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Education Policy and Multicultural Societies

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Abstract

Education policy and society are interdisciplinary programmed, drawing on sociology, political science, economics and history to address the challenges of education policy and provision. Educational policy on studies and processes in relation to issues of race, social class, gender and changes such as globalization and new managerialism are very important. Educational institutions are often the heart of a community and are central agents of socialization. Schools can be an important channel through which to promote social cohesion and address community issues of inter-cultural, inter-religious or inter-ethnic relations. The education system is also a public institution and, as such, can create open and participatory processes through which the community can exert influence. If education policy is not sensitive to the issue of social cohesion and does not incorporate the perspectives of key stakeholders, it can be divisive and alienating, contributing to injustice and violence. In the contemporary world, the deepening ethnic background of nations, diversity within societies and an increasing percentage of people who speak a second language have made multicultural education crucial and important. Multicultural education is seen as an opportunity to improve race relations and to help all students gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills which could be possible through citizenship and democratic education. Education policies are formulated by the legislature organ of government which belongs to every section of society from entire nation. It is the legislature which provides legal sanction in bringing in reforms in the education sector. Education policies are the fruit of multi-culture provision. It is in this context that there is a need of a proper mechanism which provides balance in bringing equality and uniform pattern of education in a nation. Education and democracy could not be separated as both of them are directly or indirectly interdependent. As conclusion it could be said that education policies and its impact on society exists directly as all the differences in societies such as race, gender, sex, languages etc. could be maintained from balanced perspective with the help of education.

Definition of Education Policies: Education policy is high on the agenda of governments across the world. Global pressures focus increasing attention on the outcomes of education policy and on their implications for economic prosperity and social citizenship. The experience of each individual learner is therefore decisively shaped by the wider policy environment. Educational policy focuses on the practical consequences of educational policy decisions and alternatives. It examines the relationship between educational policy and educational practice, and sheds new light on important debates and controversies within the field. Educational policy blends the best of educational research with the world of practice, making it a valuable resource for educators, policy-makers, administrators, researchers, teachers and graduate students.

Education, policy and society are interdisciplinary programmed, drawing on sociology, political science, economics and history to address the challenges of education policy and provision. Educational policy on studies and processes in relation to issues of race, social class, gender and changes such as globalization and new managerialism are very important. 'Policy should really be integrated into politics,' Jennings said. 'If people of goodwill don't deal with policy,' he said, decisions will be left to those who are not equipped to make them or worse, who are simply uninterested in fairness and equity in education.¹

The Importance of Education Policy: Educational institutions are often the heart of a community and are central agents of socialization. Schools can be an important channel through which to promote social cohesion and address community issues of inter-cultural, inter-religious or inter-ethnic relations. The education system is also a public institution and, as such, can create open and participatory processes through which the community can exert influence. If education policy is not sensitive to the issue of social cohesion and does not incorporate the perspectives of key stakeholders, it can be divisive and alienating, contributing to injustice and violence. According to John Dewey, education obviously has an individual role (increasing one's knowledge levels) but education also has a societal role where schools function as a mechanism to transfer 'values into future citizens' and to socialize them in preparation for their future voting rights.² It is the nature of this subcritical role that is often misunderstood in education policy. On the other hand, Bernstein (1971) emphasizes that 'how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, and reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social contract'.

From the above scholar views, it is clear that educational reforms depict widespread social changes, and are therefore not just a matter of pedagogy or didactics, but rather social reforms that should be analyzed as such.³ Certainly, one of the most significant social reforms has been the transformation of schooling as a private activity for the few (often religiously organized and charity-based) to that of education as right to be provided based on public expense for the masses. As the modern nation-state developed, two goals for the education system were delineate; first, to create a common culture and, second, to educate the future generations of civil servants. The state was to treat its citizens based on ability, and not on class, gender or race. The notion of equality of opportunity was an important component for this common culture, with the bureaucracy playing a key role in promoting and implementing the idea of meritocracy. Given the second goal of a dedicated administrative corp, the state could ensure its ability to steer effectively and to attract the loyalty of its citizens. As the role of the state in providing education grew, education as a national policy concern augmented in importance.⁴ Returning to John Dewey's statement, we need to ask how education policies are contributing to the development of democratic communities. The democratic view of education emphasizes the 'collective, common and community purposes, and it recognizes that the political values of freedom and equality are interdependent rather than antithetical'. Castles (1998) argues that it is doubtful whether the state will retreat from its responsibility for public education given that the state is not willing to surrender its role in the development of human capital and political socialization.⁵

Four Dimensions of Educational Policy: Education plays an important role in maintaining the prestige, power, and economic and social position of the dominant group in society. Hence, Max Weber, one of the famous sociologists, maintained that schools teach and maintain particular status cultures as schools are homogenous in their student

bodies. In order to achieve the objective of education, there is need of review of dimension of education policies. We know that education system trains individual in specialties to fill needed position or prepare cultivated individuals. Therefore, education policies are formulated keeping in mind the factors which are theoretically relevant in terms of society's need. There have been four determinants for a sound education policy system called education policy theory. Policy theories can assemble along four dimensions: normative, structural, constitutive and technical. The normative dimension consists of the values, standards and philosophies that compel societies to undertake improvement and change. The structural dimension contains government measures, and an organization's structures, methods and procedures that declare and advocate educational polices. The constituent dimension consists of the assumptions of individuals, interest group and recipients who exert power over, are a party to and profit from the policy-making process. The technical dimension incorporates the development, practice, implementation and assessment of educational policy making. The comprehension of educational policy necessitates that policymakers contemplate the influence and consequences of educational policies along these dimensions. There is considerable scope for interpretation, even in the most explicit of policies, and it is important to identify the 'silences' (what is not stated) as well as what is clearly and openly articulated.⁶

Theoretical issue of multicultural and education policy: Education is a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity. It was accepted in United Nation as well as various international organizations. Later on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted it. It affirms our need to prepare student for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice. There have been a lot of discussions in equality in terms of political freedom. This could be assess as follows.⁷

The questions of citizenship, democracy and multiculturalism are at the heart of the discussion worldwide on educational reform, deeply affecting the academic discourse and the practice of comparative and international education. Cloaked in different robes, questions about citizenship, the connections between education and democracy, or the problem of multiculturalism affect most of the decisions that we face in dealing with the challenge of contemporary education. On the other hand, theories of citizenship and theories of democracy mark the advent of modern political sense and reflect, in the complexities, the theoretical and practical challenges to democracy in contemporary societies. Theories of citizenship relate to every problem of the relations between citizens and the state and among citizens themselves, while theories of democracy relate clearly to the connections between established hidden and explicit forms of social and political power, the intersection between systems of democratic representation and participation with systems of political administrative organization of public governance and with political party systems. Ultimately, theories of democracy need to address the overall interaction between democracy and capitalism. Finally, theories of multiculturalism, so prevalent in the educational field in the last 20 years, have emerged as a particular response not only to the constitution of the pedagogical subject in schools or to the interaction between the pedagogical subject and the political subject in democratic societies but also as a way to identify the importance of multiple identities in education

and culture. In short, theories of multiculturalism are intimately connected to the politics of culture and education.⁸

Diversity, Citizenship and Education: In the contemporary world, the deepening ethnic background of nations, diversity within societies and an increasing percentage of people who speak a second language have made multicultural education crucial and important. Multicultural education is seen as an opportunity to improve race relations and to help all students gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills which could be possible through citizenship and democratic education. This democratic education must include the syllabus regarding unity in diversities. This is because diversity has become increasingly recognized and sanctioned in the western democratic nations since the ethnic revitalization movements of the 1960s and 1970s. One of the challenges to diverse democratic nation-state is to provide opportunities for different groups to maintain aspects of their community cultures while building a nation in which these groups are re-structurally included and to which they feel allegiance.

They can protect the rights of minorities and enable diverse groups to participate only when they are unified around a set of democratic values such as justice and equality.⁹ Citizenship education must be transformed in the twenty-first century because of the deepening racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity in nation-state around the world. Citizens in an adverse democratic society should be able to maintain attachments to their cultural communities as well as participate effectively in the shared national culture.¹⁰ Citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to function in their cultural communities and beyond their cultural borders. They should also be able and willing to participate in the construction of a national civic culture that is a moral and just community. The national community should embody democratic ideals and values, such as those articulated in the universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students also need to acquire the knowledge and skills required to become effective citizens in the global community.¹¹

Role of Education Policies and School Curriculum in Multiculturalism: The school institution serves as a prism through which the hopes and aims of human societies are projected: as parents, educators and political leaders attempt to conserve or transform the values and skills passed onto the next generation. So, it is not surprising that public schools get swept up into all kinds of social and economic debates. Within this context schools can assist not only in the development and strengthening of both 'national' and 'local' institutions but also in helping to increase the awareness and understanding by the different groups in the society increasing the level of articulation between 'national' and 'local' institutions. However, once the total policy to achieve and maintain cultural diversity in a society has been accepted and measures towards its implementation are being taken, the education system can then play an important role to such efforts. On the other hand, schools and other educational institutions use a variety of approaches in attempting to develop among future citizens a sense of national solidarity, national unity or belongingness to a single nation state. Another means is through the language policy which is often adopted in education. Despite the linguistic diversities which might exist in a multi-cultural society, there is usually an attempt to educate the younger generation in a common language which would better prepare them of communicate effectively with each other. A latent function of this ability of the citizens to understand and speak to each other in a common language is also to contribute to the development of a sense of national unity, social cohesion or belongingness or a single nation state.¹²

There are many ways in which schools can help to increase the degree of articulation between 'local' and 'national' institutions which is necessary to maintain cultural diversity with a framework

of national unity. However, the specific suspects of say the religious practices of a group will have to be taught in the 'local' institutions which each cultural group might establish for this purpose such as Sunday Schools, Madrassas, etc.¹³

Politics on Multicultural Societies and Education Policy: In recent years, multiculturalism has entered the arena of social debate and politics. Within education, multiculturalism functions as both pedagogical method and curricular innovation. From elementary through collegiate programmes, educators are urged to include multiculturalism, take a multicultural perspective and 'celebrate diversity.' Clashes occur within the political and educational arenas as we try to sort out the meanings and implications of multiculturalism. In this context, education and the notion of multiculturalism have brought the unique and different type of debate and controversy in connection with political and social factors which more or less influence political system if balance is not achieved. For example, a country having diversity in terms of language, culture, tradition etc. need to have such kind of education policy which connects all sections of society. Nowadays, the time has taken a different shape under which politics on education policies as well as politics on multi-culture is being targeted by the political parties for their interest. However, in every democratic country where the legal aspect is mentioned as constitution, laws, statues etc., political clashes due to attracting a large of section by political welfare programmes are taking place. In general, a majority of political parties provide all kinds of support to those sections of society from where they expect a number of votes. This system is more prevalent in countries like Iran and India where there are people having different religions, sects, casts, etc.¹⁴

Role of Multicultural Societies in Education Policies Making: Education policies are formulated by the legislature organ of government which belongs to every section of society from entire nation. It is the legislature which provides legal sanction in bringing in reforms in the education sector. Education policies are the fruit of multi-culture provision. It is in this context that there is a need of a proper mechanism which provides balance in bringing equality and uniform pattern of education in a nation. There must be equal respect to all in terms their culture, language and tradition. Hence, it is the beauty of democracy which gives such kind of opportunity to the legislature. Early philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato pointed out that education is central to the moral fulfilment of individuals and the well-being of the society in which they live. In the past few decades, research has supported this conventional wisdom, revealing that education not only enables individuals to perform better in the labour market, but also helps to improve their overall health, promote active citizenship and contain violence. The analysis below presents evidence on the relationship between education and social outcomes including health, civic engagement and subjective well-being across many OECD countries.

On the other hand, democratic societies are strengthened by fundamental principles, such as freedom, equality and justice. To keep the identities of people who produce knowledge and research suppressed seems paradoxical in a democratic society. When variables like culture, ethnicity, race and diversity are utilized in order to give some privileges to individuals from some groups and to reject others, then the provision of equal opportunities becomes a serious challenge for a society. Interestingly, every human being has a tendency to react against all forms of domination and has an intrinsic desire for freedom. For this reason, more than ever, education in and for a society must supply the schooling that is required for each student so that they can develop their own interests

and learn to live, if not in cooperation with others, then at least peacefully. Dewey, probably the most influential thinker and philosopher of progressive education, strongly opposes putting students into fixed categories or classes and treating them as a member of a class or group.¹⁵

Challenges of Education Policies in Context of Multicultural: Education and democracy could not be separated as both of them are directly or indirectly interdependent. It has been experienced that democracy sustains where there are high levels of literacy along with other things. In this context, education policy needs proper attention and guidelines in accordance with the need of democratic value and practice. Therefore, the countries which still could not establish a healthy democratic value in the countries more or less need to rebuild their education policies in accordance with the economic and social factors. Being a country with good level of education and political awareness is possible through a sound education policy system. On the other hand, it has been observed that education policies have been marred by a lot of issues in connection with the multicultural such as the problem of equal education pattern, problems of language in education as well as use of it in education, etc. Most government officials and business interests understandably favor public education that legitimates their roles and therefore advocate the values emphasized in Institutional Republicanism. This understanding of democracy supports civic education that promotes the traditional values of patriotism, social unity and economic growth. It also provides extensive institutional descriptions and campaign for individual responsibility. Tensions within this mix of education and governance include conflict over state and local control versus national policies and standards, and public school adequacy versus privatization.¹⁶

The challenges in education policies lead to problems in society as society gets its fuel from education. There have been a number of disputes and issues in connection with the diversities in society due to equal education policy. For example, *Bilingual education*, which means offering instruction in a language other than English, constitutes another attempt to equalize education for minority students. Federally mandated in 1968, bilingual education has generated considerable debate. Supporters argue that students whose first language is not English deserve an equal educational opportunity unavailable to them unless they can receive instruction in their first language. Opponents counter that students not taught in English will lack the fluency needed to function in daily life. Numerous studies support conclusions on both sides of the issue, and, as funding becomes scarce, the debate will intensify. Like this issue, another problem in education policies such as the syllabi of many universities reveal the extent of academic backwardness. They provide subjects which are neither job-oriented nor life-oriented.¹⁷

Conclusion: As conclusion it could be said that education policies and its impact on society exists directly as all the differences in societies such as race, gender, sex, languages etc. could be maintained from balanced perspective with the help of education. A better quality of education is made possible if there will exist a sound education policy. Education policy acts as an instrument of change for any society because education is the basis for a successful and healthy democracy. A long and successful democracy for any developed country of the world is possible only through a good education policy where education plays a vital role. Even though it is important to recognize the link between education policy and differing, shifting, conceptions of citizenship, such a connection is always likely to be complex. Sharp ideological differences relating to the conflict is an ever-present feature at all levels of the policy development process. Education policy on citizenship goes to the heart of core values relating to the nature and purpose of education.

Contestation at the level of the socio-political environment therefore becomes mirrored at the strategic, organizational and operational level as policy progresses from formulation to implementation. It remains to be seen whether education provisions based on principles of choice and diversity can be reconciled with the citizenship in turn been challenged by the increasingly diverse nature of contemporary societies, particularly in terms of culture and ethnicity.

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