

The Impact of Globalization on Education Policy of Developing Countries: Oman as an Example

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Abstract

Globalization can be thought of as the speedy, free movement of people, services, capital, goods, ideas and knowledge across national borders, encompassing the entire globe. It is claimed that globalization makes the world akin to a small village through time and space compression with new technologies being an important facilitator of this interconnectivity. Accordingly, national systems, in particular education systems, of nation-states have been affected critically by these processes. By reviewing the literature and analyzing some education policy documents, this paper investigates how globalization has reshaped the terrain of education policy in developing countries. Such changes in education policy of developing countries will be illustrated through the case of the Sultanate of Oman. An argument is presented that education policy in Oman has been affected seriously by globalization processes, leading to deep shifts and changes in the ways in which education policies are developed, implemented and evaluated. This paper will contribute to future research on similar topics.

1. Introduction

Globalization as a concept has been used in both positive and negative way by different people in different situations. Everyone looks at the concept from his or her point of view and interests. However, there is an agreement among all theorists that globalization has had enormous impact on societies at economic, political, and cultural levels. From the literature on globalization, it seems like everything is globalizing in this world as a result of the transformation of the world to a small village, a global village. This means borders are not any longer insurmountable barriers to any kind of connections and integration between nations. It is argued in the literature that such impact of globalization reaches both developing and developed nations. All of their governmental systems are believed to be affected by the various processes of globalization. The focus in this study is on globalization and its impact on education systems, particularly on education policy.

Regarding the linkages between globalization and education, much has been written in recent years examining how education has been affected. For

example, Marginson [27] mentions that education “has become a primary medium of globalization and an incubator of its agents” (p. 19). In addition, Priestly [33] argues that national education systems have been changed quite noticeably by the processes of globalization and that most changes happening recently in education can be attributed to the effects of and responses to globalization. Correspondingly, Jones and Coleman [25] state that no education system globally can survive and stay unaffected by globalization

Indeed, policy making in education is much affected by the phenomenon of globalization. Traditionally, policy has been produced within the authority of the nation-state. However, over the last two decades globalization has witnessed some challenges to such nation-state bound policy making in education [41]. To make it clear, globalization has resulted in the strengthened influence in policy terms of international organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, and OECD. The decisions of these institutions to varying degrees today shape and constrain the policy options for any particular nation-state. This leads us to acknowledge that globalization impacts education policy development and production around the world. However, these impacts are mediated in different ways across developed and developing countries with international organizations having more direct and less mediated effects on the developing nations.

The main aim of this paper is to investigate how globalization has reshaped the terrain of education policy in developing countries. Such changes in education policy of developing countries will be illustrated through the case of the Sultanate of Oman. In order to make it clear, the paper will start by clarifying the concept of globalization, and consider its nature. Then, the relationship between globalization and education policy will be uncovered by pointing out to the main global educational discourses that affect nation-states' educational policies today.

2. Globalization

Recently, the word globalization has been referenced increasingly in the media, academic literature and everyday talk [36]. Really, there has been a hot debate about globalization. Some people

believe globalization is a dangerous phenomenon which has changed the world in negative ways. To them, globalization has brought undesirable consequences to society, affecting its peace. A good example of those people are Muslims who are afraid that their cultural heritage loses its identity and characteristics in the presence of a dominant Western culture. The national cultures seem at a surface level to start melting and be more homogeneous with Anglo-phone western culture beginning to dominate [20]. This is the homogenizing culture account of globalization which some also see as synonymous with Americanization or Westernization.

On the other hand, another group of people regard globalization as a fruitful phenomenon, making the world more connected and informed than ever before. They look at it as a novel source for optimism in the world [40]. It is clear that this group see various advantages of globalization. In describing both views, Scholte [44] states that 'some people have associated "globalization" with progress, prosperity and peace. For others, however, the word has conjured up deprivation, disaster and doom' [p. 14]. On balance, this paper argues that both beliefs are quite true that globalization has advantages and disadvantages and this depends on how it affects different and varying nations, groups, individuals and cultures.

Around the world, most globalization authors, if not all, agree that globalization has had enormous impact on societies at the economic, political, and cultural levels. According to Stromquist and Monkman [47, p.8], globalization "comprises multiple and drastic changes in all areas of social life, particularly economics and culture". Whether it is negative or positive, the authors' consensus on globalization's impact on life shows that it has become a critical issue with dramatic consequences, requiring more and more attention

The term "globalization" has been seen almost as a buzzword by all researchers, conceiving different meanings. It is a very broad and ambiguous concept. Consulting the huge literature that has been written, it is really hard to find a unified definition for it. In fact, globalization as a science overlaps and interacts with various disciplines such as economy, sociology and history. Thus, scientists and researchers of each discipline define globalization from their own point of view or from what concerns their disciplines. For instance, a global market could be a simple definition of globalization by an economist. Despite the differences in the conceptualization, there is a great agreement among researchers that globalization has brought the world to be a small village through interconnectedness of the regions or continents.

Anthony Giddens and Roland Robertson, who were some of the first authors to write about globalization, have treated globalization, to some

extent, similarly in terms of time-space compression. According to Giddens [17, p.64], globalization refers to "the intensification of the worldwide social relations which link distance localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". In this definition, Giddens [17] argues that although the world is very huge and has large geographical distances, it still appears to be a small village under the conditions of globalization.

Likewise, stressing time-space compression, Robertson [42, p.6] states that globalization is "a concept which refers to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole". Both definitions argue that all aspects of life interaction and communication within the whole world have become easier, indicating that time and distance are not any more barriers for such interaction and communication. In the same way, Waters [50, p.3] considers globalization as "social processes in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding". The mentioned definitions suggest a fact that the world has become almost without borders; in relation to globalization, Ohamae [37] speaks of a "borderless world". To make it clear, the concept of globalization here stands for time and space compression by indicating an increase in the frequency and speed of global exchanges of services, labor, capital, ideas, and goods. This is the hyper globalist thesis of globalization, one which suggests we are in a post-national world or at least that a post-national world is emerging [6].

Another useful definition is also provided by Held et al. [22, p.55], when they illustrate that globalization is 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 of networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power". Clearly, their definition deals with globalization as a process rather than a distinct subject. They address the movement and the interaction of everything such as people, ideas and money across continents or regions, overcoming time and space. More importantly, this definition regards power as a fundamental issue in the process of globalization. In other words, it can be understood that power plays a great role in the process of globalization, and thus control over others is a characteristic of globalization.

Moreover, Held et al. [22] indicate that globalization stretches activities across the world, intensifies connectedness, speeds up interaction and impacts the local (respectively extensity, intensity, velocity and impact), which they call spatio-temporal" dimensions of globalization. Moreover, in

his book *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai [6] mentions a useful framework to explain the global cultural flows cutting across national borders, which comprises five dimensions: ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. Respectively, he prefers to define globalization as a process involving the movement of the world's people, images, technologies, finance (trade, money, and capital) and ideas (practices concerning states and other institutional policies).

In brief, this paper considers globalization as processes that make the world a small village through time and space compression with new technologies being an important facilitator of this interconnectivity. This process is marked by speedy, free movement of people, services, capital, goods, ideas and knowledge across borders. Let us now move to see the linkage between globalization and education policy.

3. Globalization and education policy

There is no doubt that education is ranked among the chief concern of nation-states as it is playing a tremendous role in shaping and preparing children for the future in an increasingly globalised world. In fact, much money is spent on education as a public service and this is due to its importance. To achieve the aims of education, traditionally, nation-states developed their education policy in regards to what they saw as important to their nation. Putting it differently, education policy was some time ago a mainly national affair. Nevertheless, within the wider context of globalization, education is regarded now as an international commodity [20], playing a remarkable mission in the global economy with investment in people, skills and knowledge [36]. This leads us to say that education policy is not any more solely a national affair, but a global one in which nation-states are not any more closed to themselves. Indeed, education policy is internationalized due to the dominance of the global economy over the national politics [22; 27]. Overall, this paper looks at “education as a sector embedded within a complex system of local, national, regional and global actors, institutions and practices (politics of education)” [43, p. 20]. Simply, it argues that education policy nowadays is formed and implemented in a global context.

In such global context, improving global competitiveness has been targeted by nation-states' education policy [15]. This is a dominant globalized human capital discourse. According to Dale [8], nation-states have recognized their priorities to create and implement education policies that help them to be more economically competitive with other nations. Mundy [35] states that countries have become more competitive by working hard to

enhance the productivity of the domestic labor force. This can be achieved by introducing new educational policies, programs and reforms that prepare children to compete in the global labour force. Indeed, competitiveness among nation-states is believed not only to enhance education, but also to make countries race each other in terms of introducing new education policies full of value. Many studies have confirmed that there have been new education policies that introduce reforms in curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation, seeking to boost competitiveness among nation-states. Examples of these reforms are engagement in international comparisons of test performance, national curriculum and productive pedagogies

Rizvi and Lingard [41] confirm that globalization has reformed and redesigned the educational policy terrain. They argue that the process of globalization has deeply shifted and changed the ways in which education policies are developed, implemented and evaluated as globalization has witnessed the reworking of the nation-state – the site at which public policy was most commonly created. Accordingly, education policy is no longer determined by actors within the nation state alone, but through various complex processes occurring globally. The literature shows that not only the education policy of developing nations have been affected by the challenges, changes and pressures of globalization, but also those of developed nations [33]. However, this major shift in education policy precipitated by globalization, Rizvi and Lingard state, is not identical in all nation-states. To some extent, developed nations are believed to be less affected by globalization than developing nations [19; 41]. Globalization is mediated more in its impact upon developed nations than is the case in developing nations. After seeing how globalization has reshaped education policy of all nation-states, the paper will consider this impact on developing countries.

4. Education policy in developing countries

Reading the literature shows that developing countries are seriously affected by globalization due to their myriad economic, social and cultural problems. In such a global context, there is no doubt that education systems of developing countries should play a major role in their development by providing quality access to education and training for all, at least at the basic education level. Having a close look at some problems and challenges facing developing countries will make the picture more clear about the importance of education in the age of globalization.

By developing nations, the paper refers to the countries which have a low level of living standards. Here, we are not only referring to development as economic growth alone, but also referring as well to other social, cultural and environmental aspects of development. In the UN division and categorization of the world, this term, 'developing country' is used to describe certain regions of the world, which are Africa, South America, the Caribbean and some Asian countries (Middle East and West Asia). Sometime, these nations are called Third World, as well as less developed nations. At other times they are referred to as nations of the Global South. According to Kazmi [26], these developing regions suffer specific economic and socio-political problems such as poverty, rapid population growth, low earnings, corruption, political instability, low literacy rates, inflation, unemployment, exploitation and many other issues (see also [16]). Indeed, there is deterioration in the quality of life in these countries compared to western, developed countries. Above all, some of these countries are worse off, as they experience increasing hunger, poverty, AIDS, war as well as low levels of education.

However, such a depressing account cannot be generalized to all developing nations. For example, the Arab Gulf countries (where Oman is located) are much better off, having less problems with poverty and war (at least for some nations of the Middle East), but at the same time experiencing increased inflation and unemployment. Fischer [16] mentions that each region or even sometimes more specifically each country has specific problems and challenges. He illustrates with examples from developing countries around the world: rapid population growth in India and China, instability of the economy in Latin America, rapid population growth and war in the Middle East, and high poverty and HIV/AIDS problems in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is not a major aim of this paper to describe these challenges and problems of developing nations, but rather to go beyond that and see how education can possibly help in fighting and eliminating these endemic problems. More precisely, what are the roles of education in development of these countries? The focus will be on these roles in the context of a globalised economy.

5. Education and development in globalization

"Education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development" [32, p.1]. This observation suggests that education is playing a great role in the development of nations and it can be seen as central to their economic growth and social development [see also 21; 41; 43]. This role is explained in how education helps nations to have enhanced life quality and a better standard of living.

With more education, it is assumed that nations do not only speed up development processes, but also make development more linked to their people's needs.

In developing countries, there is a clear correlation between quality education and less problems and challenges [16]. Investment in education is believed to produce successful development and countries which have so invested are likely to have not as much of the challenges mentioned above. Ozturk [38] shows the capacity of education in leading to broad economic and social benefits by improving the quality of people's lives and raising their productivity and creativity. He adds that education works to secure social and economic progress, which leads to increased social consistency and economic efficiency. Such improvement to economy and society is argued to make people aware of their nation's challenges and thus, a decline in their problems. For example, in the Arab Gulf countries, education has promoted economic growth, which has been proven to reduce the degree of poverty in the region. Another example is the role of education in Sub-Saharan Africa in working to limit and reduce the AIDS epidemic [21]. Briefly, the discussion here has provided evidence of the great role of education in development. However, if education is so fundamental to development, does that role change in the age of globalization?

To explain the relationship between globalization, development and education, we have first to see if globalization has altered development needs and objectives. Previously the paper has explained how globalization has led to changes in the economic, political and social issues facing nation-states. Thus, this leads us to confirm that the development issues and goals of developing countries would likely need to change appreciably to cope with the changes associated with globalization. In their study of East Asia, India, China, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, Green et al. [21] point out some of these development matters provoked by globalization processes such as technology transfer, foreign investment, and the importance of trade. In the globalization age, such changes do not only occur as economic issues of development, but also relate to social and cultural issues of development. What this paper is confirming here is that development goals and matters of developing countries have been changed considerably by globalization processes.

With global changes, education is found to be more vital and fundamental to development than ever before. There is a consensus that globalization has brought some changes to the role of education in development [43]. Green et al. [21] reach a conclusion that education is a necessary component of development in responding to globalization and achieving economic growth and social development. Their findings clearly demonstrate the importance of

education as a positive factor and driver of development, steering these developing countries to ensure fruitful impacts of globalization. They put it simply in clear words that “Countries which have been most ‘successful’ in globalization hitherto have been those which have achieved the most favorable terms of engagement with the global economy and education has been an essential precondition for this” (p. Xi). From these words, an argument is developed that education is crucial to developing countries, creating opportunities for these countries to engage and integrate with the global economy.

To elaborate further, for example, globalization suggests the need for improving the labor force to make the state more competitive in the global economy. Education seen as investing in people through equipping them with the new knowledge and skills needed for the global economy is believed to play the greatest role in development [43]. There is no doubt that education becomes more and more important for economic development as these countries wish to compete within the global economy. Regarding social development, education is also found to play an increasingly vital role in resolving and treating the social contradictions and strains carried by globalization [18]. Moreover, globalization with its technological advancement important to development opens the door for education to play a fundamental role. This is clear in the introduction of information technology in schools. The provided examples here suggest the great role of education in economic and social development of developing nations in the age of globalization.

6. Implications for education policy in developing countries

From what has been discussed above, it can be assumed that education should continue its unique role in development in the context of the various facets of globalization. This provokes the notion of the need for better, responsive educational systems that help these developing countries to take a part in the new global context and integrate with global economy. As Hoa [23] argues, developing countries to achieve successful development in the age of globalization have to be brave enough to develop and implement education policies that deal with the global discourses and issues. The relationship between education and development in the global context implies that developing countries must invest strongly in implementing education policies that will help them to develop a nation that has the strength to integrate with the globe and gain positive impacts.

Yet, reminding ourselves with the arguments presented previously, developing countries cannot survive by implementing education policies focusing

merely on what they see important to their nation, by mainly considering policies as only a national affair. Dale [10; 11; 12] argues that education policy to be successful in nations’ development has now not only to consider the local and national affairs, but also consider a broader international and global political economy. Here, we have to think about the policies, programs and agendas of the international organizations as development agencies in the age of globalization. Indeed, this paper argues that the role of international organizations in developing countries is much stronger than in developed ones. Robertson et al. [43] claim that international organizations have a more powerful impact on education policy of low-income and developing countries through their practices, programs and policies such as the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, and the broader globalized education policy discourses of the knowledge economy and lifelong learning. Accordingly, education policy in developing countries is globalized.

In coping with globalization, Green et al. [21] discover five common goals among education policies of the developing countries studied. These goals are “the achievement of high quality mass education”, “the planned expansion of secondary, technical and higher education”, “the development of communication skills”, “the equitable expansion of education”, and “the awareness of the potential of both the official and hidden curriculum of educational institutions to promote positive – and perverse – contributions to national unity and social cohesion” (p. xv). Considering these five goals in depth leads to a conclusion that some education policies in developing countries have been responsive to the global requirements with a focus also on national and local problems. To make it clear, quality mass education and equitable expansion of education help ameliorate local problems and contribute to the promotion of social equality. On the other side, developing communication skills and expanding secondary, technical and higher education are positioned to assist with the competitive integration into the global economy. Robertson et al. [43] make it more clear when arguing that policymaking must be “grounded both in an understanding of the ‘local’ and in more innovative global strategies” (p. 2).

To sum up, education policy of developing countries has been affected extensively by the work of international organizations. Moreover, there have been global education policy discourses that have implications for education systems of developing countries. At this stage, we will move to talk about the impact of international organizations, as well as the new global education policy discourses affecting the education systems of developing countries.

7. The role of multilateral organizations

It is believed that globalization has resulted in empowering multilateral organizations such as international governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations [25; 36; 43]. Their role and mission vary between the different service sectors of nation-states. Regarding education, these organizations have affected the development and the implementation of education policies and programs around the world. The literature shows that many authors have described the effect of global, multilateral organizations on education. For instance, Jones [24] argues that national development programs of developing nations has been affected remarkably by the increased external influences carried by open communication and global discourse on development. Thus, by extension, these external influences, Jones [24] believes, impact nation-states' education policies. Recently, these organizations are playing a great role in shaping the context of education policies and becoming the most influential body around the world. In general, education today, particularly in the nations of the Global South, is seen as central to nation's development.

In addition, Green [19] presents an argument that the realities of globalization potentially force states to lose their control over education. He stresses that their traditional role over education of merely creating human capital for national economies, and encouraging national identities and cultures could no longer be preserved. Thus, their power over education would be shared with other international organization. According to Robertson et al. [43], this new account of globalization has opened the door for prominence and influence of a variety of multilateral and supranational organisations such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, OECD, as well as international non-governmental agencies. To make it clear, Cerny [9] suggests that the changing global circumstances make nation states thirsty to form and set up a framework of international organizations with the aim of establishing "governance without government". Indeed, these organizations have come up with multilateral agreements and policies in education for the whole world, promoting educational discourses about human capital and economic development. Here, an argument is presented that nation-states' power over education would be shared with these international organization, framing how policies are developed in nation-states.

From what is stated above by Jones [24], Green [19] and Cerny [9], we take for granted that development actors such as international governmental organizations and international (IGOs) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operate as

mediators of global educational agendas, contributing to the globalization of education. This argument is emphasized by Rizvi and Lingard [41], confirming that "the discourses that frame policy texts are no longer located simply in the national space but increasingly emanate from national and supranational organizations" (p. 14). It is stated that there has been a great need for multilateral institutions that would help the world to cope with the new global context [36]. Indeed, multilateral organizations work internationally with the aim of shaping economic and social development. Dakopoulou [14] points out to the mission of these organizations, describing how these organizations involve in the creation of social policy and its implementation through service delivery (emergency and development aid). He also mentions that the policy goals of these organizations are achieved through two different ways. The first one is powers of persuasion and the second one is conditionalities attached to loans. Perhaps persuasion is the major mechanism in relation to the nations of the Global North, while conditionalities might be the major mechanism functioning in respect of the nations of the Global South. In some cases, the failure in implementing agreements of some organization may impose fines or force countries to pay compensation [14].

In regards to education, multilateral organizations have played a huge role by offering educational programs and being the largest aid provider for reforming education in the developing world. Let us mention some of these international and regional organizations that promote the advancement of education globally. For instance, the UN has four agencies that support education: these are the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations development programs. As the main UN agency of education, UNESCO looks at education as the basic driving force of globalization process [48].

However, the conditionality associated with aid always places pressures on nation-states' education policies especially in poorer countries. Rizvi and Lingard [41] mention that conditionalities have real effects on education policy. If we consider the World Bank influence on education policies of less developed countries, there is always a strict loan conditionality [8]. The World Bank has set its own desirable policy goals and countries must implement its policies and programs so they can get financial assistance [25]. Based on human capital economics, developing countries are offered educational loans. According to Bonal [8], the conditionality associated with the aid of the World Bank has put it as one of the top subjects of globalizing education, by being in

charge of formulating and delivering a hegemonic model of educational development.

To look at the effects of international organizations on education policy of developing countries, we have to consider two sets of policy prescriptions that had spread over the world from 1980 to 2005 [43]. The first one is called The Washington Consensus (1980-90) and the second one is The Post-Washington Consensus (1990-the present). For the sake of only focusing on education policy, the paper will not describe these two policy types in detail, rather it will introduce them generally to outline their effects on education policy of developing countries.

7.1. The Washington Consensus 1980-90

The term the Washington Consensus is used to describe the era of the globalised policy prescriptions by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The literature agrees that from 1980- 90, the whole world experienced a wave of policies with major restructuring of economies that had measures related to “fiscal austerity, deregulating the economy and opening it up to international competition” [36, p.37 ; 7]. It is explained that these policies reached the low-income countries because of the Mexico debt crisis in 1982 as these countries had loans from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) [36]. To see its connection to developing countries, it is believed that then the World Bank and the IMF created a set of policies associated with loans that would work to make sure that debtor countries were able to repay their loans [36]. As Singh [37] writes, these policies through loan conditionalities became globalised and spread over the developing countries. As a result of loan conditionalities, developing countries had no choice rather than to implement associated economic policies as part of the conditions of loan agreements.

Regarding education policy, Robertson et al. [36] say that education systems of developing countries had been affected by the Washington Consensus policies. It is argued that the influence of international organizations on education policy of these countries had increased noticeably during this era [20]. The World Bank was the chief policy player, creating a model of globalised education policy for developing countries. Mundy [35] describes that model as “sharply curtailed role for government in educational provision” and the “rationalization of its role in educational finance and system oversight”, “commitment to decentralization, cost-recovery and privatization in higher education”, “increased attention to ‘productive’ inputs like textbooks”, and “a movement out of technical vocational education” (p. 490). As it is clear, there was a policy preference of the World Bank to

decentralize education and privatize schooling in developing countries.

7.2. The Post-Washington Consensus 1990-2005

By the end of the 1980s, the era of the Washington Consensus policies had been subject to severe criticism [35; 43]. It is believed that these policies did not work effectively to ensure social cohesion and stability for the low-income countries, which was the most needed for development [43]. Moreover, these policies were accused of failing to reduce inequality and poverty and therefore were considered to be unsuccessful in attaining sustained economic growth [49]. These criticisms led to the emergence of the Post-Washington Consensus macro policy framework, focusing on good governance. The World Bank [51] report on Africa mentions that poor governance was behind the failure of the Washington Consensus policies in developing countries. According to the report, the problem was not with agendas of the Washington Consensus policies per se, but with poor governance, secrecy, corruption, lack of accountability, inefficient policymaking, and disregard for the law. As argued by Abrahamsen [1], the Post- Washington Consensus policies with their focused agendas on good governance were introduced to help the developing countries with their development and related problems.

Centering around development, the Post-Washington consensus was believed to help the developing countries through: increasing living standards (more improvement to education and health), achieving sustainable development, bringing equitable and democratic development [46]. Beyond that, social capital as a concept emerged during the 1990s to be a marked characteristic of the era of Post-Washington Consensus policies [15]. It is worth mentioning here that this era witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of NGOs and human rights organizations across the globe. Such increase, Robertson et al. [43] argue, has accelerated the development processes and worked to reduce the challenges of developing countries. Beside these development matters, the Post-Washington Consensus has resulted in what has been called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an attempt by the UN to develop collectively a set of precise international development goals. The paper will discuss the MDG related to education later on. However, in spite of everything mentioned about development in the Post-Washington Consensus policies, what have been the implications for education policy in developing countries?

7.2.1. Education for All. During the Post-Washington Consensus era, there was a new worldwide agenda for education, aiming to prioritize primary education over other things. This new agenda was believed to help developing countries to overcome poverty and other major challenges. To make it clear, in 1990, a conference called 'Education for All' (EFA) was held in Jomtien, Thailand, coordinated and organized by the World Bank and UNESCO. Robertson et al. [43] argue that this conference was a chance for the World Bank to concentrate on the challenges that were facing education systems of developing countries and to overcome the failure of its previous policies during the Washington Consensus. Besides, they believe that this conference helped UNESCO to "re-establish itself after losing credibility and funding during the 1980s" (p.62). These observations concerning the World Bank and UNESCO point out the involvement of these two leading international organizations in shaping national education policies of developing countries, suggesting the new global governance of education.

Most importantly, the EFA initiative had implications for education policy of developing countries to achieve the goal of 'Universal Primary Education' by the year 2000. Focusing on basic education, the initiative was proposed to have a positive effect on people's health, education and the overall living standards in these low-income countries. Indeed, as Robertson et al. [43] state, the EFA initiative would help also to eliminate gender differences in access to primary schooling. Across developing nations, EFA caused a kind of standardization in education. Briefly, the EFA initiative increased the influence of international organizations over education policy of developing countries, directing them to more standardized primary education provision.

7.2.2. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

By the end of the 1990s, there was global talk and discussions about poverty and its effects on developing countries and all low-income countries. To tackle this problem, the United Nations (UN) organized a Millennium Summit in September 2000 with the participation of all UN members, with the goal of attempting to eliminate poverty and achieve sustained development [43]. The summit resulted in eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for both developing and developed countries to be achieved by 2015. These goals have addressed the challenges that have faced the world, specifically developing countries, during the age of globalizations. It is important to mention that almost all international organizations have been working to achieve the following eight MDGs:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

The importance of education in development and overcoming the global challenges during globalization has been emphasized and reinforced by the MDGs. MDG 2 is about ensuring that all children around the world, boys and girls similarly, have the full opportunity and ability to complete primary schooling. This agenda for education suggest the amore common and collective direction for education policy of all countries to achieve that goal by 2015. It is anticipated that developing countries are the greatest beneficiaries from these goals, as they will be receiving loans and funds from international organizations and donors towards achieving these goals. However, we have to acknowledge that the education policy of developing countries will be strictly directed by this MDG and therefore, a clear demonstration of the powerful impact of international organization on them.

8. Globalized education policy discourses

There are various global discourses encouraged by globalization that affect local educational practices and policies. There is no doubt that these discourses have affected education policy of developing countries, forcing them to follow the global direction. Some of these discourses are knowledge-economy, life-long learning, English as a global language, national curriculum and others that shape education policy globally. Indeed, it has been found that these discourses have played a great role in not only shaping the education policy of developing countries, but also in pushing for more efficiency and effectiveness within their schooling systems [41].

9. Globalization and education policy in Oman

9.1. Sultanate of Oman

It is worth to start first by introducing the Sultanate of Oman generally, looking at its geography, economy, education and development. Oman is located geographically at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf, more specifically on the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It is considered the third largest state in the Arabian Peninsula, with 309,500 square kilometers of land area [32].

According to the latest census in 2003, Oman has a total population of 2.33 million people (Omanis were 1.77 million and the rest were foreigners). As it is clear from the Ministry of National Economy report in 2004, the Omani people are young - around 53 percent of the total Omani were under the age of 18 years old.

The Basic Statute of the state refers to Islam as the religion of the country and Arabic as the official language. In regards to other languages, there are others such as Urdu, English, Swahili and Baluchi, which are spoken by other Omani people. English is widely spoken and used as a second language. In fact, it is now used more than Arabic in business, technology and higher education.

Moving to consideration of the economy, Oman, like other Arab Gulf countries, is an oil producer, relying heavily on it as the major source for its economy. However, to overcome global challenges, the Omani government has implemented a new strategy (1996-2020), called the *Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020*. This new strategy has the main aim of achieving economic diversification through promotion of foreign investment, privatization, and trade and industrialization and liberalization. It is believed that this strategy will lead to economic stability and fiscal balance. The strategy's objectives also include "the training of Omani citizens, promotion of their skills, as well as adoption of policies aiming for the promotion of each citizen's living standard" [34, p.25]. Doing so is proposed to help in replacing foreigner workers with Omanis, achieving what is called 'Omanisation' of the economy. Moreover, tourism has been emphasized as a source and industry for enhancing and enriching the Omani national economy. To enter the global economy, in 2000, Oman became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such membership is believed to help the Omani Government in attracting foreign investment, as well as integrating with the world economy.

9.2. The education system in Oman

After this introductory information, let us look at the history of the Omani education system. According to Alnabhani [5] and Almamari [4], the modern Omani education system began only in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos became the ruler. Before that year, there was only informal education in which children studied religious education about Islam. Indeed, education was only for boys and girls had no provision [4]. With the new government, education was seen as priority that would help in the development of the Sultanate and play a great role in building a strong, dynamic state [29]. During the previous 40 years, the education system has witnessed a major development and changes.

According to AlHinai [3], Omani education has developed qualitatively and quantitatively, dividing it to different periods as follow:

- *First period (1970-1975) and second period (1976-1980)*. This period saw the beginning of the spread of formal education throughout the Sultanate. Building schools to accommodate both boys and girls was the main concern of these two periods. At that time, there were two shifts working schools: morning for boys and afternoon for girls. The curriculum was not national, but borrowed from neighboring countries. The focus here was on quantitative issues of provision.

- *Third period (1981-1985)*. This period was characterized by continuing the spread of education with the additional emphasis on improving the quality of education. Moreover, there was a specific focus on illiteracy and adult education. This period saw progress in introducing the first national curriculum.

- *Fourth period (1986-1990) and fifth period (1991-1995)*. These two periods made a great development in Omani education by starting higher education. For example, Sultan Qaboos University, the only state university till now, was opened in 1986.

- *Sixth period (1995-2020)*. As AlHinai [3] calls it, this is the period of reform. This period has been characterized by many changes, such as introducing *Basic Education*, a new curriculum and adding new subjects. Many argue that this period of reform has been a result of the conference 'A future vision of Omani economy: Oman 2020 (see e.g. [3; 4; 5]).

In short, as argued by Almamari [4], quantitative provision of education in Oman began in 1970 to 1995, marked by the distribution of learning for all Omani areas, and the qualitative period started in 1998 with the introduction of Basic Education. He argues that "these developments resulted from changing economic, societal, and cultural and political realities at local, regional and international levels" (p. 17).

9.3. Education policy in Oman

Education has been very critical for the rapid development seen nowadays in Oman. As is obvious from the history of education system, the Omani government has been investing heavily in education since 1970. Being a developing country working speedily to achieve development, it is believed that the Omanisation strategy and globalization have profound implications for education policy in Oman [2; 4; 5]. Indeed, both globalization and Omanisation have been significant concerns of Omani education policy, as they reflect the local and international challenges facing the country. To make it clearer, education policy is based on the needs of Omani people and reflected in the changes that are

happening locally, regionally and globally [34]. If we consider the shift from the quantitative to the qualitative focus in education in Oman, we see clearly the presence and effects of globalization on education policy. Here, I will try to look at few examples of globalization's impact on education policy, focusing on the introduction of Basic Education and some related globalized policy discourses.

Oman's 2020 Vision conference, held in 1995, is regarded as the first, most significant long-term strategy by the Omani government to face the challenges of globalization and Omanisation. Indeed, the conference has resulted in various proposed policies for the different systems of the government, attempting to achieve sustainable development [28]. This leads us to say that this conference has influenced the education system positively in terms of changing its policies to cope with global changes, as well as to better meet local needs. Almamari [4, p.18] mentions the following educational policies, recommended by the conference to tackle the challenges of globalization and Omanisation:

- "Implement and improve the standards of Basic Education.
- Make secondary education more consistent with the requirements of the future society.
- Pay more attention to scientific subjects.
- Introduce the teaching of computing in schools as a basic subject.
- Improve the teaching/learning of the English language in BE.
- Provide schools with adequate human resources and educational equipment.
- Improve the status of teachers.
- Improve in-service training courses and workshops for all staff in the educational field.
- Improve teaching methods and education practices according to new trends and encourage the concept of learning by doing".

Looking at mentioned education policies, we come to the argument that globalization has seriously affected the education policy of Oman. To see this influence, let us concentrate on the introduction of the Basic Education policy which is the new system replacing the previous General Education system. We mentioned previously that the Post-Washington Consensus has come up with EFA and MDGS which have proposed the implementation of basic education. The Omani Government through the introduction of Basic Education has tried to follow this global trend. The Ministry of Education in Oman has to provide a report on the development of the Basic Education to the UNESCO [34]. This shows the powerful impact of UNESCO on Omani education policy. The new system of Basic

Education, as it is clear from its policy objectives, has introduced the teaching of English and computing from grade one. Moreover, it has focused on teaching mathematics and sciences. Returning to our discussion previously, teaching English, computing skills and science are most obviously global education policy discourses that have affected education policy in Oman.

Alharthy [2] points out that Basic Education has been implemented to prepare Omanis to enter the workforce, equipped with the required skills demanded by the global economy. This leads us to confirm that Basic Education with its curriculum policy focusing on life skills and global economy is a way to face the challenges of globalization. Moreover, the report of the Ministry of Education [30] to UNESCO shows that to achieve the required changes to Basic Education, there have been new teaching and learning strategies that have been derived from global experiences. In terms of international tests, the Ministry of Education uses the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to test the mathematics and science achievement of Omani students and compare their achievements on a global scale. According to the Ministry of Education website, using TIMSS helps the Ministry to have reliable data to assess Oman's comparative global competitiveness [31]. To this point, it has been argued that new policies of education in Oman regarding curriculum, testing, English teaching, life skills, work skills, and computing skills are without doubt reforms and policy responses to the pressures and discourses of globalization.

10. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the literature on globalization and education policy, with a focus on Omani education policy. An argument has been presented that globalization has had strong influences on education policy in all nations. Developing countries are much affected by globalization and their education policies compared with those in developed countries have been seriously influenced. The role of multilateral organizations in globalizing education policy, as well as the global educational discourses (multilateralism, the knowledge economy and technology, lifelong learning, global curriculum, testing, and English as a global language) have been found to affect developing nation-states' educational policies today. In general, the paper has discovered the followings:

- International organizations are playing a greater role in shaping the context of national education policies and becoming influential policy agents around the world, particularly but not exclusively in developing countries.

- International organizations ‘impose’ their policy interests, objectives and philosophies in developing nations via conditionalities linked with loans.
- The discourses of knowledge economy, life-long learning, international testing and technology are found to be the main concern of education policy in both developing nations; these have thus become in effect globalized education policy discourses.
- English as the medium of teaching is taken into consideration by almost all developing countries’ education policies; this situation is a response to the globalization of the economy, with English now as the dominant language of business and trade.

In regards to education policy in Oman, it has been found to be impacted by globalization. With the implementing of Basic Education, we saw how Oman has changed its education policy to tackle the challenges of globalization and responded to both EFA and the MDGs. The researcher has found that there have been no previous studies of globalization and education policy in Oman, focusing on the various ways the education system and education policy in the Sultanate of Oman have been influenced by globalization. Thus, further studies on this issue are recommended.

10. References

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