

PUBLIC POLICY TARGETING AND EDUCATIONAL REFORMS: ISSUES, TRENDS AND OPTIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the relationship between politics and education in developing nations in light of the question: under what conditions is educational reform successful? The objective is to create a framework for investigating policies based on outcomes rather than objectives or needs. The authority recommends that, in addition to technical and cultural criteria for policy, educational researches should consider three political dimensions of policy-decision making, implementation, and effects of a given policy on a system's capacity for dealing with inevitable spin-off problems. Review of existing research on the politics of education in developing nations indicates that most researchers have concentrated on a historical-descriptive style of analysis, overemphasised data such as cross-national surveys, and underemphasised data studies, analytical approaches, and research on questions such as the success or failure of particular policies. The conclusion is that major sins of co-operative educational public policy studies currently should be to discern regularities in the conditions that shape outcomes, examine specific policies with regard to their effects on society, and analyse conditions and settings, which encourage or discourage particular types of education policy relationships.

INTRODUCTION

"The Public Administration community has long acknowledged that the...administrative state is fundamentally shaped by politics. Despite the obstinate legacy of the politics-administrative dichotomy, scholars emphasize that effective public management, and successful reform, are essentially political..." Frederickson and Johnston (1999:281).

Developmental African governments and other policy makers in the area of policy-making and the issues of the developmental state often emphasise the strategic role of public policy targeting as a vehicle for implementing national educational agendas and institutional reforms. Within the confines of this quagmire, most states in continental Africa often seem to experience several policy mal-alignments in the implementation stage of strategic educational reforms (Kuye, 2007).

The article argues that uneven development, complex patterns of social, and class differentiation, coupled with the need to ensure fiscal budgetary discipline and the infusion of an effective review mechanism among other factors create the conundrum of fear and disarray. In the same vein, it is interesting to note that the process of reform in itself is an excellent agenda. However, within the constraints of global recession and the infusion of new demands on a modernised form of structural adjustment, most African states fall behind in the implementation of educational programmes. The question then arises as to whether the adoption of targeting as a methodological approach to address development in a functional approach. For instance, policy targeting has often been emphasized in poverty alleviation programmes or educational reform projects. Not only is targeting widely recognised as a means for implementing policies, but also for ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and infrastructure initiatives. However, recent experiences with programme implementation through targeting in some African countries, suggest that targeting tends to be a highly sensitive issue and a potential source of tensions particularly in multi-ethnic, multi-layered public bureaucracies or relatively diverse societies. Therefore, it is argued that separate targeting policies are required as apart of a comprehensive national development strategy toward educational reform in most developing or emerging countries (Kuye, 2004).

The assumption that an African country tends to be characterized by uneven development among its component units, regions or groups of people implies that such areas or groups which were considered *backward* should be targeted when implementing programmes and projects aimed at ensuring equitable development of the country. More often than not, targeting results in controversies and criticisms from other sections or groups who see targeting as a means of concentrating national resources in the development of specific areas while neglecting others. Thus targeting could be a major source of political and/or ethnic tension in countries where ethnic and tribal sentiments often play major roles in issues concerning development and resource allocation.

The above are simple instances of targeting and its likely implications, and a suggestion that targeting any type of development programmes and aids is not completely crisis-free. Nevertheless, some critical issues surrounding programme/policy implementation in which targeting is an instrument are often neglected during the design of such programmes or policies. Often there is no consideration for country-specific issues, such as a society's sensitivity to ethnicity or cultural diversity. The issues of democracy and good governance have a bearing on the rule of law, the equality of all of its citizens, the sustenance of the principles of equality of opportunity for all and the adherence to the principles of

the separation of powers, while at the same time, maintaining the independence of the judiciary (Mukamunana & Kuye, 2005).

Moreover, the inability to separate policy design from its implementation often results in additional or associated costs (financial, social, political, and economic) in development programmes during implementation. These are in the form of increased administrative costs to national governments and, attempts to ensure that a given program reaches its intended or targeted beneficiaries may also raise transaction costs, it may also raise the cost of providing incentives to the economy, and may create an overall reduction in political support. In most cases, such costs are often overlooked during the programme and project planning stages, thereby posing severe constraints on a smooth implementation process. In view of these and other reasons, the need for policy targeting as a strategy cannot be overemphasized. In support of the principles of good governance, the policy approach of targeting can be used to address the mechanisms to be put in place when adopting standards, as this will require specific and clear codes of behaviour between member states (Kuye & Kakumba, 2008).

It is within this confine that the objective of this article is to provide insights into the question of how policy targeting can be designed in order to make educational program implementation meet the requirements of more effectiveness, minimum costs, and optimal public administrative and political support. Attempts to provide answers to this question are critical in a policy-making framework. The article takes a panoramic view at these major policy requirements for targeting educational development programmes and projects in the context of continental Africa (Kuye & Kakumba, 2008).

Uneven development within a given African country can be said to have resulted in links between economic sectors, technology, and social forms of production, in a spatial as well as social division of labour. The development of capitalism thus reshaped pre-existing social divisions, as well as creating new ones. Uneven development thus resulted in social differentiation. It has resulted in social relations of systemic inequality along lines of class, gender, and divisions (e.g. tribal and ethnic), and the process through which these social divisions and relations are created. Therefore, programmes aimed at reversing this trend, tend to emphasize targeting areas or groups, which have been left out of development.

The crisis of the *developmental state* in African countries poses a critical problem. The central role of the state in public administration, development planning and economic management has had a strong resonance in Africa. It was seen as a principal means of managing the economy, directing it away from the interests of financing capital and markets toward meeting national needs and aspirations. The crisis of the developmental state that emanated from this central role of the state in the 1970s and early 1980s in Africa and even recently, in the 90s in South Africa, has resulted in locational and social differentiation in a considerable number of countries. The crisis of the developmental state has had far-reaching implications, which resulted from the regular and persistent deprivation being experienced in many African countries. There had been fallen export volumes and values, squeezed import capacity, and problems of food supply, which

together escalated external borrowing, followed by a decline in their credit worthiness (Nzewi & Kuye, 2007).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A TOOL FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND PLANNING

Inescapably, politics pervades education. So long as education is a valued good in society requiring allocating of scarce collective resources, educational policy will be influenced by political groups, processes, and institutions. By definition, the political area is characterised by conflict and negotiation rather than by strictly rational planning of means to goals. As a result, content of policy cannot be independent of the characteristics of policy-making and policy-makers. To evaluate policy involves analyzing politics.

A political perspective on education has enjoyed growing popularity in the past decade. Investigators have concentrated considerable effort in the past in the United States, with Europe not far behind as a favourite site for research. Indeed, given population growth, limited financial resources, and disillusionment with the effects of past policies, one could argue that the greatest need for analysis of the relationship of policy-making to policy outcomes is precisely in developing nations (Kuye & Kakumba, 2008).

ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS: A RATIONAL CONSIDERATION

A policy is considered rational, if the difference between the values it achieves and the values it sacrifices is positive and greater than any other policy alternative (Dye, 1998:25). The rational model stresses that, for any sound policy, value preferences and policy alternatives must be identified and their respective possible consequences be analysed in order to come up with the most efficient and effective policy. In principle the model requires that policy output should represent *maximum social gain*, emphasizing that, a government chooses policies that result into gains to society that exceed costs by the greatest margin (Dye, 1998:24).

Students of the politics of comparative education in developing nations have thrived on a historical descriptive style of analysis, narrating and explaining what happened in a particular situation. Such analysis is a solid step on which to build an understanding of relationships among actors, processes, structures and outcomes. The aim of comparative educational policy studies ought to be to discern regularities in the conditions that shape policy outputs and the effects of these policies on society. This conditional analysis would attempt to describe settings in which certain events do or do not occur, without necessarily claiming to have found causation. Many of the political variables used in quantitative analysis are either insensitive to national variations or meaningless to a developmental state notion. To say that parliamentary regimes do not all produce the same educational policy is neither interesting nor surprising. But this should not be taken to mean that politics is therefore irrelevant. In South Africa, there is a need for parallel

case studies that will yield a clearer understanding of the political process and its effects on educational reforms.

REFORM VERSUS RATIONALITY

Kukumba & Kuye (2006:807) argue that rationality as a theoretical concept plays a very important role in policy and decision-making. It was elucidated that the rational model of policy making and analysis is raised out of the Rational-Comprehensive Theory that underlies multiple bases, which involve reasoned choices that can lead to different courses of action to solve public problems. Dunn (1994:274) suggests that *Technical rationality* must be based on reasoned choices that involve the comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to promote *effective* solutions for public problems. On considering the issues of *economic rationality*, he articulated that such thinking should be based on reasoned choices that involve the comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to promote *efficient* solutions for public problems. Choices involve comparison of alternatives in terms of their total costs and benefits to the society. On the notion of legal rationality, he proposes that they must be based on reasoned choices that involve comparison of alternatives according to their *legal conformity* to established rules and precedents. On *social rationality*, choices should be made on comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to maintain or improve valued social institutions. While examining the principles, which govern *substantive rationality*, he notes that there should be reasoned choices, which are characterized by the comparison of multiple forms of rationalities in order to make the most appropriate choices under given circumstances.

In investigating the notion of rationality as it affects government decision making, Umar and Kuye (2006:807-821) contends that for policies to be rational and comprehensive at the same time, and in support of the views of Lindblom (1968), they have to meet several conditions of decision making (Dunn, 1994:275). In principle, an individual or collective decision maker must identify all policy problems on which there is consensus among all alternative stakeholders.

Studying reform-planned change in education that is ostensibly directed at specified goals require the impetus and conditionalities of a developmental state mindset to achieve the required educational outcomes. Reforms have special interest to a policy analyst because they represent attempts to re-evaluate the past, redefine problems or reallocate costs and benefits for future initiatives. The concept of reform therefore must be distinguished from regular, repeated decisions, such as elaboration of annual budgets for ongoing operations. The administrative routine does impinge on the development of reforms, but a focus on reform brings political processes and constraints into a sharper and defined space. This article posits that although a reform may be conceived as producing bold results, it should be carried out incrementally. This notion of incrementalism is not necessarily a judgement on the success of the changes but an attestation to the fact that an incremental strategy may be required for adoption of changes through the systems in a developmental context.

SUCCESS

Institutions are relevant to the policy process. Policies are seen as institutional outputs since most public policies are authoritatively conceived, formulated, implemented and enforced by government institutions (Dye, 1998:15). Whereas the traditional public administration tried to demarcate the role of the government bureaucracy as only responsible for implementing policies made by the legislature and other political organs, these public officials in government agencies make vital policy inputs. For example, *firstly*, when there are legislative gaps during implementation or resource inadequacies public officials in such government institutions make policy adjustments and choices that suit situational imperatives. *Secondly*, the role of public institutions involves the task of balancing the statutory/legislative intent and executive priorities before putting policies into practice. In addressing this complex quagmire, the "intellectual discussion is good up to a point, but within the comparative contexts, it should be able to stretch the analytical capability of the academic and the practitioner communities well beyond their limits..." (Kuye, 2005:535).

Some may argue that the notion of *success* and *failure* are loaded terms, but this does not mean that they ought to be avoided by serious scholars and academics. Consideration of success requires sorting out different meanings of the term, each of which may direct research to a different set of problems.

To achieve success in a developmental state, these *four* propositions are in order:

- Successful for which target population? What are the competing, conflicting, and coexisting interests that impinge on educational policy and how they enter the policy-making process?
 - If all the variables were constant, would a reform produce anticipated results? Is such a reform culturally appropriate?
 - Is there a synergy between policy implementation and the actual policy itself?
 - Does the change produce other significant outcomes and how are these dealt with?
- A reform ought to be judged not only in isolation, but also by the degree to which the system can cope with its broader consequences. In most developing countries, some patterns emerge as to whether a given policy improves or hampers a system's capacity to deal with inevitable spin-off problems.

SUCCESSFUL FOR WHOM?

From a practitioner's point of view, outcomes of policy cannot be divorced from their origins from the analyst's perspective, the two should not be separated, but often are. Knowing who set the agenda, who proposed a policy, how it was contested, and whom the program seems to threaten often helps explain both content of a policy and variations in commitment of resources and energy to its achievements.

Graham Allison (1971) argued quite persuasively that one's analytic perspective influences his/her conclusions. By defining, an analytic approach defines relevant and irrelevant categories of evidence. A rational policy-making perspective assumes decision-

making to be essentially a process of setting and ranking goals, perceiving and defining problems, searching for and evaluating a proliferation of technical institutes, for example, one would look for probable goals- accommodation of students, manpower needs – rather than clash between ministries. This approach is not wrong but it is incomplete. A working hypothesis of rationality helps isolate issues and information that play a role in the evolution of policy. Moreover this perspective does not require sensitive or inside information, so it is often a good place to start when evidence is sparse. Nonetheless, its assumption limits its explanatory power, and the model fits some situation much more accurately than others. If one used this approach exclusively in studying policy-making, many outcomes would seem puzzling, poorly informed, or irrational.

One powerful limitation on the rational model described by Allison (1971) is its assumption that actors share a commonest of goals. This unity of goals ought to be investigated, not assumed. As a first step one needs to discover who participates. Obviously, different actors bring different perception of problems and their own self-interests to bear on policy-making, and they have different resources to back their stands. As a result, a policy may not be the best choice to reach predetermined goals, but, in the absence of agreed-upon goals, the compromise among interests rather than a solution.

This second sense of demand requires a series of steps not available equally to everyone in society. Expressing vague feelings of need as concrete wants, and transmission of them to proper authorities require availability of and familiarity with channels, power resources, access, and attention from policy-makers. Groups not just in their interests, but in their abilities to tap this process, to be accepted by others or to force other to pay attention. They enjoy varying levels of success in making their values prevail and even in getting their problems onto the political agenda. What we describe as the decision making process is often a combination of decision making (rational or incremental), and procedure making. In bargaining, certain groups have already established *de facto* rights to participate. But there are other relationships among interested actors: grating groups token participation; freezing out others wants; claiming that one has anticipated others needs. Stated in general terms, not only do different actors allocate amounts or points of success which also affect outcome? We may find in a few perhaps by keeping others out, but elsewhere their plans are ignored and abandoned by others.

The study of policy-making in the illustrations above is essential to understanding what conditions can lead to success and failure. In particular, some options prevail not because they are best in an objective sense, but because they are in the perceived interests of some participants or because they represent a compromise among competing interests. Other options are excluded because they conflict with the interests of some groups or because certain groups do not have the process for reasons unrelated to the policy under study. These biases in policy-making go far beyond problems of limited information or limited information-processing capacity. One would expect that cross-national variations in the level at which educational policy-making occurs, in officially sanctioned means of participation, or in the nature of relevant political resources would affect who participates and how their participation is valued. As a second step, one should evaluate how variation in participation affects policy choices.

APPROPRIATE STRATEGY

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind in evaluating performance of a given policy is whether the solution fits the problem. This question has both technical and cultural levels. *First*, is the theory connecting problem, solution, and effect accurate? Does it take into account the delicate structure within which a program must operate? For example, there is some question whether elementary school pupils and teachers will pay much attention to new manual work exercises unless that material is tested on secondary school entrance exams. *Second*, are these theoretical links valid in the specific cultural conditions? Alternatively, are there features built into the program to encourage sensitivity to cultural differences and allow sufficient flexibility for adoptions to these differences? Cultural gaps arise not only when reforms are imported from abroad, but even when urban reforms applied to rural areas, or when a program is transferred from one region to another. The complexity of this cultural problem forms the richness and complexity of cultural as well as from uncertainties and confusion during periods of social transformation or decay. In developing nations, analysis, and anticipated differences are made more difficult by an overlay of foreign culture on indigenous social institutions. As a result, a school system may resemble European systems but operate in subtly different ways. In addition to those political constraints, links between problem, programme, and product, are complicated by hidden agendas in policy-making. The stated goals of a programme may not always be the most important ones for some policy-makers. The tenets of this article are not referring to unintended consequences, but to desired aims, which for one reason or another are not expressed for public consumption.

In the case of a developmental state, a university-level reform is needed to channel more students into practical fields and this may be justified by reference to human resource capital needs as this may ameliorate the puzzle over distortions in achievement of public goals without exploring unpublished intentions (Keith, 2004).

IMPLEMENTATION

To study implementation (service delivery) is to study the relationship among the parts of a policy and how instruments are framed, communicated and the degree of autonomy individual actors enjoy in the interpreting, ignoring, or expanding their instructions. Actual policy, after all, is more or less than a set of regulations and guidelines issued by policy-making bodies. It depends on actions by individuals located in the corridors of the influential and privileged citizens. Compliance and co-operation by all these groups do not necessarily follow automatically from the issuance of regulations (Naidoo & Kuye, 2005).

Avoiding interventional distortion where a person thinks he/she is acting as directed, but is not often seen to be a purely administrative problem. Discussion on avoiding distortion recommends lucid formulation of goals and clear communication of instructions throughout the administration along with provision of sufficient resources. But

the problem is more than one of clear information though that is often a serious concern. Unintentional distortion in a matter of both politics and administration.

Implementation problems may be examined from another perspective as well: the availability of alternatives for individuals and groups to achieve their aims outside the structure of government services. To approach this topic one should return to the idea that implementation of policy depends not only on the rules and procedures laid down by policy-makers, but also on the correct acts of individual administrators within the system and of thousands of citizens acting independently. Much of governing is directed at achieving their co-operation at the lowest cost possible. A lack of monopoly may offer its own benefits for the time being. In a developmental state concept, the state must be seen to act as a political and administrative safety valve. Finally, monopoly may make non-compliance more difficult without eliminating the problem altogether; indeed, reaction to an unpopular policy may then have to be expressed as general hospitality. Still the apparent attractiveness of control helps explain governmental attempts to monopolise or regulate sectors of activity, even if those efforts are sporadic and not fully effective. Attempts to improve implementation and compliance may be expressed in terms of not only better information and communications, but also structurally – imposing greater control despite the costs of doing so.

Analysis of implementation is inextricably tied to analysis of policy making in two ways. *First*, the way in which policy is made may create or avert certain characteristic problems in implementation. *Second*, even when policy is set, it is rarely settled. Problems in implementation may lead to consideration for plans and renegotiation of other stakeholder interests.

DEALING WITH CONCEQUENCES

Even the best-conceived public policy must be one that is politically negotiated. It is probably inevitable that any given social policy will generate new problems, even as it succeeds in solving old issues. In that case, it would be wise to anticipate and monitor far-reaching consequences on any programme. However, it would be foolish for experts to eliminate them. Instead, it is necessary to turn attention to how a given policy affects government's or other groups capacity to deal with spin-off problems. Such capacity may be evaluated by examining a given policy's effect on group alignments, on perceptions, on resources, and on information-collecting capacity.

A policy may influence the alignment of groups by creating vested interests with a stake in the continuation of a programme even when that programme's rationale has disappeared. On a more abstract level, policies may have broad positive or negative effects on citizen support for the government in general and their willingness to comply with directives issued in the name of the nation. In addition, a policy may block or facilitate new perceptions of existing or evolving problems. A programme that works in 75% of the cases may block perceptions of internal weaknesses, which account for failure in the other 25%. Resolution of a problem, however, may make a different problem look like a new priority and focus attention in that direction.

The above articulation has indicated that decision-making and policy analysis largely political processes, tuned by the nature and structure of the existing political environment. The role of the different actors in the policy process has been examined while taking into consideration that politics overtakes the conventional *rational* model in decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Each of the foregoing dimensions of success encompasses a complex set of problems. What this article has attempted to do is to demonstrate how different level of success impinges on one another. It has further been argued consistently that to evaluate conditions under which policy reforms succeed or fail, involves looking beyond the observation that a given proposal can be subverted by political forces or administrative sabotage under the canopy of policy incompatibility with some vague attestations to political reality. It also reiterated that in the developmental state notion of educational reform, an interventionist approach must be followed to address reform issues and at the same time ought to broaden the definition of success to include a consideration of a programme's impact on capacity to deal with outcomes.

In summation, the logic of strategic policy reforms in a developmental state must be interventionist in context and must be seen as a means to achieving the required goals of the state.

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