
Aid, international co-operation and globalization: trends in the field of education

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Economic globalization and education

What is the future of educational international development co-operation in the present period of accelerated globalization? As Forster rightly points out in his contribution in this book, international development co-operation is no longer what it used to be. The inclusion in official OECD/DAC aid statistics of assistance for democratic development, participation in United Nations peace-keeping operations, development-related contributions to combat narcotics, assistance to demobilization efforts, and disbursements for asylum-seekers and refugees from developing countries residing in the industrialized ones indicates that the definition and scope of ODA have been substantially enlarged during the last ten years. It is not surprising, therefore, that the meaning and importance of aid to education, in the 1970s' sense of the term, have been changing rapidly. Despite static or even declining ODA, international development co-operation has to cover new fields of concern to international agencies and to fit new objectives. Education now has to contribute explicitly to democratic development, environmental concerns, narcotic reduction and others.

Nevertheless, until recently this trend remained compatible with the paradigm of aid to education as identified by King (1991), despite the fact that it questions the long-standing project-oriented way of identifying and running activities in that field. In addition, the content and quality of messages transmitted through education have become as important as their structures. The evolutions on the aid scene are now accelerating because the globalization process has dramatically changed our perspective on international co-operation during the past ten years. If we accept the definition of globalization as a process of systematic elimination of

institutional and technological obstacles to the movement and profitability of financial capital, the following impacts can, according to Vinokur (1996), be expected in the production, transmission and appropriation of knowledge:

- A strong linkage to innovation as an essential determinant of profitability on increasingly competitive markets. As the cycles of consumption are shortening owing to the rapidity of technological change, firms have to constantly innovate and update themselves or call upon new knowledge.
- Consequently, education and training are increasingly articulated both in terms of structures and processes as the efficiency of the production and utilization of knowledge is defined primarily by economic agents (enterprises, firms and corporations). In other words, the leading role exerted by the political and social constituencies of civil society – usually represented through state structures – is declining *vis-à-vis* the economic and financial actors whose objectives are primarily market-oriented.
- An example of this evolution is clearly confirmed in France, for instance, where the concept of ‘competence’ (as a sum of different types of knowledge only validated through action) is now officially used in the law ruling education and training as well as in the corporate discourses and practices for production, staff organization and evaluation.
- Nevertheless, in spite of this move towards a strong economically oriented coherence among education, training and production, the ever-accelerating change in the production sphere has led to an increasing dissociation between output flows from education and training systems and input flows in production structures and processes. Because of the reaction time of these systems, stronger pressure is put on education and training institutions and on individuals to be more productive and effective in the short term and to adapt constantly to new situations. The social price is a dramatically increasing rate of non-insertion and/or exclusion of those who cannot cope.
- In other words, the dominant ideology of entrepreneurship is colonizing the field of human resources development as it encourages individuals to assume larger responsibility for their education and

training. This 'demand-driven' approach obviously leads to basic questioning of the education and training institutions which have tended to exert some kind of monopoly on the offer of programmes and curricula and, hence, have lost contact with the economic reality. This has led some people to compare the productivity of a kolkhoz-based Soviet production unit with that of a school system, and to underline that both are totally inefficient (Perelman, 1993).

- The apparent paradox of this trend is that it goes alongside a tendency towards the standardization of school-based skills at an international level in view of an improved assessment of the potential of labour markets across the globe. 'Standards for performance of an educational system do not differ systematically between Ghana and Georgia (either the state or the country). Educational officials in Africa, Asia . . . hold to the same standards and as a result they are demanding the same knowledge of innovation and system reforms as educational leaders within the OECD countries' (Heyneman, 1995, p. 2). The International Mathematics and Science Study highlights some of the consequences of this standardization process as it compares results of country/regions/people with reference to one single scale.
- In order to stimulate and/or accompany the previous trends, the growth of powerful knowledge industries has been facilitated by the boom of new information and communication technologies (*Prospects*, 1997a, b). The development of these industries has been based on the phenomena cited above of content standardization and individualization of consumption in education and training.

From international aid to international trade in educational co-operation: a challenge for the agencies

What we are witnessing, then, is an acceleration of the multiple phenomena of innovation, deinstitutionalization, standardization, privatization and individualization of the process and organizational modes of research, education and training (Vinokur, 1996). It is the combined effects of these trends that must be confronted by aid agencies and international development co-operation in the field of education and training. Will such agencies be capable of dealing with these phenomena and pro-

pose original and constructive responses? This uncertainty is particularly obvious in the case of public bilateral and multilateral agencies, as the development concepts and strategies adopted by such agencies in the 1970s are now being strongly questioned by the acceleration of phenomena linked to globalization. In addition, the decrease in international development co-operation activity observed since the mid-1980s is now being amplified as a result of:

- Reduced public resources for development aid and the consecutive and significant drop in the number of positions available within agencies.
- Ageing of agency personnel. Staff renewal is far from being guaranteed by a new generation, since the latter is more concerned with humanitarian aid, environmental issues and international trade than with the aims of traditional development co-operation.
- Transfer of public development aid to the private sector through competitive tendering as used, for example, by the European Union. This results in: (i) the dislocation of the potential for a coherent overall vision of educational policies leading to a sort of 'capacity debuilding'; and (ii) a shift in emphasis to rapid resolution of immediate problems (relief having replaced development).
- Significant growth of economic actors for whom educational research and projects constitute new flourishing markets. Corporations (and their 'demand' linked to globalization as mentioned above) are gaining increasing influence in the fields of scientific and technical research as well as in education and training (Carton, 1996).

The way in which international development co-operation responds to these phenomena will depend on each agency's analysis of both the general trends of globalization and its consequences on the ground.

If we adopt Vinokur's analysis of globalization referred to earlier, a number of consequences may be identified for governments in the South. Traditionally, these governments constituted the main partners of international co-operation, but they are now confronted with social and political reactions resulting from the excesses and paradoxes of processes of unification inherent to globalization (exclusion and poverty). Reduced public expenditure for human and social development (education, health and others) has also given rise to alternative systems of production and dissemination of knowledge, not only through new, but also through traditional

channels (linked to religion, ethnic groups, neighbourhood, age groups, networks and so forth). Although these channels were still being resisted one decade ago by governments keen to reinforce their legitimacy through state educational policies, traditional practices in the provision of education services are now being widely encouraged. Indeed, the same governments have now 'accepted' the rehabilitation of what they once considered to be 'non-rational factors such as religion, culture, tradition . . . as success components of modern economies in a global economy' (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 103). This acceptance by weakened states is dictated by the need to promote national competitiveness on a globalized investment market. Both reduced public expenditure in education and the social and financial self-management of education expenditure by individuals and groups within civil society contribute to this competitiveness.

International aid agencies consequently face a dilemma. It is true that the shift of emphasis since the beginning of the 1980s towards non-governmental organizations and civil society (often in opposition to the state) is now bearing fruit. However, the significance of this shift may be ambiguous. Civil society can be a source of innovation at the national level, but it can also be an instrument of integration into an increasingly competitive market dictated by transnational economic agents rather than by political and national representatives of a particular society. This rather pessimistic vision is not shared by Heyneman:

It is true that educational assistance by OECD-DAC countries declined between 1989 and 1994 (France 13 per cent, the United Kingdom 16 per cent, Canada 56 per cent) and the case has not been sufficiently compelling for the public to reconsider their many other important priorities and problems in order to allocate more international assistance to education (the voting public in donor countries tends to be older, hence more concerned with issues of pensions . . .). As traditional aid declines, what will happen to education? Much of the international co-operation in education has developed under the auspices of international aid. There is reason to believe that the level of international co-operation in the field of education is on the increase in spite of the fact that the level of international aid is on the decline (Heyneman, 1997, p. 522).

This last point is at the heart of the debate which cuts across bilateral and multilateral 'aid' agencies:

The decline in foreign assistance for education can be considered a tragedy. On the other hand, the elevation of education in domestic debate and the increase in trade of professional ideas on educational reform might be considered a benefit. The adjustment to these new functions on the part of development assistance agencies and international agencies familiar with the traditional rationales for education investment will be different, however, in the end, their successful adjustment will be good for the field of education (Heyneman, 1997, pp. 524–5).

This partly explains why contradictory positions and practices often develop both within the headquarters of aid agencies and within their decentralized management structures. Within the same agency they may lead to the simultaneous existence of the following perspectives:

- A resignation to the trend of reduced public development aid in general and in the education sector more particularly. The progressive privatization of international development co-operation has transformed agencies into administrative and financial intermediaries. As a result, trends towards deprofessionalization and absence of staff renewal are becoming commonplace.
- A perception of educational innovations within civil society as instruments of ‘resistance’, not so much against an inefficient state but against increased poverty and exclusion associated with globalization.
- A growing interest among aid agencies in training. As the training sector is seen as representing the link between educational and productive concerns, articulations between sectoral policies in technical and vocational education and training, on the one hand, and the promotion of small and micro-enterprises, on the other, is now on agency agendas (Working Group . . . , 1997*a, b*). These new interests reflect concerns for coherence between political, technical and technological investment policies by countries which are decreasingly seen as donors and more as partners (Forster and Stokke, 1998).

International co-operation is not solely a market product

These different strategies reflect conflicting visions and concerns about the relations among the three poles of any socio-economic system, whatever the period or the place concerned. If we accept the idea that these three

poles are: the public sector (state, co-ordination, institutional property), the capitalist sector (capital, competition, individual property) and the social sector (work, co-operation, community property), then any international co-operation in the field of education can be initiated and implemented by and among any of these three poles from the local to the global level. The very fact that Heyneman still refers to an international scope indicates that his perspectives are not yet fully clear. The emerging new global socio-economic system underlines the fact that the concept of nation is beginning to be either undermined or disconnected from the public sector/state dimension. Co-operation can, therefore, develop between the three previously mentioned poles and be of many different types according to the specific combination. For example, in the field of education,

As long as there is a scarcity of public resource to finance public education demands, there will be an international trade for educational reforms. The demand can, therefore, be expected . . . to continue the process for a shift away from the traditional lines of international relations. . . . These traditional linkages may be replaced gradually with interests of partners or competitors in trade, and with interest in similar educational issues, such as higher education diversity, experience with voucher and loan systems and the like (Heyneman, 1997, p. 524).

This vision of 'international' co-operation – which is different from one of relations between nations – illustrates the challenge and fears stemming from the globalization process. Is it possible to accept that education objectives, strategies and policies are influenced by the capitalist sector as well as by the public and social sectors, and that their respective actors cooperate in different ways according to their specific views? Are we, by contrast, faced – as Vinokur (1996) expresses it – with a dominant, unique perspective strongly marked by the financial and technological dimension of a sole market-oriented globalization process? If the answer is in favour of the latter, it should be no surprise that humanitarian aid and assistance become the main answer to crisis situations. Where this unrequested duty of aid/assistance is the main answer to crisis, its rationale seems to be grounded more on moral values than on a socio-economic and political analysis.

Questions concerning the role of education in the sudden development of the crisis and its possible future prevention of new such situations

are just beginning to be posed (Tawil, 1997). It will be difficult to provide the answers as they relate to ideological, political and religious dimensions of education which cannot be traded and standardized. They will be affected by as yet unforeseen consequences of the globalization process which can, in turn, be expected to strongly influence the future of co-operation in the field of education.

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