

# The Role of International Organizations in Education

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## ABSTRACT

In an increasingly interconnected yet ideologically fragmented world, education emerges as a vital arena for reconciling global visions with local realities. This paper examines the critical role international organizations play in shaping global education policies, funding, and frameworks. It explores the historical evolution of international education governance, comparing key players such as UNESCO and the OECD in terms of their mandates and philosophical orientations. The study assesses how international organizations advocate for human rights-based education or alternatively promote education as a driver of economic growth. Further, the paper investigates the effectiveness of international funding, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy campaigns while highlighting systemic challenges and contextual complexities in implementing global education agendas. Through case studies of actors like Oxfam and the Global Partnership for Education, the analysis underscores the importance of context-sensitive, participatory approaches. Ultimately, the research reveals that while international organizations are powerful agents in global education, their influence must be carefully harmonized with national values and needs to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.

**Keywords:** International Organizations, Global Education Governance, UNESCO, OECD, Education Policy, Educational Development, Capacity Building.

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is experiencing a dual crisis resulting from both accelerated globalization and rising anti-globalism. As the world becomes smaller and more unified through broader connectivity, people with different local social backgrounds, beliefs, anchored in diverse identities, increasingly clash. Institutions of socialization such as education must rise to the challenge of transforming the diverse potential tensions into constructive conversations in an attempt to create harmony in a larger social context. Different local social environments in which one has been forged determine someone's world view, which is firm. This makes exposure to a different world view a traumatic experience. Denying constant exposure to a different world view, on the other hand, does injustice to the silliness of different world views. This dilemma may be aggravated if education, an institution of socialization, is nationalized. Different interpretations of the above dilemma are shared by people at nation-states of different sizes and developmental levels. In relation to education, this is reflected in advocacy for different international organizations, which propose different roles of education in world governance which fall into two broad categories: (1) education for a common humanity at the benefit of all human kinds prioritized by; (2) education for a global knowledge economy primarily for the enhancement of national productivity prioritized by the second type has narrower ethical scopes than the first type. Respectively, education as sites of intercultural understanding; social cohesion; membership, inclusion, and belonging; as a human right and a global common good are the prominent characteristics of strategies [1, 2].

### Historical Overview

International organizations have significantly influenced global knowledge and education dissemination since the 1940s, arising from the Cold War's ideological needs. Foundational bodies like the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund were created to facilitate discussions on political, economic, and cultural matters. They aimed to peacefully resolve disputes, promote economic growth, and enhance cultural and educational standards among member states. UNESCO, founded in 1945, became the leading international organization in education due to its activities and membership. The 1960s saw the rise of regional organizations alongside global bodies, spurred by decolonization and UNESCO's

advocacy for education as a right. The 1994 GATT Ministerial meeting integrated education with trade in goods and services, prompting organizations to prioritize education as a market commodity. While many international organizations view education through an economic lens, others like UNESCO focus on ensuring relevant quality education. The UNESCO Declaration on Collective Memory and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics underscores education's cultural and historical dimensions. There is an urgent need to broaden the debate on education philosophy and objectives, allowing organizations to evaluate existing standards critically. Recent developments reveal significant damage caused to national education systems by the hasty move towards a poorly considered global education framework [3, 4].

#### **Key International Organizations**

Education is essential for transferring knowledge and preserving culture across generations, fostering societal functioning, and promoting individual growth. Recognized as a human right, education aims for inclusivity and equality, emphasizing the importance of universal access to knowledge and values. International organizations play a vital role in ensuring education is constructive and humanizing from a global perspective. In the 21st century, education synchronized with national development has become a pressing global concern. The principle of "Education for All" is rooted in the idea of promoting peace and well-being and requires collaborative efforts among nations, rather than a one-sided approach from developed to developing countries. There was a call for equal attention towards education, with a focus on health and cultural well-being, highlighted during a World conference. Special emphasis was placed on improving access to lower primary education for marginalized populations. India's national educational policy reflects the realities of globalization, positioning education as key to human development. It serves as a vital tool for enhancing living standards, health, and personal fulfillment. Ultimately, education involves a socially mediated process, where knowledge and skills are imparted through various social institutions, illustrating how western models have been integrated into other educational systems [5, 6].

#### **Impact on Global Education Policies**

The two international organizations selected here for comparative analysis are the OECD and UNESCO. Both organizations are active in the field of education, and both aim to influence education policies in their member states and beyond. However, they differ in their mandates and values, leading to a complementary but divergent policy approach. Within the overall context of globalization and the rise of economic competitiveness, the OECD takes a sectoral view of education, regarding it as a means and an instrument to promote equity and economic growth. Education is treated as a "specialty" whose performance can be measured by establishing a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators. With the goal of national qualification, educational reform involves standardising testing mechanisms to engage a wider number of indicators and monitoring cross-country performance on such indicators. Educational governance is drawn into political and institutional battlefields where national control is mediated by cross-national policy transfer among schools and systems within an increasingly competitive climate. Following, this has led to a shift in discourse and practice as education becomes subjected to the benchmark imperatives of GATS and GATS-like developments in other fields. This does not mean that globalization is an uncontested space or that it will emerge or evolve in a particular direction. What this analysis nonetheless indicates that, despite the benign terms by which it was framed, the first universally progressive education policies advanced in the 1990s were highly contested and self-interested. So great are the stakes to defend, resist, accommodate, adapt to or mitigate the influence of global culture and the changed environments of local action within which policy is socially constructed that caution against reductive and simplistic accounts of developments must be exercised [7, 8].

#### **Funding and Resource Allocation**

In recent years, international organizations have made considerable investment in education to realize the expectations stated in the international declarations. This has included monetary support and various educational initiatives and programs in countries where access to education is still quite low. Nonetheless, establishing effective educational systems does not consist only of monetary donation. Rather, active involvement and enforced leadership of the recipient country's government and community are required to adapt the education system according to the local context, usages, and needs. Concerning this, even though there are notable success stories of international organizations in improving literacy in the developing world, there are also failures of imposed educational systems leading to deepening inequality and brutal opposition. Thus, even though international organizations play a constructive role in education, the downgrading of education to an expense rather than an investment by pursuing rapid outcomes or lack of support, experience, and wisdom in the audiences may lead to inferior results. Instead, a localized participatory approach with flexibility should be applied, enhancing the leadership role of the recipient country to realize a sustainable educational system. Generally, many ins and outs can affect the investment on education. Foremost is the clearly established vision of the education system and the

priorities that rely on the characteristics of the given local context. The philosophy and vision of the education systems should be set, carefully considering the local situation and culture, instead of being imposed from the outside. Next is the existence of competitive accountability. Assessment and accountability systems can provide incentives to spend education funds wisely. Otherwise, effective demands for education within the political sphere are distorted. There also needs to be comparative analyses of educational trends through international indicators and benchmarking [9, 10].

### **Capacity Building and Training**

According to the UNDP, capacity is the ability of individuals and organizations to perform functions effectively, efficiently, or sustainably. It differentiates between human and institutional capacity, asserting their interdependence. The five components of capacity are: Skilled human resources; Leadership and vision; Viable institutions; Financial and material resources; and Effective work practices. Capacity is crucial for achieving developmental goals, fostering self-reliance, and enabling sound economic choices. Inadequate capacity results in a lack of self-reliance. Human capacity encompasses the knowledge and skills that individuals must possess to contribute to development. In Nigeria and other African nations, human capacity-building primarily focuses on formal education and vocational training to develop skills. Additionally, further development should encompass non-formal education and training. Mastery of languages is essential for socializing knowledge and facilitating information exchange. Without effective methods for disseminating knowledge produced by international and regional entities, capacity-building initiatives in developing countries may be ineffective [11, 12].

### **Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns**

International organizations play a vital role in advocating for education reforms through coordinated campaigns that focus on specific issues. These campaigns mobilize actions, disseminate information, and organize global events such as action days. A key player in this effort is the Global Campaign for Education, alongside regional initiatives like the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education and the African Network Campaign on Education for All. Various social justice movements also address education issues. Some organizations engage in specific ad hoc advocacy efforts, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment. In 2015, the education community united to revitalize the international education agenda and launched a global campaign, attracting attention during the UN Summit. Advocacy campaigns are centered around substantive issues and their framing. Over time, these issues have evolved and interlinked, allowing flexibility in actions that suit different contexts. Broad definitions of issues in global education campaigns enable a diverse range of stakeholders to lead advocacy efforts [13, 14].

### **Challenges Faced by International Organizations**

Multi-country international organizations analyze educational systems in an integrative way to show why they are as they are. They recognize some of the difficulties international organizations tackle in education. They are related to: 1- Complex knowledge; 2- Highly Reviewed Policies; 3- Different Contexts; 4- Decoupling; 5- Fluid Field; 6- Awareness of Non-linearity; 7- Pre-conception of Issues; 8- Politics and Organizational Needs. The world of education is complex and multilayered, where knowledge is difficult to compile, let alone compare. There are tensions between professional and public knowledge, reasons for broadening the scope of analyses to a well-built set of proxies for long-run education. These proxies on inputs to and outcomes of education seem to reveal more persistently the underlying conditions affecting education. They seem also to respond less to review processes, which develop ways to diagnose education issues based on objective knowledge. Approach a broad set of proxies accounting for education complexities, focus less on policies and on how to implement technical fixes for narrowly isolated shortcomings. Examine lots of highly reviewed policies, mainly in the form of extensive reports that produce a wealth of emphatically researched and policy relevant knowledge widely disseminated. Countries' education systems are specific, partly because of contextual variables. This knowledge not levied by policy has made organizations careful in how to devise their comparative studies and inductive reasoning about policies to implement, accounting for local variables in advisory and counterfactual methods. Countries decide to aim differently for something better. Intended influence on reform processes often runs into unforeseen decoupling complexities of dynamic interaction between the education system and its socio-economic, but also political-ideological environment. Education scientists know the organic nature of education, which runs on rules, such as non-linearity and cycles. Syntony is a key point, but precisely the most difficult to master at single points in time if the aim is to change systems [15, 16].

### **Case Studies**

In 2015, the World Bank identified several challenges besetting global education which contributed to education shortfalls: a lack of cohesion among education organizations, an unwillingness to prioritize

education funding, diminishing hope for progress, and education targeting deemed unworthy by funders. The UN suggested that resource-oriented reforms focusing on increasing education funding to GIS and incentivizing those funds' use for education cannot yield positive change. In the latter half of the 20th century, through the basis of charity, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerged as participants in the global discussion of education. Currently, NGOs comprise numerous actors vying to form international cooperation agreements and regulations on education engagement. A select few of the most visible organizations dominate the respective fields of education and non-governmental organization participation in education designations. The case study involves Oxfam, The Global Campaign for Education, and The Global Partnership for Education. Worldwide, Oxfam is a charity and NGO that cares about obliterating poverty. Oxfam attempts to impinge on the politics of education in every country to ensure that contents of the education system are inclusive. Oxfam serves in the realm of policy and process monitoring of education globally, nationally, and locally. The Global Campaign for Education started with an alliance of NGOs to campaign for the deadline of Education for All promises at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. It occurred at the time when the newly formed NGO Service Charter afforded an alternative model of involvement for the NGO sector at the global level. Global Campaign for Education is still an influential coalition of Next Gen members and other interested actors in fulfilling the rights to education. Lastly, The Global Partnership for Education is the only global fund for education, which was formed in 2002 on the basis of the international funding governance of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The Global Partnership for Education expects that governments and international organizations free up more funds, deal privately with cross-border businesses, and stop going bankrupt [17, 18].

#### Future Directions

International organizations (IOs) play a crucial role in global education governance, coordinating efforts and providing resources for collaboration in various policy areas. These educational IOs are increasingly involved in national policy environments, influencing practices through system evaluations, recommendations for improvement, and global analyses of achievements and challenges. They significantly impact the design and dissemination of global education policies, which have evolved over time and gained legitimacy. It is essential to explore how educational IOs are reshaping understandings of education and their operational methods. However, their influence across national contexts is not uniform; the concept of 'selective' diffusion acknowledges that strategies from IOs are received differently depending on national governance and policy contexts. Varied understandings of education promoted by IOs often face challenges in national implementation due to mismatched processes. Distinct negotiations between IO recommendations and national perspectives lead to diverse interpretations of global educational ideals. In-depth case studies are necessary to better understand these dynamics, revealing disconnected outcomes and enhancing our comprehension of IO influence in the global education governance landscape [19, 20, 21].

#### CONCLUSION

International organizations have played an indispensable role in shaping global education through their policies, funding, advocacy, and technical expertise. While their influence has led to significant advancements such as increased access to education, improved international benchmarking, and the promotion of inclusive and equitable learning they also face persistent challenges. These include navigating diverse socio-political contexts, respecting national sovereignty, avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions, and addressing capacity gaps. The contrast between organizations that promote education as a common good (e.g., UNESCO) and those that emphasize its economic utility (e.g., OECD) reflects broader tensions in global governance. For international cooperation to be effective, a balance must be struck between global aspirations and local realities. Sustainable progress depends on embracing culturally sensitive, participatory approaches that empower local stakeholders while fostering international solidarity. Moving forward, it is essential to critically evaluate the roles, methods, and impacts of these organizations, ensuring that education remains a transformative tool for peace, development, and shared humanity.

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