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The economics of policy borrowing and lending: a study of late adopters

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Abstract

The article draws on interpretive frameworks from diffusion research and social network analysis to explore one particular ‘travelling reform’—outcomes-based education—that went global. The argument is made that by virtue of studying late adopters of a travelling reform, the article provides a unique perspective on the diffusion of a travelling reform. The article also explores the role of policy borrowing and lending in the diffusion of a travelling reform. The article argues that policy borrowing and lending are not just about copying and pasting, but about adapting and transforming. The article also argues that policy borrowing and lending are not just about copying and pasting, but about adapting and transforming. The article also argues that policy borrowing and lending are not just about copying and pasting, but about adapting and transforming.

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Introduction

Over the course of the last few years, the belief in outcomes as an effective quality improvement and monitoring instrument has developed into a doctrine. Having attained the rank of 'educational orthodoxy' (Smyth & Dow, [1998](#), p. 291), many policy experts feverishly promote it. They view its global diffusion as ultimate proof that this particular reform strategy is effective and accelerates change in schools. Outcomes-based education (OBE) may be seen as an example of a reform epidemic that has afflicted education systems around the globe, especially at the stage of policy formation, and to a lesser extent at the stage of policy implementation. Policy formation and implementation are vastly different processes. However, the question of whether global talk about OBE has actually led to OBE-like reforms in practice will not be discussed here, as such an inquiry would require a normative interest in establishing the features of what an outcomes-based education reform should entail. The fact remains that policy experts in a wide array of countries have discursively and, more importantly, selectively borrowed OBE.

This article focuses on the temporal dimension of policy borrowing and draws attention to the late adopters of outcomes-based educational reform. Diffusion research distinguishes between three phases of epidemics, including the slow growth, explosive and burnout phases of dissemination (Watts, [2003](#), p. 172). Late adopters of a reform join the epidemic or reform movement at the burnout stage. By the time global reforms such as OBE land in late adopter countries, they are at the same time everybody's and nobody's reform. These reforms are generally deterritorialised, making it difficult to

map the late adoption of OBE. This article examines the late adoption of OBE in the context of the late adopter countries. It explores the process of policy borrowing and implementation. For example, in the case of South Africa, there is a late adoption of OBE. Africa countries are late adopters of OBE. Education systems are the route of the transformation. Martinez.

The global diffusion of outcomes-based education



Of course, it is much easier to simplify the cross-national interactions of policy brokers or entrepreneurs of the past, than those who are still alive. Apart from anecdotal evidence concerning the significant role of international consultants (Samoff, [1999](#); Werning Rivera, [2004](#)), international organisations (Jones, [2004](#); Steiner-Khamisi, [2004](#)), ‘transnational’ networks (Rose, [1998](#)), and empirical studies (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh, [1998](#)), for years has been a lack of comparative policy studies. For example, Dolowitz and Marsh (1998) have argued that policy investigation has been a ‘black box’. Thus, there is a lack of borrowing of policy from one context to another.

Having listed some of the challenges in tracing the process of policy diffusion in a more sophisticated manner, I will now discuss factual aspects of OBE diffusion. It is possible to identify when OBE surfaced in a particular education system by determining the year in which the idea of outcomes as a quality improvement and monitoring instrument was first inscribed in legislation. A brief event history of OBE, following legislative benchmarks, is useful in outlining the late arrival of such reforms in Central Asia and continental Europe.

Slow growth stage and early adopters

New Zealand revamped its public sector in the 1980s, culminating in the State Sector Act of 1988, and Public Finance Act of 1989. Emphasising outcomes-based accountability, these two acts had important repercussions for the education sector. Meanwhile, the Thatcher government in the UK pushed for a series of neo-liberal and market-driven reforms. The 1988 Education Act for England and Wales introduced a national curriculum, standardized testing and parental choice, all signposts of a new neo-liberal era in educational reform epitomizing the language of public accountability, effectiveness and market regulation. New Zealand's OBE shared features with curriculum reforms that took place in the UK, Australia, Canada, South Africa and, for a brief period, the United States.^{[1](#)} Faced by widespread criticism in their own country, neo-liberal reformers made references to similar experiences in other countries. The Ministry of Education of New Zealand, for example, explicitly acknowledges the kinship of its reforms with the National Curriculum in England (established in 1988), the Australian and Canadian curriculum reforms, as well as South Africa's Curriculum 2005 and its P (Preparatory) level (1998).

The world of education has commonly associated New Zealand with its 1989 Education Reform Act and his/her curriculum and his/her learning content taught in model was individual student. At the end of the 1980s, student's performance reached. In practice, form. In addition, contracts, and



purports to measure the precise performance of a teacher as reflected in the learning outcomes of students, it has been propagated as a tool for quality enhancement in education, and aptly referred to as the New Contractualism or New Accountability. In many countries OBE was accompanied by the introduction of merit pay or bonuses for teachers who did well on teacher scorecards. Claims have been made by proponents that OBE, as opposed to content- or input-based curricula, monitors the quality of education more effectively, and better responds to the desire for greater public accountability in education.

Explosive growth stage

During the phase of explosive growth, from the mid-1990s to the millennium, several education systems were revamped in accordance with the OBE doctrine. Surprisingly, Switzerland, notorious for its parochialism and procrastination in complying with international agreements in general, and the adoption of international trends in school reform in particular, was on the front line promoting reform imports from New Zealand in the mid-1990s. What started out as a broad public administrative reform tailored after New Zealand's New Public Management (NPM)—introducing lean and efficient management, reducing the state apparatus, abolishing the civil-servant status of teachers, and replacing tenure of civil servants with performance-based promotion and employment—soon became the guiding principle for a major outcomes-based school reform in the Canton of Zürich, Switzerland (Steiner-Khamsi, [2002](#)). By the end of the 1990s, the radical reforms in Zürich had caught the attention of policy makers in other European countries also considering moves towards educational reforms that were more out-



Canton of Zürich, has implemented a series of incremental reforms. One particular aspect of OBE reform was the move in Switzerland to a low and unequal outcomes-based system. Implemented in 1998, this early case of OBE adoption was a supported policy that has been widely discussed. Curriculum reform in the 1990s in New Zealand (2000)

Burnout stage and late adopters

The three Central Asian cases of late adoption—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia—have already been analysed in terms of selective policy borrowing (Steiner-Khamisi et al., [2006](#)). Acknowledging that each reform consists of several elements, we examined what exactly was borrowed from OBE models, that is, which of the elements resonated in the three national settings. The OBE package extends into reforms that affect curriculum, monitoring of teachers, student assessment, teacher salary schemes, public accountability for the quality of schools and, in some countries, school choice. For example, when I studied how Mongolian teachers perceive OBE, I found only two practices attributed to it: monitoring of teachers and performance-based teacher salaries. Other aspects, such as student assessment reform, curriculum reform and public accountability, were so disliked that the interviewees wondered how these other aspects could possibly be associated with OBE (see Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe, [2006](#)). With the realisation that a reform comes across as an octopus with several arms, the question then became: which element(s) of OBE reform travelled to the different national contexts? Phrased differently, how was OBE interpreted by decision makers in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia? In the previous studies we drew from David Phillips's theory of policy attraction (Phillips, [2004](#)) by raising the research question of why a particular reform—OBE—resonated in a national context (Steiner-Khamisi et al., [2006](#); Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe, [2006](#)). At the same time, our comparative analyses enabled us to demonstrate that OBE was attractive for different reasons, as decision makers in each of the three national contexts emphasised different elements of OBE. In effect, we added a cultural spin to the theory of attraction by investigating what OBE meant to the interviewees. We used this approach to bridge the interview data with the theory of policy attraction.

In addition to the theory of policy attraction, we found it useful in analysing the policy adoption process in the ministries of education in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. In public accounts of the reform, the interviewees mentioned different parts of the OBE package. The interviewees mentioned different types of curriculum reform, such as the introduction of a national-wide curriculum, the introduction of a new curriculum, and the strike of the curriculum. The interviewees mentioned the period of the reform.



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia embraced OBE during the burnout stage of the OBE reform epidemic when other education systems had already reached the point of weariness with similar market-driven and outcomes-based reforms.

The window of opportunity

One of the key questions in public policy studies is when or under what circumstances is there a receptiveness towards new (reform) ideas (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, [1993](#); Kingdon, [2003](#); Howlett & Ramesh, [2003](#))? The frequently used term ‘policy window’ (Kingdon, [2003](#), p. 165) points to the temporal dimension of policy formation, and concerns identifying the catalytic moment for policy change. In comparative education policy research we implicitly draw from a window of opportunity concept to explain the likelihood of cross-national policy borrowing. This applies especially to the ‘externalisation thesis’ that Jürgen Schriewer ([1990](#)) has advanced, based on Niklas Luhmann’s theory of self-referential systems. Schriewer proposes studying local contexts to understand the ‘socio-logic’ (Schriewer & Martinez, [2004](#), p. 33) of externalisation. According to this theory, references to other education systems function as leverage to carry out reforms that otherwise would be contested. Schriewer and Martinez ([2004](#)) also find it indicative of the ‘socio-logic’ of a system that only specific education systems are used as external sources of authority. Which systems are used as ‘reference societies’ (Schriewer & Martinez, [2004](#), p. 42) and which are not, tells us something about the interrelations of actors within various world-systems. We find the analytical framework of Schriewer and Martinez (2004) useful in explaining an increasing number of policy borrowing cases. In growing, we believe: because the very act of borrowing, there must be a win-win context for a new idea whose whose For com it that at a particular m idea is borrowe g

national borrowing occurs in times of protracted policy conflict. There exist by now a host of comparative studies that have adopted this line of inquiry, commonly subsumed under the label the politics of policy borrowing (see Steiner-Khamisi, [2004](#)). Political reasons for cross-national policy borrowing include, for example, change of political allies (e.g. Silova, [2005](#); see also Nóvoa & Lawn, [2002](#)), stakeholder replacements as a result of changes in government (Luschei, [2004](#)), or external 'shock' (Phillips, [2004](#), p. 56). An example of external shock is the release of the PISA study in Germany, which demonstrated the below-average achievement results of German students, and soon became a vociferous public scandal in the German education system. Events such as these generate reform pressure and introduce a window of opportunity for new reform ideas to find public support.

The politics of policy borrowing debunk the commonly-held assumption that reforms are borrowed from elsewhere because they are better. The 'lessons learned from elsewhere' are deconstructed in ways that reveal the political agenda behind policy borrowing. As remarkable as this new area of research in comparative education has been, the political reasons for policy borrowing only capture the reality of a minority of education systems. Most education systems are dependent on external assistance or 'aid', creating a situation in which 'voluntary policy transfer' is enmeshed with 'coercive policy transfer' (Dolowitz & Marsh, [2000](#), p. 6), and the window of opportunity often concurs with the period in which grants or loans are made available for implementing specific reforms.

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reform was funded by a \$25 million loan from the Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank, [2003](#)). The first loan was approved in December 1999 and the second loan of \$15.5 million targeting accountability and efficiency in health, education, social welfare, and labour was granted in October 2003. In the late 1990s New Zealand became the magnet for policy pilgrimage. Each and every member of the Mongolian Parliament and all senior-level staff of ministries were sent on study tour to New Zealand. The policy pilgrimage from Mongolia boomed at a time when critical observers had already published and widely disseminated their doubts about whether the New Zealand-style public management reforms were applicable for developing countries (Bale & Dale, [1998](#); Schick, [1998](#)). Despite, or perhaps because, Mongolia was a late adopter of the new public management reform, various ministries quickly implemented it.³ In 2003, the Ministry of Education published a thick 319-page white handbook on outcomes-based education with numerous examples of student benchmarks and teacher scorecards (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, [2003](#)). The following year, every school had to develop outcomes contracts with the staff and adjust bonus payments according to performance (see Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, [2006](#)). That same year a resolution (Government of Mongolia, [2004](#)) minutely regulated monetary awards for good performance. The resolution requires that bonuses are only given based on output-contracts, and that—in line with the guidelines of the State Service Reform Committee—the evaluation criteria for civil servants' performance should be transparent and results-based. The performance of civil servants is evaluated and scored (grades A, B, C) by superiors, and the bonus granted depends on the score. In addition, the resolution specifies the maximum amount given for bonuses to civil servants.

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procedures for teachers and school principals through the development of model performance management arrangements which elaborate new performance criteria and include the annual appraisal of teachers and principals.

- Subcomponent 2: Development of improved national standards and criteria for performance evaluation. The new criteria will address student progress, and will improve comparability of school performance. This subcomponent also includes the development of new external verification procedures to support the existing school evaluation commissions in carrying out performance evaluation of teachers and school principals.
- Subcomponent 3: Development of a performance incentive scheme which is structured to map onto the current salary scale for teachers and principals.
- Subcomponent 4: Support for a targeted program of fellowships for new teacher graduates who agree to teach for at least three years in rural schools in subject areas with unfilled vacancies.
- Subcomponent 5: Technical assistance and training of teachers, school principals, and education administrators in implementation of the new performance management system. (World Bank Group, [2005](#))

The first three subcomponents, in particular, reflect the logic and language of OBE reform. My analysis of the temporal dimension of OBE does not entail an evaluation of ongoing reforms in Mongolia or in the Kyrgyz Republic. The question is not whether it is good or bad that of all available reform models OBE has been selected for import. The broader objective of the Kyrgyz project—rural school development—certainly deserves a positive comment. Of all former Soviet Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Kyrgyzstan is the only one in which rural school development is the first Central Asian priority. The 'long-term' goal of the project is to improve the quality of education in rural schools. The 'long-term' goal of the project is to improve the quality of education in rural schools. (Steiner-Weil, 2005) It is also not clear whether OBE is a good model for Kyrgyzstan, given that OBE has been implemented in a number of countries with a mixed record. The success of OBE is related to the timing of its implementation.

Scholars have argued that OBE is a good model for Kyrgyzstan. It is also not clear whether OBE is a good model for Kyrgyzstan, given that OBE has been implemented in a number of countries with a mixed record. The success of OBE is related to the timing of its implementation.

quality of education. In Mongolia, for example, as part of structural adjustment in the educational sector, very small rural schools were shut down, the number of complete general education schools (offering all 10 or 11 grades) was reduced and only made available in urban and semi-urban areas as well as in a few rural centres. At the same time mega-schools with over 3,000 students were created to save on administrative cost and support staff in schools (Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe, [2006](#)). International funding was channelled into the mega-schools, semi-urban schools and regional schools at the expense of schools in remote rural areas. Due to the rapid deterioration of rural schools, administrators in rural areas faced difficulties retaining qualified teachers and attracting new ones. These structural reforms of the late 1990s aimed at curbing public expenditures for education, and preceded the quality improvement reforms that OBE promised to achieve. There is a second reason why OBE was inscribed in government regulations only in 2003 (Mongolia) or, respectively, pursued in a project only in 2003 (Kyrgyz Republic): the funding of development banks was only at that time made available.

In low-income countries, the 'time has come for an idea' (Kingdon, [2003](#), p. 1) when international funding for implementing that particular reform (idea) is secured. It is important to bear in mind that international funding is earmarked for specific sector strategies and projects. This means in the case of the Central Asian countries that international funding was only made available if OBE-type reform was systematically pursued.

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They conclude:

when we are analyzing policy change we always need to ask the question: is policy transfer involved? (p. 14)

Similar to comparative education research, scholars in public policy studies and comparative politics tend to neglect the economics of policy transfer, and instead emphasise cultural, social and political factors. For example, Sharon Werning Rivera ([2004](#)) in her fascinating study of Russian élites investigates one of the core issues in borrowing research: Which countries serve as exemplars of emulation, as reference societies from which lessons are learned? She offers three choices—comparability (geographical, historical or cultural proximity), prestige (geo-strategic prominence of a country) and performance (country that excels economically and politically). What is conspicuously missing from her analysis are economic considerations, that is, countries that are actively involved as ‘donors’, and engage in external financial assistance. Bennett ([1991](#)) provides one of the best—albeit dated—literature reviews on policy transfer research. Similar to Werning Rivera’s study, Bennett’s review excludes studies that deal with policy transfer in the development or dependency context.

In the best case scenario, loans for a project signed off by international financial institutions such as the World Bank or regional development banks are accompanied by the lending of reform ideas (Jones, [2004](#)). More frequently they come with the wholesale transfer of a comprehensive reform package formulated by the lender.

Examining the role of international financial institutions in the development of the self-referential educational policy in their own countries. Over 20 specific, Holmes found that always favoured ration, whereas ended the introduction of donor-



the world's largest bilateral donor in educational development, the Government of Japan, serves as a case in point, illustrating the logic of bilateral donors.

Until the 1990s, the Government of Japan was, for a variety of reasons (see King & McGrath, [2004](#)), unique in refraining from imposing Japanese conceptions of good education on countries to which they gave loans or grants. Instead it engaged in more culturally neutral, 'hard'-type aid (construction of schools, purchase of technological equipment, etc.), a focus that came under serious attack for its disregard of international agreements to direct all investments to the improvement of the quality of basic education. Under international pressure, the Government of Japan was forced to find a niche in educational export. The high scores of Japanese students in the league tables of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS and TIMSS-R) were used as a justification to convince Japanese government officials of the need to get involved in 'soft'-type aid, that is, improving the quality of education in loan or grant-recipient countries. With the move from hard to soft-type aid, the Government of Japan has positioned itself—in the international competition over nation-specific 'best practices'—as an ardent disseminator of Japanese 'lesson study' in mathematics and science education around the globe. In line with international agreements, specifically with Education for All (1990) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Government of Japan now focuses on basic education mostly in Africa, but also in its traditional target region (Southeast Asia) as well as in Latin America. Starting in 2001, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has actively promoted 'knowledge-sharing' among practitioners in mathematics and science education in the form of Japanese lesson study (Naqao, [2004](#), p. 54ff.; see also Sawamura, [2002](#)). In a lesson

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Atlantic or within European states. To be fair, researchers in development studies, in turn, tend to neglect policy borrowing and lending research altogether for their object of study. Too often, policy transfer is framed in terms of coercion and imposition with little critical analysis of why and how decision-makers in Third-World countries actively borrow reforms, both for political and economic reasons, from elsewhere.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. OBE was discussed in the United States for a brief period in the late 1980s, but was replaced by Goals 2000 in most states, a standards-based approach to curriculum reform issued by the Federal Government in 1994. However, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) triggered a renewed interest in outcomes-based accountability or ‘new accountability’, a term coined by researchers affiliated with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) (Friedman, 2002). CPRE is a part of the University of Pennsylvania. For a discussion of the ‘outcome’ approach, see Friedman (2002, p. 294), and Friedman (2002, p. 294), which shows how the NCLB Act in particular has led to a focus on ‘outcomes’.
2. Article 49 of the Education Act of 1994 states that ‘Payroll taxes shall be levied on the basis of the number of employees’ (2002).
3. The goal of the Public Sector Management Reform (PSMR) was to ‘improve the efficiency of the public sector’ (2004), but it was not widely adopted. Only a few states adopted it, and only a few states adopted it, with the exception of the state of...

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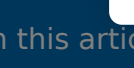
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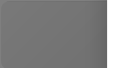
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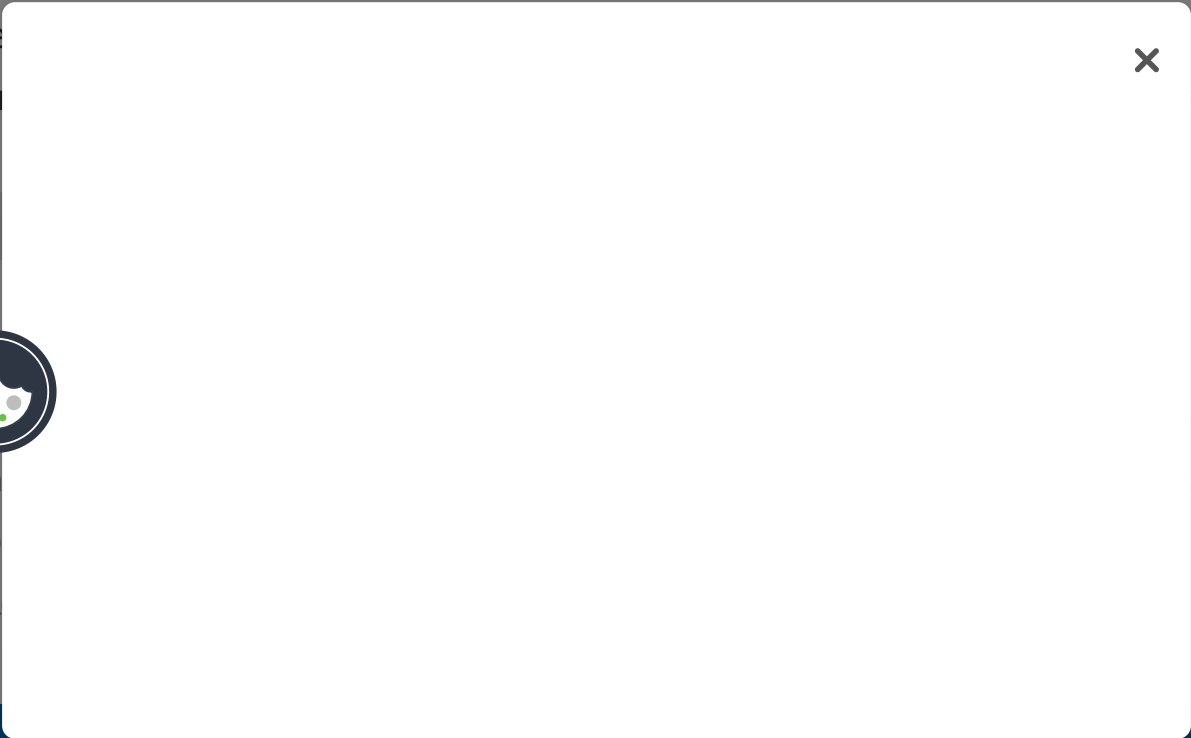
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