % of GDP	5.19	1.09	3.40	8.30

Table 2.4 Regression for multicultural education policy (*n* = 33)

	Coeff.	SE	Std. beta
Sociocultural diversity	0.483 ⁺	(0.264)	0.235
International economic relations	0.491 [*]	(0.242)	0.363
Linkages to global civil society	1.890 ^{**}	(0.628)	0.650
GDP per capita, logged	0.392	(0.330)	0.196
Public spending on education, % of GDP	0.047	(0.249)	0.027
Constant	−2.319	(2.835)	
<i>R</i> ²		0.590	

⁺*p* ≤ 0.10; ^{*}*p* ≤ 0.05; ^{**}*p* ≤ 0.01

linkages to global civil society (std. beta = 0.650, *p* ≤ 0.10). In line with Hypothesis 3 of the world-polity perspective, it appeared very clear that countries with more *linkages to global civil society* tended to have institutionalized a policy for multicultural education to a greater degree.

The pattern reported in Table 2.4 appears consistent with Cha and Ham’s (2014) recent analysis of different datasets, where they found the extent to which a country had *linkages to global civil society* strongly associated with the adoption of policies for multicultural education (whose data came from UNESCO’s World Data on Education) and related curriculum standards (whose data came from IEA’s TIMSS Curriculum Questionnaires). Considering the prevailing assumption about multicultural education as a practical approach to meet concrete intrasocietal needs of individual countries, this result is very suggestive. Multicultural education may be becoming an institutionalized routine whose importance is sociopolitically constructed and thus taken for granted in an increasing number of countries, often regardless of their immediate, substantive needs for it.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our data analyzed in this study suggest the possibility that multicultural education is becoming an integral part of educational policy discourse whose legitimacy is taken for granted in many national education systems, largely regardless of individual countries’ immediate societal needs.⁴ As Meyer (2006) puts it, “the modern world society is built around an expansive conception of the rights and capacities of

⁴The case of South Korea provides an illustrative vignette. Despite the country’s extremely high degree of ethnolinguistic homogeneity compared to most other countries around the world, South Korea has recently been formulating a range of national policies to ensure that racial/ethnic minority children are not discriminated against in any aspect of their school life. For example, in 2007, both the national curriculum standards and textbooks were revised to reduce nationalistic and ethnocentric descriptions. In addition, multicultural education courses have recently been incorporated into the curricula of many teacher preparation programs in South Korea, and

the individual human person, seen as a member of human society as a whole rather than principally as the citizen of a nation-state” (p. 264). It seems that multicultural education around the world has been increasingly linked to the expanded notion of citizenship that emphasizes the centrality of the individual as a primordial member of glocal civil society, rather than as a member of a bounded national territory.⁵ Multicultural education discourse appears to be grounded in the common notion of the individual whose personhood is seen as constituted independent of national citizenship (Ramirez 2006). That is, an individual person is theorized as a member of subnational and transnational communities in addition to a national citizen, because the nation-state as a societal unit is no longer conceptualized as the only primary boundary for an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991).

Most conventional views explain the popularity of multicultural education in terms of its sociocultural and economic functions in a given society. Such explanations proffer useful insights from a realistic stance. However, an educational phenomenon is not only a functional response to meet substantive societal needs; it is also a futuristic project in character. Contemporary political conceptualizations of education continue to expand the purposes of education far beyond providing direct or immediate functional utility to individuals or to society (Fiala 2006; Gutmann 1987; Labaree 1997). Education systems around the world are constantly responsive to new visions of society, not only within but also beyond national boundaries (Soysal and Wong 2006). As economic and cultural globalization processes intensify, children from every part of the world are now expected to become capable and responsible members of a new “imagined community” that may be called “world society” (Meyer et al. 1997). Current world-cultural values that celebrate individual personhood as the fundamental basis of one’s distinctive and special roles in society undergird various educational policies for empowering individual children regardless of their backgrounds (Frank and Meyer 2002). In this respect, the adoption of multicultural education policies across national education systems can be seen largely as an embodiment of epistemic models that have been constituted in “transnational spaces” (Gough 2000) for educational discourses on various dimensions of “world cultural and social diversity” (Lynch 1989, p. viii).

Given the rising popularity of multicultural education across national education systems, reflective evaluations of current policies on multicultural education are necessary to better assess their intended and unintended effects on nations, local communities, and most importantly, individual children (Ham et al. 2014; Yang and Ham 2015; see also Cha, Ham, Ku, and Lee in this volume). Without such reflective procedures, multicultural education might remain only as a “symbolic and

(Footnote 4 continued)

in-service teacher training programs for multicultural education are also emerging. See Cha et al. (2013) and Mo and Lim (2013) for related discussions.

⁵In this respect, Sutton (2005) notes that although each national debate on cultural diversity in education reflects the aspects of diversity that are unique to a given particular country, the universal purpose of schooling as incorporation of future citizens into civil society renders a common framework for the formulation of multicultural education policies across different countries.

hortatory” (Schneider and Ingram 1990) policy element whose impact on lived experiences in the classroom might be limited in many parts of the world, especially where an adequate teaching force and/or other necessary educational resources are not present. As the adoption of multicultural education policies appears to be emerging as a world model, educational policymakers need to be innovative and reflective enactors of this policy model. Sustained shared efforts should be directed toward pondering how to help children develop a heightened sense of cultural diversity and common humanity in the context of today’s world society, where cultures penetrate each other and are not confined to bounded nation-states.

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