Education in the Maldives: 1900–2015

POLICIES, THEMES AND OUTCOMES

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Table of Contents

Preface

This book grew from the doctoral study of the first author, which analysed key education policy reforms in the Maldives over the period 1900–2015, using an extended 'policy trajectory' framework to examine three policy contexts: policy influences, policy text production and policy practices/effects. For ease of analysis, the study period of 115 years was divided into five eras each named after a significant policy actor. To address the dearth of literature on policy analysis for long spans of time, and educaton policy studies on the Maldives, this book has undergone extensive revisions from the original study. For stand–alone purposes, a new chapter has been added, and easily-obtained general literature has been heavily condensed.

A hybrid theoretical framework comprising critical theory and poststructuralism was used in the to enable a comprehensive approach to policy analysis spanning global (macro) to local (micro) levels. These theoretical lenses underpin the concept of a 'policy trajectory' which forms the structural framework for the book, guiding research questions and presentation of findings. While policy 'influences', 'texts' and 'practices' are considered separately, their interconnected nature is also acknowledged. The book answers four primary research questions. The first three

research questions were framed around these three contexts. For the purpose of this study, the 'global' level included influences from particular international sources, the 'national' level encompassed the Maldivian government, and the 'local' level mainly comprised individual powerful policy actors. Through the fourth research question the book also sought to reveal the implications of the findings for the development of education policies in the Maldives for the future, especially with accelerating globalisation.

Data collection involved a combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Almost all available policy documents of the study period were perused and 35 key policy actors were interviewed. Of the five eras into which the 115-year study period was divided, there were no living persons from Era 1 (1900–1934). Thus, only documents were used as data sources for this era. For the remaining four eras, both interviews and documents were used as data sources. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 participants between May 2014 and December 2016. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to determine participants who included past and present government policy elite members, institutional leaders, school administrators and teachers.

The findings revealed several key themes in relation to the three contexts of the policy trajectory spanning 115 years of Maldivian education history. The dominant themes arising from the context of influences included international policy borrowing, global education trends, catering for national development needs, equity and access, resource shortages, relevance of education to the Maldives and available employment, and the role of particular powerful individual policy actors. The less prominent themes relating to influences were cultural considerations, impact on behaviour and learning and impact on schools and teachers. Quality concerns had both influenced the development of some education policies and raised them. The policy text production was characterised by the major themes: catering for national development needs, the role of particular powerful individual policy actors, equity and access, resource shortages, relevance of

education to the Maldives and available employment, cultural considerations and governance. The themes relating to policy practices/effects over the study period were equity and access, catering for the national development needs, quality, resource shortages, governance, power concentration, and finally relevance of education to the Maldives and available employment. Based on these findings sixteen theoretical propositions were synthesised from the study of the evolution of education policy processes in the Maldives over five eras from 1900 to 2015.

Several implications of the findings for the development of education policies in the Maldives were deduced from the study. The first of these implications deals with social efficiency, democratic equality, educational access, quality and resources. Other implications pertain to the need to contextualize overseas policies as well as improving regulatory mechanisms for quality and assessment. In addition, it was recommended that the Maldives revitalize both the technical and vocational education and training systems and higher education by prioritizing quality and labour market relevance of programmes. The book concludes by outlining a number of implications for future research and also providing an update on recent education policy developments in the Maldives between the conclusion of data collection in 2016 and the book publication.

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For our parents

1

Introduction

Aim and Context

Since the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century, there had been a wide range of education policies implemented in the Maldives, each with the explicit aim of reforming the previous one for its shortcomings or addressing prevailing educational imperatives. Some of these policies resulted in unintended outcomes necessitating review or change of the policies. Yet, there had not been a comprehensive analysis of these policies for their successes, unintended outcomes and actual consequences. The aim of this study was to analyse key education policy reforms in the Maldives over the time period 1900–2015, using an extended 'policy trajectory' framework comprising policy influences, policy text production and policy practices/effects. Through this task, recurring themes in the production, enactment and longer term impacts of education policies on key aspects of Maldivian education were unravelled.

This study primarily examined the evolution of Maldivian education policies and it is, therefore, important to establish a brief outline of the social context as well as the education policyscape of the country during the study period of 115 years. The year 1900 was chosen as the the start of the study period because in 1903 King Shamsudhdheen ascended the throne for the second time

and the earliest available written record of education began from 1910. Thus, it was decided to set the study from the beginning of the twentieth century to include these two significant events. For ease of analysis, the period is divided into five eras roughly corresponding to the active periods of significant powerful policy actors.

Public government-funded education in the Maldives started in 1927 with the takeover of a private tuition class by the government (Salaahudhdheen, 2015). Soon after this takeover, in 1932, provision of education was mandated by the first constitution (Amin, 1947). However, educational opportunities remained limited and restricted to the elite and the aristocrats until the mid-1940s when actions were taken to expand and strengthen the education system. These actions resulted in opportunities for females and island (rural) students to access public education (Official Records, n.d.). The educational opportunities available from abroad at government expense were also expanded in the 1940s.

In 1961, English medium instruction was introduced to the two government schools of Male', the capital. Soon after, there was a gradual cessation of government sponsored scholarships to study overseas. Vocational education was expanded and institutionalized in the 1970s which resulted in the establishment of two post-secondary institutions.

The period from 1978 to 2008 witnessed the expansion of primary education, especially in rural islands, reaching almost all the school-age children. In addition, teacher training and secondary education were also expanded. However, schooling became a government-funded enterprise for the whole nation only in 2005. Prior to that year, most schools were run by communities in which they were located, receiving little financial and other assistance from the government. Following the first multi-party election in 2008, several education policy reforms were brought, of which decentralization and privatization were most notable. However, after three years, another change

in government led to a reversal of the most significant reforms leading to increased authoritarianism in institutional governance in general, including education.

Key Concepts and Themes

There are some terms and concepts in education discourse such as 'policy' and 'globalisation' which are central to this book, but carry different meanings and connotations in normal discourse. Some of the terms and concepts relevant to the book are introduced here but they are comprehensively discussed in Chapter 3 (the literature review).

The term 'policy' encompasses a range of broad conceptual issues precluding a simple definition. From the literature, four broad dimensions to the definition of 'policy' can be identified: policy as text, policy as value-laden actions, policy as process, and policy as discursive (Ball, 1990; Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the definitions 'policy as process' and 'policy as discursive' were highlighted as these approaches underpin the conceptual framework used for the study. The range of definitions for the term 'policy' itself highlights its contested nature.

Literature on education policy has identified dominant ideologies that influence the discourses of education policy at different periods (Ball, 1990; Bell & Stevenson, 2006). The most influential are often political ideologies. The major ideology dictating contemporary education policy direction in the first two decades of the 21st century is neo-liberalism associated with globalisation (Rizvi, 2017).

By the late decades of the 20th century the phenomenon of globalisation was increasingly steering the direction of education policy discourses. Globalisation can be explained as the interconnectedness across the world, or compression of space

and time experienced as a result of advances in communication and transport (Bottery, 2006; Fischman & Gvirtz, 2001). The main ideology driving these discourses was that of neo-liberalism. Supporters of this philosophy promote free trade in an international market. Various authors have described economic globalisation, cultural globalisation and political globalisation as three of its main dimensions (Bottery, 2006; Morrow & Torres, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). One of the widely used terms in relation to globalisation is 'global knowledge economy'. This concept implies that education can be treated as a commodity that can be exported for a high-value return (Ball, 2008; Peters, 2012; Roberts, 2009).

The incorporation of globalisation and neo-liberal ideology into education policy discourses resulted in redefining the purpose of education as preparing global citizens who can compete in the global knowledge economy (Fischman & Gvirtz, 2001; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). To achieve the 'new' purpose of education, a universal set of education policy themes that go beyond nation states were enacted, resulting in the creation of a 'global education policy field' where nation states were subjected to dramatic effects (Hameed-ur-Rehman & Sewani, 2013).

Ascendance of neoliberal ideology had redefined the role of nation states in education. The degree of control the nation state had over education diminished giving rise to decentralisation (Welch, 2013). In addition, the state had been reduced to just a market player which tries to compete in an international market (Welch, 2013). These changes gave rise to privatisation, corporatisation and commercialization of education, along with greater accountability demands (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Welch, 2013).

Advances that characterize globalisation had trickled into teacher education policies and had resulted in reforms and tensions (Loomis, Rodriguez, & Tillman, 2008). The quality of teaching has become an important aspect of 21st century learning and is measured by means of international testing such as the

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). A common factor observed from high achieving countries taking PISA, such as Finland and Singapore, is the extensive investment the countries have made in making teaching a strong profession (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012).

However, in the second decade of the 21st century, scholars and commentators have noted that there is a rise in authoritarianism and nationalism on a global scale, including in the USA (Chacko & Jayasuriya, 2017; Linden, 2017). The effect of these changes and the tension between 'globalists' and 'nationalists' in education policy are continuing to play out in different ways.

According to Yates and Grummet (2011) education policy and curriculum are very closely linked. One of the major goals of the contemporary school curriculum is to promote the intellectual development of young people and to prepare them to contribute to a fast changing global knowledge economy (Yates & Young, 2010). Common trends aligning with the neo-liberal emphasis on markets, choice and accountability are seen in the curriculum policy of many countries (Lundahl, Arreman, Lundström, & Rönnberg, 2010; Mangez, 2010; Yates & Collins, 2010). One such trend is the move towards an outcomes-based approach to assessment and a diminished role for subject-based content (Yates & Young, 2010). Though, many countries gave schools relative autonomy in curriculum determination in the 1970s, a move towards national curriculum standardization was observed in the latter part of the 20th century (OECD, 2014).

Education policy research is characterised by recurring concerns that are sometimes prominent and at other times inconsequential. Three main educational concerns germane to this study are economic utility and human capital which foreground the need for 'quality' in education, citizenship and social justice, and marketization. Advocates of economic utility and human

capital discourses argue that the more a nation state invests in developing the skills and knowledge of the citizens the better are its chances of national competitiveness (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Supporters of citizenship and social justice discourses maintain that education plays a role in eliminating societal inequalities and dealing with the sources of inequalities to ensure social justice (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Williamson, 2012). Those subscribing to free market theories claim that market forces increase the efficiency and standards of schools, making them more responsive and attractive to parents and students (Zhang, 2012). The three major sets of discourses have their pros and cons which are explored in Chapter 3.

Research Design and Research Questions

This section is a brief explanation of the research design employed in this study, which is further elaborated in Chapter 5 of the book. The first part describes an overview of the theoretical paradigms and the concept of 'policy trajectory'. In the second part the research questions are outlined, derived from the concept of the policy trajectory.

Theoretical Framework

The evolution of education policy processes in the Maldives from 1900 to 2015 was analysed using a 'policy trajectory' approach, which itself has been modified over time (Ball, 1994; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Vidovich, 2007, 2013). Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of policy trajectory approaches, the study drew on the two theoretical paradigms of critical theory and post–structuralism (Ball, 1994; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Vidovich, 2007, 2013).

A major milestone in policy analysis studies ensued from the redefinition of the term 'policy' by Stephen Ball in the 1990s

as "both text and action, words and deeds" (Ball, 1994, p. 10). This definition gave rise to the view that policy is not a top-down linear process, but rather a whole process that incorporates the initial formation of policy and the behaviour that follows from it (Vidovich, 2007). Ball's (1994) approach portrayed the study of policy as a 'messy process' from which the practitioners cannot be excluded. Ball also brought in more post-structuralist perspectives to critical policy analysis.

The way power is perceived by critical theorists and post-structuralists is different. While critical theorists see power as centralized and the policy elite as having the control to promote their values through policies to drive policy in the directions they want, post-structuralists see power as decentralized (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004). For post-structuralists power can circulate at different levels and can be either positive or negative (Vidovich, 2013). Though critical theory has a broader scope when analyzing macro-level and meso-level policy processes, the ideas put forward by the post-structuralists are believed to be more applicable to a micro-level analysis (Vidovich, 2013). Therefore, a hybrid theoretical approach as reflected in the policy trajectory framework, was chosen for this study to analyze both macro level constraints and micro level agency to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the complex policy processes involved. A hybrid approach incorporates both critical and post-structural lenses.

In their seminal work on the policy trajectory, Ball and colleagues proposed three contexts: the context of influence, the context of policy text production, and the context of practices/effect (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992). Later, two more contexts, namely the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy, were added to the policy trajectory (Ball, 1994, 2006; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Vidovich, 2007, 2013). In this study, the primary emphasis was on the first three policy contexts–influence, policy text production and practices/effects–although the final two contexts were incorporated as long-term policy outcomes discussed in Chapter 12.

When applying the policy trajectory approach to policy analysis, the relative emphasis of critical theory and post-structuralism varies at different points. While critical theory is mainly used to identify the broader patterns of power operating at the macro level, the post-structuralists' view is used to identify the different interpretations and enactments at the micro-level often within individual institutions (Vidovich, 2007, 2013). In recent years, analysis at the micro-level has become more important as politicians have started focusing on the outcomes of policies, and evidence is required by all parties to see what really works (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011;Vidovich, 2013).

As noted earlier, the 115-year study period was divided into five eras each of which roughly corresponded to the active time of a particular powerful policy actor, except for Era 5 which had no single significant policy actor. The data collection for Era 1 was based on extant documents, whilst both interview and document data were collected for the other eras. The main focal point of this study was on the 'national level' that comprised the Maldivian government and other non-governmental groups within the Maldives involved in education policy production. There was a need to delimit the scope as the study spanned 115 years. Thus the 'local' or institutional level, such as individual schools or universities were not considered in-depth for any era, unless policies directly concerned an individual institution. However, particular individual policy actors were considered within what is labelled as the 'local' level of the policy trajectory.

Research Questions

This study sought to investigate the following research questions:

1. How have global national and local influences affected education policy development in the Maldives between 1990 and 2015?

2. What were the features of the key policy texts in the evolution of education policy in the Maldives (1900–2015), and how were the policy texts produced?

3. What were the practices/effects stemming from each of the major education policy developments in the Maldives (1900–2015)?

4. What are the implications of the findings for the development of education policies in the Maldives for the future, especially with accelerating globalisation?

Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative approach was used to study the evolution of education policy processes in the Maldives over the extended period of 115 years in this study. Throughout the study, issues of researcher positionality were considered and measures were taken to limit biases (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Data collection was conducted between May 2014 and December 2016. Interviews were conducted with 35 participants comprising policy actors of different eras including past and present government elite policy members, institutional leaders and teachers.

Data was analysed using the five-phased cycle of data analysis described by Yin (2011). The findings are reported in Chapters 6 to 10, with one chapter for each era. The themes arising from findings are discussed in the light of literature to generate sixteen theoretical propositions in Chapter 11 and the implications of the findings are highlighted in Chapter 12.

Significance and Original Contribution of this Research

This study is significant at national level for the Maldives because in no extant document that was available has there been a systematic analysis of the post–1900 Maldivian education policyscape. The task is made all the more critical and timely because many of

the policy actors of the past century are at an advanced age and opportunities for data gathering available at the time of the study would soon expire. Furthermore, this study makes an original contribution to the field of globalised education policy analysis, with a case study of a small island developing nation in the manner discussed below.

First, the research will bring into light the distinctive educational values, systems and histories of the Maldives contributing new knowledge on Maldivian history, culture and tradition. Based on the reasons for successes, failures and consequences of Maldivian educational policies, one of the intentions of the researcher is to explore the policy prospects for the present and future. According to McCulloch (1997), people tend to use experiences from history when they make decisions regarding present and future. Hence, it is believed that if a particular idea or approach has been tried before, even in different contexts and circumstances, past results can act as an empirical evidence base for on-going policy refinement and development.

Second, the study of the evolution of the Maldives education policyscape in the past century explicates the many factors that have engendered the complex contemporary education system of the Maldives. Hence, this study makes a significant and original contribution to scholarship specifically in the area of education policy processes in the Maldives and possibly in other small island states.

Third, the study is significant because of the international dimension of this research in that the global/international influences on the policies and their practices/effects are examined. Although the study is based in the Maldivian context, similar studies conducted in other countries have shown that close parallels can exist in the way countries react to prevailing 'global' conditions, depending on their development stage (Bottery, 2000; Phillips, 2003). With accelerating globalisation in the past forty years, education policies across nations are becoming more similar in

their aims and goals, although there is increasing recognition that how a state reacts to global pressures is context-specific (Bottery, 2000; Braun et al., 2011). Policy processes of states are constantly subject to local and outside pressures. Global–local dynamics in education policy processes are complex and require investigation (Vidovich, 2013). Studies of this nature will help bring into light the complex web of contestations and negotiations that occur from global to local levels of policy processes. It is anticipated that this study will enrich the literature on evolution of education in developing countries, especially small island states.

Finally, the study will contribute to methodologies used in policy analysis. In particular, the combination of historical and contemporary education policy analysis will make an original contribution because of the study's unusually long study period.

Structure of the Book

This book contains 12 chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter, Chapter 2, outlines the context of the research essential to unravel and understand the education policy trajectory. The chapter also discusses the education policyscape of the United Kingdom and the United States of America—two countries that have had a major impact on education systems of many others. The education systems of India and Sri Lanka that have had a notable impact on the education system of the Maldives are also outlined. These four education systems are explicated so that the evolution of contemporary education system of the Maldives in the 20th and 21st centuries may be better understood.

Chapter 3 examines the key concepts of policy, ideologies shaping education policy, globalisation, discourses shaping education policy and key concepts in education policy. The concepts include quality, equity and access, new forms of governance in education, quality teachers and curricular reforms.

Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical frameworks used to analyse the education policy processes of the Maldives from 1900 to 2015. Here the importance of theory to understand the research and the role of conceptual frameworks for guiding the research are discussed. Critical theory and post-structuralism which form the foundations of the policy trajectory approach used in this study are also examined. For each theory, the basic assumptions are discussed followed by implications for education policy research, and then the relevant critiques. The final section of the chapter explicates the 'policy trajectory' approach and the more contemporary 'policy network' approach in greater detail.

Chapter 5 outlines a discussion of the methods used in this study. The chapter begins with a description of qualitative research design. The first section also discusses researcher positionality in qualitative research. The second part of this chapter presents the four research questions that guided the study. The third section of the chapter outlines the methods of data collection (interviews and documents), sampling techniques and participant coding. The subsequent section explicates the approach to data analysis which is followed by a discussion of ethical considerations.

Chapters 6 to 10 present the findings of the study, answering the first three research questions for each era. Chapter 6 reports the findings from the Salaahudhdheen Era (1900–1934) and Chapter 7 reports the findings from the Amin Era (1935–1953). Chapter 8 reports the findings from the Nasir Era (1954–1978), followed by the findings of the Maumoon Era (1978–2008) in Chapter 9, and then the Post-Maumoon Era (2009–2015) in Chapter 10.

Chapter 11 presents the 'bigger picture' comprising common and contrasting themes, insights and perspectives from the study of education policy processes in the Maldives across the whole policy trajectory over the study period 1900–2015. The chapter compares and contrasts the influences, policy texts and practices/effects across each of the five eras, identifies overall trends/patterns, and finally discusses the findings about influences,

policy texts and practices over the 115-year period in relation to the literature. Additionally, 16 theoretical propositions generated from the three policy contexts (influences, policy texts and practices) are presented. Chapter 11 also outlines the reflections on the theoretical framework used for the study.

Chapter 12 concludes the book. In the first section of the chapter, the fourth research question is answered by pointing to potential longer term effects of evolving policies and discussing the implications of the findings for the development of Maldivian education policies for the future. In addition, the chapter identifies a number of implications for further research arising from the considerations of limitations of the study. The final section of the chapter outlines the major education policy developments, both global and national, that had occurred since the end of data collection in 2016. The section underscores the increasing role of supranational bodies on nation states and global education trends.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, gives the essential background necessary to understand the study context.

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