



## **Under what conditions,if at all, Can policies be transferred between countries?: Ethiopia's education policies in context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Policy transfer is a process that could incorporate borrowing of ideas, knowledge, ideologies and the alike. Cognizant of this, the essay tries to assess the education policies which have been transferred to Ethiopia by two different regimes over time that include the socialist/military regime and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. In so doing, the policy transfer framework that has been adapted is employed as a lens in the analysis of the documents reviewed. Thus, the essay revealed that political ideology, which is preferred by the government of each regimes and a direct and an indirect influence of international organizations are the main driving factors for the policy transfer. Consequently, it is suggested that to seriously consider the various contexts such as the established institutions, historical trajectories and the overall socio-economic situations have vital significances to increase the success of policy transfer.

### **1. Introduction**

Often times, it has been noticed that policy makers within different systems of government are so intended to find solution to the problems they have identified including economic or social problems. In such instances, as a possible way out they usually employ policy transfer that may incorporate borrowing of ideas, knowledge, ideologies and the alike. In this regard, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) indicated that the international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the European Union are also playing their own part in the process of policy transfer across the world.

As has been defined by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), policy transfer can be understood as "a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place"(p.344). Taking this into consideration, the usual assumption about policies is that if it works out in one country, it will also succeed in another country. For instance, Dolowitz and

Marsh (2000) outlined that; Policy Management Groups were established in many African countries without seriously considering their relevance, just because a recommendation has been given by a certain consultancy firm to adopt it.

But, I argue that for a policy transfer to be a success story; to consider the different contexts such as the established institutions, historical trajectories and the overall socio-economic situations is very essential. Otherwise, its success is attained hardly. In connection to this, Rose cited in Rose (1993) pointed out that; Laws, existing human capital, and finance are some of the important variables that are required to realize public programs.

Bell and Stevenson (2006) stated that; since the education policy has a greater implication on the activities of various sectors of governments, policy transfer in the education sector has become one of the focuses of attention of the governments of many countries across the globe. Therefore, this essay tries to address the abovementioned argument by taking the education policies of Ethiopia that are transferred from different directions at different periods of time and by two different regimes.

Ethiopia, which is a country in the Horn region of Africa, is one of the oldest nations in the globe and the oldest independent country in Africa. Therefore, Education is not a recent phenomenon to the country. But, until the beginning of the 20th century, education was highly attached to churches and mosques (Kiros, 1990). Consequently, the main purpose of education was to prepare individuals for religious and associated duties and responsibilities. And, these schools have provided the schooling to children of the nobility and to the sons of the ordinary people. However, as time advances, the situation has changed and the country has experienced the so called 'secular' or 'modern' type of education (Mekuria, 2009).

This modern education has become well organized and institutionalized during the last three systems of political governance, each distinguished by its education policy. The first one was during the Imperial regime which had been put in place soon after the second world war until 1974; the second was the military regime that lasted until 1991 (Negash, 2006). The third is the one which is implemented by the current ruling party, which is the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front or EPRDF regime that has renamed as prosperity party since November 2020, in power after 1994 until the time of writing this essay on June 2021. Therefore, this essay is looking into the education policy transfer that has been implemented by the last two regimes namely the socialist and the EPRDF regimes. This case for the study is chosen because of the fact that the two regimes were in favor of different political ideologies, which have their own implication in the policies introduced to the country including the education policy. In addition, it would help assess the past and present policies accordingly.

This said, the essay addresses the following questions; what triggered policy makers to engage in the policy transfer process? Who were involved in the policy transfer process? In addition, what factors limit or make possible the policy transfer?

To deal with the above questions, the essay is arranged into three sections. Following the introduction, it firstly describes the concepts and explanations of policy transfer. Section two will then discuss the education policies of Ethiopia in light of empirical and theoretical evidence. Finally, some relevant conclusions will be highlighted.

## **2. Concepts and explanations of policy transfer process**

For Bell and Stevenson (2006) the conceptual issues that are explained under the umbrella term policy is too broad to make a single definition. Of course, it is obvious that defining the meaning of policy is crucial to discuss about policy transfer process and its use.

Hence, as per the definition given by ILRI (1995) policy is “A definite course of action selected (by government, institution, group or individual) from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and, usually, to determine present and future decisions” (p.5). Likewise, for Bell and Stevenson (2006); policy is “all about the power to determine what gets done, or not done.” (p. 23). This has a greater political implication, so that its content could be interpreted in several manners. Further, Rizvi and Lingard (2009) defined policy as “things that can in principle be achieved, to matters over which authority can be exercised” (p.4). In addition, as has been stated by Stephen Ball (1994), “Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Cited in Rizvi and Lingard, p. 5). Moreover, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) defined it as “broader statements of intention and which generally denote the direction policy-makers wish to take” (p. 12).

In short, policy can be summarized as a broad plan of action that can serve as a general guideline for policy makers wanted to achieve. Bearing this in mind, therefore; Viennet and Pont (2017) have noted that education policy can be perceived as the actions taken by governments in relation with various educational activities, wherein a greater emphasis has been given to the different mechanisms being employed to put this into effect.

Whereas, policy transfer is “a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place”(Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, p.344). As a consequence, it can take the following forms: copying, which is a sort of transferring the policy fully; emulation, it is a kind of transferring the overall idea behind the policy or program; combinations, it incorporates blends of diverse policies; and inspiration, a situation where in the policy in a different authority

has become a reason for policy change though the final result does not bring what has been intended primarily (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000).

### 3. A Brief Analysis of the Education Policies transferred to Ethiopia

In this section, it is tried to employ empirical evidence that help analyze the educational policies transferred to Ethiopia by the two different regimes. In so doing, the policy transfer framework pointed out by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), which is adapted as shown in the table below, is used.

Table-1: A Policy Transfer Frame work

<i>Why trans-fer?</i>	<i>Who is in-volved in the trans-fer?</i>	<i>What is transferred?</i>	<i>From where?</i>	<i>Degree of transfer</i>	<i>Constraints on trans-fer</i>
Mixtures: bounded rationality (voluntary) and coercion by political parties	Civil servants, institutions, ideologies and experts	Policies (content)	Cross-national(global states)	Emulation	Past policies, ideology/cultural proximity, structural/institutional , economic and language

Source: Adapted from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000)

#### 3.1.Highlighting the education policy transfer in the socialist era

The political system that has been existed in Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991 declared a republic which was ruled by a socialist workers party. In this regard, Yeneayehu (2011) and Negash (2006) claimed that; the military regime was a pro-socialist that had been highly supported by the former United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and Eastern European allies. As a result of this, the socialist regime had promised to eradicate poverty and improve the economy of the country. In so doing, education was taken as the major tool. Consequently, the education policy that was put in place by the previous imperial regime, which was labeled as elite focused and academic, has been dismissed. In addition, every policy including the education was supposed to be adapted from pro-socialist ideals point of view. In line with this, Negash (2006) noted that the main focus of Socialist education in the country was to incorporate

the fundamentals of Marxism at all levels of the education system wherein; scientific socialism was perceived as a panacea for all.

However, I argue that while the policy transfer was conducted, it ignored some of the important elements that needed to be taken in to account. For example, when we see the socio-economic situation of the people who have been living in Ethiopia, majority of them are agrarian and those involved in the school system including the students are coming from such a family, who had no clue with the essence of the new ideology that were introduced. As a result, for such members of society; it wouldn't have been that easy to take the idea for granted. Put it differently, like in many agrarian or traditional societies, a good number of the Ethiopian people are highly committed to their traditions, values, norms and beliefs; nevertheless, the new ideology which had been brought by the socialist regime was completely out of joint with what they were familiar with.

To substantiate the abovementioned, Negash (2006) stated that; despite the socialist regime had emphasized on inculcating the new ideology in the school system, as time advances there was a tendency of dissatisfaction in the content of the quality of education within the people. Similarly, Clapham (1990) noted that “a fairly good education for a relatively small number of children had under the socialist regime been transformed into quite a poor education for a much larger number of children” (quoted in Poluha, 2004, p: 182). In addition, Negash (2006) is dubious about the regime's success whether any of the goals had been realized along the line. Hence, I argue that missing the relevance of some of the important elements that include the socio- cultural, economic and historical trajectories of the people could be among the reasons why the policy transfer didn't meet the intended outcomes by the government, which is improving the economy and the livelihood of the people. In this connection, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) pointed out that policy transfer can be perceived as a success story when the goals, which are set by the government or key actors, are achieved. In line with my argument, Negash (1996) confirmed that; while policy particularly contents of curriculum have been adapted, the history, culture, and needs of the country should be considered seriously. This is why, Negash (2006) has also stated that “For the great majority of the Ethiopian population socialism is associated with the spreading of the equality of poverty” (p: 22).

Therefore, bearing the abovementioned points in mind, in what follows the policy transfer framework, which is indicated in table-1, is employed to analyze the education policy transfer that was held during the socialist regime.

When we try to figure out the reason why the policy transfer had taken place, it can be said that both voluntary elements and bounded rationality are attached to it. This can be justified by the fact that the socialist regime had chosen the ideology among the existing alternatives of the time period by itself. As a

result, the regime was able to get support from the socialist allies such as USSR and East European countries. Likewise, it can be argued that to a certain extent the policy transfer had bounded rationality in it. For instance, despite the socialist regime in Ethiopia had opted to be a friend with the socialist ally countries in its own wills voluntarily, the rationality could be bounded for the sake of ideological similarity. Thus, I argue that the education policy transfer, which was taking place during the military regime, had given priority for ideology irrespective of other important variables such as socio-economic situation and historical trajectories of the country. As a consequence, it had impacted the education system of the country in that order too.

Also, when we see the different parties that were involved in the policy transfer, experts in the ministry of education of Ethiopia and experts of the ally socialist countries were the ones who are mainly engaged in inculcating the socialist political ideology into the contents of the education system. Therefore, in the light of the policy transfer framework in which this study is employing; it can be claimed that institutions, ideologies and experts had a fundamental role in the policy transfer.

Further, as has clearly indicated in the above summary, the major focus of the policy transfer was in the policy contents especially to inculcate the fundamentals of Marxism at all levels of the education system. This suggests arguing while the policy transfer had been in place, regardless of the socio-cultural situation of the country wherein majority of the people have religious and traditional mindset, it was merely emphasizing on ideology.

Likewise, as the policy contents were adapted from USSR and Eastern Europe socialist allies, it can be claimed that the policy transfer had a cross-national feature in which the key actors were governmental states from different directions.

Furthermore, this case has shown that there was an incorporation of the socialist ideology in the contents of the education system at large. Therefore, it can be said that the degree of transfer was more of emulation. In this regard, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) have outlined that; emulation is referring to a sort of transferring the overall idea behind the policy or program.

Finally, as far as the constraints on policy transfer is concerned, the cultural difference between the source countries of the policy and the receiving country that takes the transferred ideology for granted, past policies by the previous regime in the country which was totally different from the ideas propagated by the socialist regime, the less developed economy of the country that thwarts to allocate the required resources for implementing the policy transfer, language as a barrier to understand the concepts about the ideology and the differences in institutional structures could be mentioned some among the many. Hence, I argue that for a policy transfer to be a success story; to seriously consider the different contexts

such as the established institutions, historical trajectories and the overall socio-economic situations of the country is very essential.

### **3.2. Highlighting the education policy transfer in the EPRDF era**

When the EPRDF regime came into power in 1991, which was after an end of a civil war with the socialist regime, claimed that the education system is suffering from various challenges. In this regard, for example; it was indicated that the overall enrolment rate was one of the lowest at the global level in general and even lower than half of the average for countries in the Sub-Saharan regions of Africa (World Bank, 2013).

Following the above mentioned justifications, the regime has brought its own education policy, which has been started to be operational since 1994. As a result, education has been given a crucial role in order to address the multifaceted problems of the country including the socio-economic. And, the policy is put in place as a key solution to redress it (Ministry of Education, 2008). In this connection, Yeneayehu (2011) pointed out that; the EPRDF regime has substituted the socialist ideology by the so called 'Revolutionary democracy' with pro-west economic structure. Besides, the international organizations such as the World Bank and the international monetary fund have played a significant role as agents of the education policy transfer to the aid recipient countries including Ethiopia (Garomssa, 2016 and Yeneayehu, 2011).

As a result, the political governance in Ethiopia has incorporated its own goals in the education policy and among which, Gebremariam (2002) and Negash (1996) outlined that; the main inspiring features of the education policy are emphasis on civic education, focus on skill formation, valuing indigenous culture and the need for environmental protection, and orientation to development. Further, as has been recommended in the 2000 United Nations Declarations on the Millennium development goals, the government has included universal primary education as part of its policy priorities. In this regard, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggested that due to globalization, national governments do set their educational priorities as they have found it crucial and put their educational policies in that order too.

Furthermore, as has been stated by Negash (1996), regional languages have got recognition to become medium of instruction and facilitate the teaching learning process at primary education level. In fact, this is a result of the political ideology being adhered by the EPRDF regime, which is ethnic based federalism. In this connection, Derash (2013) has attested that more than 30 languages are employed as languages of instruction or taught as subjects at primary schools in the country (Cited in UNICEF, 2016). As a consequence, schools are supposed to impart the priorities of the ethnic group via civic education lessons, which has a political socialization element in it (Asayehegn, 2018). This suggests arguing the policy transfer in the current regime has also employed an inculcation of its own political ideology.

According to World Bank (2005), one of the successes of the education policy, which has been implemented in the EPRDF regime, is that school enrollment has increased at all levels significantly. In addition, UNICEF (2016) stated that supporting students to use their mother tongue through national policy is one of the most progressive achievements of the country in the continent. However, Ambatchew (2010) challenges the argument by saying that “it is one of the most advanced language policies on paper, but with questionable practices on the ground” (quoted in UNICEF, 2016, p.201). This could suggest us claiming while such a policy transfer is put in place; the meager allocation of resources, which has something to do with the socio-economic situation of the country, has its own impact in realizing it. Based on what has been pointed out above, in the light of the policy transfer framework indicated in table-1, below it is tried to analyze the important elements of the policy which has been transferred by the current ruling EPRDF regime.

To begin with, if we pay attention to the reason why policy transfer has been taking place during this period of time, it can be claimed that the transfer is more inclined towards coercion. This is so due to the fact that the common practices of the international organizations such as the World Bank and the international monetary fund is to put various pre-conditions to aid recipient countries like Ethiopia. As a result, they would be able to transfer their ideals either directly or indirectly. In line with this, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) asserted that the influence of international organizations to disseminate ideas and information that have policy significance is increasing.

In addition, to a certain extent the policy transfer has voluntary element in it. For example, among the alternatives that are found in the international political arena, the regime has preferred a political governance system that relies on ethnic based federalism though it partially linked to the civil rights which are encouraged by those international organizations as well. As a result, it has managed to promote and implement vernacular language based primary education in different regions of the country.

Likewise, with regard to the different parties that were involved in the policy transfer, we can mention the institutions such as ministry of education of Ethiopia, which has engaged its experts, pro-west ideologies that are partially favored by the regime and systematically propagated by supranational institutions including the World Bank and the international monetary fund.

Furthermore, the essential elements that have been transferred in the policy are contents, which are promoted by the international organizations. For example, in the education policy; civic education is inculcated as one of the contents of the school curriculum at all levels of the education system. This has mainly focused on respecting human rights, federalism and the ideals of pro-west democracy. Besides, a policy goal like the declaration to achieve universal primary education has been part of the policy which is incorporated in the system.



What is more, as the agents of transfer were mainly the international organizations such as the World Bank and the international monetary fund, it can be said that the whereabouts of the transfer was cross-national. Moreover, as the policy transfer has involved various elements, which are identified by the different parties and put in place in its own way, it implies that the degree of transfer tended to combinations or mixtures.

Finally, it can be claimed that some of the factors that are identified as constraints in the policy transfer framework has also apply to the education policy transfer under the EPRDF regime. These are: past policies, which has favored different political ideologies with that of the current regime, has created a gap to be filled, the allocation of limited resources to the intended objectives, for example; to materialize the usage of vernacular language as medium of instructions to over thirty local languages has required a huge amount of human and financial capital, language was also a barrier to transfer some of the concepts into local contexts, and due to differences in institutional structures realizing universal primary education was achieved at the expense of quality of education; to name but a few. Therefore, I argue that for a policy transfer to be a success story; to consider the different contexts such as the established institutions, historical trajectories and the overall socio-economic situations is fundamental.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

This essay has focused on the education policies which have been transferred to Ethiopia by the socialist and EPRDF regimes. And, it depicts that policy transfer is a process wherein; various reasons can be pointed out for the borrowing of ideas, knowledge, ideologies, and the alike so to happen.

Cognizant of the above, the essay came to realize that the main driving force for the policy transfer during the socialist regime was similarity in political ideology, which is between the source countries of the policy and the receiving one to inculcate it in the education sector at large. To substantiate this, Negash (2006) affirms that the curriculum was highly influenced by ideological texts. This is also corroborated by the fact that USSR and Eastern European socialist allies have played significant roles. Whereas, the policy transfer which has been implemented by the EPRDF regime is highly driven by the direct or indirect influence of international organizations and to a certain extent by accepted pro-west political ideals of the regime. In this regard, the World Bank, the international monetary fund and the united nation declaration have impacted significantly.

In both cases, it can be asserted that ideology has got a great impact in the policy transfer though the degree of transfer is differing in its own way. Further, we have seen that the socio-economic situations and historical trajectories have also played their own part in determining the policy transfer being as constraints.

To sum, it can be concluded that while policy transfer has been made, to seriously consider the different contexts such as the established institutions, historical trajectories, and the overall socio-economic situations have vital significance to increase its success.

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