

Local Ownership of Education Policies at the Crossroads between the Active Participation and the Passive Compliance to International Goals

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, perceptions about the role of local population in policy development process have deeply changed. This change is related to the idea promoted by international institutions that the development actions cannot succeed without a strong local ownership and a broad approach that guarantee active participation of local actors. This article argue that even though this idea brought change of opinions on the behavior expected from local population, institutional reforms related to this change involve consultative and informative participation rather than partnership participation that was initially expected. The article explores this issue with regard to socioeconomic mechanisms adopted at local level. It reveals challenges facing the local ownership of educational policies by critically analysis the transformation of policy instruments through which local education actors express their expectations and aspirations.

Keywords: policy instruments, education management, participation process, education policy, partnership process, ownership process, international goals, globalization in education.

1. Introduction

Globalization has led to transposition of educational practices from one political system to another or from one region to another, regardless of geographic distance or cultural barriers (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). This practice borrowing process (Phillips and Oshs, 2004) produces a remarkable effect on local educational innovations and changes. Thus, in many countries, educational change has become cut and paste, a one size fits all. Educational reforms are being implemented within different school systems and they often look alike. Applied in contexts other than those in which they are initially developed, these reforms are interpreted as a result of submission to a dominant model. Hence, educational policy development process is considered as compliance to doctrines promoted by international financial institutions in order to acquire institutional legitimacy and related resources. Different researchers reported on the mechanisms through which globalized doctrines are adopted in education systems in sub-Saharan Africa (Charlier & Pierrard, 2001; Kamuzinzi, 2009; Rugengande, 2010). However, these studies are limited to the international or the national level. They do not allow the understanding of the economic and the sociological mechanisms that are implemented as soon as the models are made available to the beneficiaries of education actions at the grassroots level.

The pressing problem is related to local ownership of educational policies that reflect the international doctrines. The partnership approach promoted by international financial institutions requires local actors to take responsibility for development actions. Meanwhile, the extreme dependence predisposes them to passively accept donors' requirements. In such context, the question of policy instruments that promote local participation and local ownership arises. In dealing with this issue, a coordination tool called "partnership process" has been mobilized to ensure active participation of local population and to facilitate local ownership of educational activities. Nevertheless, despite the mobilization of this tool, diversity is still observed within the community of international financial institutions, within the group of government officials and within the civil society. Each group disposes its own objectives, its aspirations and its agenda.

This article aims to analyze how the practices promoted by international organizations shape the networks created between donors, civil society and local administrators through policy instruments mobilized in education sector. It explores the confrontation between the international benchmarks, the local governance and the local practices. The issue raised highlights the logic of local participation and local ownership. It focuses on the mechanisms implemented for the application of the partnership process in Rwanda education sector. It examines the policy instruments by which heterogeneous actors, pursuing different objectives and aspirations, combine their efforts to develop educational strategies. The partnership process recommends local ownership as a key to success of educational strategies (World Bank, 2002). It requires a collaborative educational management (Caillods and al, 1989) which involves equal consideration of all educational stakeholders in the decision-making process. However, putting it into practice seems to be a complicated and difficult task. It raises the issues of harmonization, coordination and ownership of initiatives brought by different actors that operate in the education systems of countries that dependent on international aid.

The article focuses particularly on the case of Rwandan education system. The choice of this country

was motivated by its unusual situation. It is one of four African countries (together with Guinea, Mali and Zambia) whose education systems are the most dependent on the official development assistance (ODA) (UNESCO, 2011a; UNESCO, 2011b). Meanwhile, it is also – together with Botswana and Ethiopia - among the African countries that relatively confront the influence of international donors (Whitfield, 2009; Whitfield et al, 2010). Thus, this article assumes that in Rwanda, the process of development of educational policies is still aligned with the doctrines promoted by the international financial institutions and reflected by the policy instruments mobilized within the education sector. In parallel, the article assumes that Rwandan education policies depend on strategic reactions of local actors toward these policy instruments. This paradoxical situation leads to three questions: What happens to these policy instruments as soon as they are made available to their users at the local level? How do these instruments shape the behavior of local educational stakeholders? How do they facilitate the process of local participation and local ownership?

Thus, the objectives of this article include the following: (1) analyze the way in which the globalized doctrines promoted by the international financial institutions transform the policy instruments mobilized in the Rwanda education system; (2) Examine the way in which the normative and prescriptive characteristics attributed to those instruments shape the local participation and local ownership of educational policies developed in Rwandan education sector. To achieve these objectives, this article examines how operate the policy instruments mobilized within the Rwandan education sector. It analyzes their role in educational policies development process. It also analyzes the way in which these instruments reflect the globalized doctrines promoted by international financial institutions and relayed by local governments. Specifically, it analyzes how the international political doctrines and targets influence the local interpretation of educational actions.

The research was based on two methods of data collection used in the social sciences: the analysis of official documents and the analysis of interviews conducted with different education actors. The documentary corpus consists of over a hundred official documents related to strategies applied in the Rwandan education sector from 1994 to 2014, the reports of scientific studies conducted in Rwanda education sector, different official reports related to Rwanda education system and different articles published in national or international journals. In addition, interviews were conducted with 89 educational stakeholders involved in the education sector (donors, local authorities, local educational authorities, representatives churches involved in education, etc.). The interviews were conducted in Rwanda within two different periods, from March to August 2013 and from December 2013 to February 2014.

The research was conducted through the diachronic approach. It traced the emergence and the evolution over time for each policy instrument mobilized in Rwandan education sector, in order to seize its influence on the education reforms undertaken since 1994. Thus, the collection and the analysis of data were based on the following dimensions: the emergence of policy instrument; its evolution over time; the type of actors involved at every level of the instrument evolution and the role they played; the key dates that characterize the emergence and evolution of each policy instrument; replaced or integrated practices during the evolution of each instrument; the connection between each instrument transformation and the socio-economic-political context that prevailed during that transformation, types of changes brought to the network of educational stakeholders through the transformation of each public policy instrument.

2. Policy instruments, demarcation of perspectives

This article analyzes the participation and ownership issues through the policy instruments approach (Hood, 1983; Lascoumes and LeGalès, 2004). The issue of policy instruments was raised since 1950s. In Anglo-Saxons countries, the merit of a first breakthrough on policy instruments goes to Dahl and Lindblom (1953). Other authors followed and presented different perspectives on policy instruments (Kirschen et al, 1964; Doern, 1981; Hood, 1983; Linden & Peters, 1989; Vendung, 1998 ; Bemelmans-Videc et al, 1998; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). However, these perspectives considered policy instruments as simple technical components of public policies, neutral, without any other values except being peripheral and marginal components of public policies (Lascoumes, 2007: 1). Their interest was reduced to the success and the effectiveness of their implementation that makes public policies operational (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004).

A new perspective of policy instruments was recently brought by French authors, Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès (Lascoumes et Le Galès, 2004; Lascoumes et Le Galès, 2012). In their sociological approach on policy instruments, they stated that policy instruments have an axial value. Through their own attributes and through the effects they produce, they shape public policies. They also influence the collective representations and the behaviors of actors involved in public policies. They often produce effects which were not initially expected (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004). Since then, a policy instrument is defined as « a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation» (Lascoumes, 2007 : 4). Instruments are used to conduct public policies. Thus, they serve

as intermediary link between a political decision and its transformation into effects (Schultz, 2014). In this perspective, the concept of « policy instrument » includes institutions, procedures, structures, techniques, government tools, budgets, laws, tariffs, negotiating modalities, etc. (Zittoun, 2011).

The sociological approach considers policy instruments as government tools that produce a specific representation and a specific problematization of public issues. Hence, the ownership of public actions can be analyzed «from the angle of the instruments that structure policies» (Lascoumes, 2007: 4). To apprehend the way in which collective action is built in the Rwandan education sector, this article is aligned with the sociological approach of policy instruments. It tries to understand the way policy instruments mobilized in Rwandan education system acquired their normative and prescriptive characteristics; the way they reflect the globalized models promoted by international financial institutions and the way they produce normative and prescriptive effects that allow them to shape the local participation process and the local ownership of educational policies.

3. International organizations' doctrines and education systems in sub-Saharan African countries

The institutional basis of African school systems is rooted in colonial school. However, the involvement of local African leaders in the process of development and the implementation of educational policies started after the African countries independences (1950s-1970s). At the moment, the dominant ideology was aligned with the Keynesianism approach which advocated a strong State that controls all regulatory functions. Initially, the State control produced positive effects on the management of education systems. In Africa, the newly created states were eager to develop the social sectors which had been neglected by the colonizers, particularly the education and the health sectors. Their priority was to increase the schools enrollment, especially after the Addis-Abeba conference of May 1962 that insisted on the implementation of free and universal primary education. These positive effects were hampered by the economic crisis observed all over the world during the 1980s. The financial decline that followed the economic crisis led to the interventionism of the Bretton Woods institutions in the development and the implementation of school policies. Thus, the central role of the State was seriously questioned. The involvement of international financial institutions was followed by the local governments' withdrawal. It led to the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). As a result, the Keynesianism approach was replaced by the neoliberal principles and the market economy. Unlike the Keynesianism which advocates the control for the public actions, the neoliberalism favors different practices such as the minimal State interference in business activities, the world entirely governed by the private exchanges, the privatization in all public sectors, the minimum public expenditure on social services, etc. (Azoulay, 2002 ; Nubukpo, 2013 ; Peemans, 2002).

Therefore, the withdrawal of State and its replacement by the international financial institutions goes with the implementation of privatization policy, the decentralization system and the public expenditure reduction. It had an impact on the responsibility of African States within the education system. Since then, their role was limited to the development of regulations and to the minimum coordination of education system. In addition, the major component of structural adjustment programs was the reduction of the government deficit. It implies the decrease of government spending with a direct effect on social sector expenses, particularly for health and education sectors. Consequently, during the 1980s, various educational reforms were imposed by international financial institutions in order to reduce the cost of education: the multigrade teaching, the double shift, the repetition rate reduction, the privatization of education, the priority for the education of girls, the loss of civil servant status and salary reduction for teachers, the decreased academic level of newly hired teachers, the priority for primary education funding at the expense of higher education and reducing the cost of education. Hence, the quality of education has deteriorated and the school dropout increased.

In mid 1980s, the United Nations' children's fund (UNICEF) published a report which stimulated new transformations in the managerial process within countries that depend on international aid. The report pointed out the lack of social impact of adjustment programs which was considered as one of reasons of developments actions failure (Cornia et al, 1987a, b). Later, other institutions and organizations intervened to testify, with indicators in support, of the degradation of human conditions due to lack of social dimension in the adjustment structural programs (PNUD, 1997). Since then, an aspect that highlights the social impact was integrated into structural adjustment plans. This aspect was introduced in the form of social adjustment program. Consequently, in addition to the doctrines focusing on the open economy aligned with the market and the competitiveness, other features were added such as democratization, improvement of the human rights situation, etc. In 1989, the World Bank introduced a new concept of «good governance» (World bank, 1989: 60) which brought new components into the governance system of countries that depend on international assistance. The newly introduced components include the local ownership, the local empowerment and the local accountability. Meanwhile, international financial institutions were trying to counter the increasing school dropout by an increase in financial assistance to education (Lange, 2003; Rugengande, 2010).

In order to improve the harmonization of actions and the coordination of external assistance, various initiatives were undertaken. They include the initiative of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). They

include also the sector wide approach (SWAp) which was adopted as an alternative to the project approach that seems condemned to a gradual disappearance. It is in this context that from the year 1993, the structural adjustment programs in which the role of the State was considered as "minimal" were replaced by the poverty reduction strategies (World Bank, 2002) that promote a "small State but strong" which governs along with the civil society and the market (Cling et al, 2003 ; Altinok et Lakhali, 2007). Thus, the partnership process which gives much more responsibility to local actors was reinforced. The government was no longer considered as a regulator of education activities but a facilitator of the collective action that involves different education actors.

In countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the neoliberal's principles and the market logic changed education systems through the structure adjustment programs adopted in 1980s. They came into action after the Harare conference on education had observed difficulties in African education systems due to economic crisis (UNESCO, 1982, a, b). Nevertheless, the role of local actors and the partnership process were not mentioned in the public policies that were implemented in 1980s. They appeared in 1990s after the Jomtien conference (article 7 of the Jomtien declaration on education for all) (UNESCO, 1990). They were reinforced and strengthened in 2000s after the Dakar conference on education (UNESCO, 2000). The education program adopted at Dakar advocates a tripartite partnership (civil society-donors-states) that facilitates the integration of local population in the implementation of the 'Education for All initiative (UNESCO, 2000). Since then, local participation and local ownership were included among the criteria for assessing the credibility of African education strategies (World Bank, 2002). Later, the World Bank introduced the education for all fast track initiative in order to strengthen the partnership process and the harmonization of actions in African education systems (World bank, 2004 ; World bank 2006).

4. Transformation of policy instruments mobilized in Rwandan education system

After the Rwandan independence (July 1, 1962) the management of schools in the country has been aligned with the Keynesianism approach. Regulation of education system was put under the responsibility of the State. In 1980s, unlike other African States, the Rwandan government has been very reluctant about the integration of neoliberal principles and the market economy in its governance system. It has refused to adopt the structure adjustment program until early 1990s when the adverse circumstances (recurrent climatic disturbances, diseases on food crops and pests leading to a considerable decline in food production) forced the government to negotiate the structural adjustment plans with the International monetary fund (Marysse et al, 1994). On the day of signing of agreement between the Bretton Woods institutions and the Rwandan government, a civil war started in Rwanda and hampered the implementation of planned actions. Four years later, a genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi population occurred in Rwanda.

The civil war and the genocide have completely destroyed the Rwandan education system. The reconstruction required financial, human and material resources that Rwanda government could not mobilize alone. Therefore, multiple international partners were intensively involved. Their intervention was conditioned with multiple requirements. In that way, new practices and new political doctrines such as partnership process, good governance, local ownership, local accountability, decentralization process and local empowerment, were introduced in all public administration sectors. The sector approach was adopted in education sector as a replacement for project approach in order to better harmonize and better coordinate education activities. These international requirements led to unprecedented changes in Rwanda education system. They created a new institutional configuration in which all policy instruments mobilized in education system were incorporated. Thus, these policy instruments were transformed and modified in order to fit in the new institutional configuration aligned with the political doctrines promoted by international financial institutions. Different school reforms were undertaken as a consequence of that policy instruments transformation. They were carried out within three dimensions: legislative dimension (regulatory instruments), financial planning dimension (economic instruments), and coordination dimension (informative and coordination instruments).

In legislative dimension, different regulatory instruments were mobilized. The school legislation of the 1960s to 1980s attributed to the State the entire school management responsibility. Then, there was an implicit nationalization of primary and State control of education. The government did not explicitly declare its decision of taking control of schools. However, in order to maximize its control over the education system, the school legislation provided some regulatory provisions that inhibit parents' initiatives in education. In 1980s, the intervention of the Bretton Woods institutions affected not only the educational policy guidelines but also the management of school system. Therefore, the Rwandan government was forced to withdraw and to accept non-governmental initiatives. School legislation was then amended to incorporate and facilitate private initiatives. In addition, the events that took place during the 1990s and 2000 (the civil war, the genocide against the Tutsi and the changes in the doctrines promoted by international organizations that include ownership, participation, empowerment, accountability, etc.) affected the Rwandan school legislation elaborated in 1980s. In this context, many regulatory provisions have been proven incomplete and inadequate. Thus, the Rwandan constitution was modified in mid 2003. A new educational policy was developed in 2003. New school legislation was elaborated

the same year and modified in 2012. Nevertheless, all these transformations of regulatory instruments were aligned with the recently introduced international doctrines. Different regulatory provisions were introduced into the school legislation to facilitate the new practices promoted by the neoliberal principles and the market economy such as the partnership process, the local involvement in education sector management, the privatization of education, the merit and excellence principles, the decentralized system, etc. (MINEDUC, 2001). The regulatory instruments adopted in the Rwandan education system targeted the empowerment of local stakeholders in conducting the process of defining educational priorities and actions, and the reduction of interventionism of international institutions in the process of educational policy making.

In financial planning dimension, the education sector integrated itself in the new institutional configuration through five newly created instruments: the middle term expenditure framework (World bank, 1998a); the general budget support (GBS) and the sector budget support (SBS) (ODI & Mokoro, 2009; Chiche, 2009); the long term strategy and financial framework (LTSFF) (MINEDUC, 2006) and the capitation grants delivered to public and subsidized schools. These economic instruments were mobilized in order to enable the local government to better coordinate and direct all educational strategies and educational actions. In addition, these new instruments enable the harmonization of international aid and its alignment with the locally developed strategies. The idea was to allow local government to be accountable to the public on budget management and policy outcomes.

In the school management and coordination dimension, six new policy instruments were mobilized: the education sector strategic plan (ESSP) (MINEDUC, 2003); the decentralized system (World bank 2011; OSSREA, 2006; Imaniriho, 2011); the sector wide approach (Swap) (Latham et al, 2006; Smith & Yisa, 2005); the silent partnership system (Koopman, 2006; MINEDUC, 2006a ; ODI & Mokoro, 2009); the joint education sector support (JESS) (MINEDUC, 2010); the joint review for education sector (JRES) (MINECOFIN, 2004). The aim of these coordination and informative instruments was to move from previous practices in which donors used to elaborate a project, to determine financial and material resources for its implementation and to put it into actions with a little involvement of the local government and the local population. The major components were the different forums for discussion and strategies for the local population (especially the poor) to express their aspirations and to participate actively in the process of definition, dissemination and institutionalization of educational policies. The new coordination practices put emphasis on the local participation in educational policy development process and the local ownership of education actions.

5. Transformation of Rwandan education policy instruments and the local ownership of education actions

The above paragraphs show that over the past two decades, Rwandan education policy instruments have been deeply transformed, recycled and adapted in order to reflect the political doctrines promoted by international organizations. This change aims to provide a framework which attributes to local people the autonomy and the ability to define educational policies. Normative characteristics attributed to these policy instruments are supposed to allow equally distributed power to the State, to the local population and to the international donors. Educational reforms aligned with these transformations insist on public involvement (including financial participation) in all phases of educational policy definition process. They also insist on local accountability in the implementation process of educational policies. Effort was concentrated on issues of strengthening local institutions through the decentralization process. Nevertheless, results of interviews conducted as part of this research show that change in procedures for granting and for management of international aid has not eliminated the persistent feeling that selection of education targets and priorities still depending on the agenda of international agencies. The international targets and the benchmarks set by donors weigh much in the process of definition and implementation of local educational policies.

Failure to comply with the international targets and priorities or the benchmarks, even the timing of planned actions, lead to a risk of loss of credibility of local educational strategies resulting in the loss of financial resources. Thus, local educational actors restrain themselves into a mimetic process. It consists of passive acceptance of globalized doctrines promoted by international financial institutions instead of local aspirations developed through active participation. Hence, local participation becomes a maneuver intended to ensure the legitimacy of strategic documents developed in the education sector. However, some authors consider this maneuver as local actors' strength rather than weakness (Charlier, 2007; Verhaegen and Vandamme, 2004). It allows them to secure legitimacy and resources necessary for the survival of the education system without a confrontation with international donors. Consequently, the transformation of instruments allows the creation of local participation mechanisms without necessarily providing a solution to local ownership issues. Local actors attend different meetings and different discussions on educational issues. Different studies are conducted to check on the progress of educational activities within the decentralized entities. Education reports are regularly sent from education decentralized entities to the central administration of Education. Nevertheless, local actors are still complaining that education policies are decided from above according to the benchmarks defined by the international financial institutions without effective local participation. Results from the conducted interviews

show that although the new practices provide equal chances to participate in the education discussions, local actors are not yet considered as equal partners. Different education actors expressed their concern on some educational decisions which are decided from the top level without consultation with local population.

6. Conclusion

Through the new institutional configuration aligned with the political doctrines promoted by international organizations and relayed by local governments, education policy instruments acquired normative characteristics that permit them to shape the local participation and the local ownership process. However, confronted to the country's economic dependence, these policy instruments tend to create education structures that facilitate local involvement in the local education actions without providing the local capacity to influence the related education policies. Thus, local education actors participate through different education structures (institutional ownership) without possessing the power to influence educational decisions that are made through these structures (decisional ownership). In this case, local participation becomes more consultative and informative rather than partnership.

Educational policies adopted in Rwanda reflect the international targets such as the millennium development goals, the educational for all, etc. Any local aspiration or expectation that does not align with these international targets is hardly integrated in the local education policies. The benchmarks and the evaluation criteria set by the international organizations are strictly and mechanically applied. Local actors are obliged to own the international goals and to transform them into actions according to local particularities. However, even if they are subject to a binding dimension created by the procedures for granting international aid, it is they who voluntarily decide to incorporate these criteria in their system of governance. This voluntary adoption of international benchmarks attaches the local government and the local population to the elaborated policies even if they are proven unfavorable (Charlier, 2003; Charlier, 2005). Given that the binding aspect of the benchmarks is subtly disguised and given the fact that these benchmarks are voluntarily adopted at local level, the new institutional configuration places the entire responsibility for the adopted education policies to local actors, even if they are not autonomous in the decision making process. In case the educational actions are unsuccessful, the donor is cleared because the policies related to those actions are theoretically defined by the local actors.

Finally, in order to deal with the participation and the local ownership issues, this article proposes to strengthen the practices that facilitate the development and the expression of locally developed initiatives. Hence, the article notes that the institutional ownership (participating in forums where decisions are made) is not enough if it is not accompanied and completed by the decisional ownership (capacity to influence decisions made through those forums). It stresses the importance of elaborating educational policies that fit in the reality experienced by local actors and that take into account the obstacles to educational reforms aligned with those policies. For future research directions, this article recommends a thorough study on the phenomenon of local resistance towards the policy instruments mobilized in the educational sector. How does the local population respond to school reforms brought by the transformed educational policy instruments? In addition, the article recommends a comparative study on local ownership of educational policies within the "East African Community" (EAC) which includes Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. These countries are engaged in a process of harmonizing their school systems, especially the higher education system. It is imperative to understand the way in which they are harmonizing their educational policy instruments and the mechanisms by which the local population is involved in that process.

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