

CLAUDIO-RAFAEL VASQUEZ-MARTINEZ, GRACIELA GIRON, IVAN DE-LA-LUZ-ARELLANO, ANTONIO AYON-BAÑUELOS**THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM****Abstract**

Educational reform implies questions of social production and of state regulation that are the key words in educational reform, education and educational policies. These reforms are always on the political agenda of countries and involve international organisms, since education is a vehicle of development for social progress.

A point of departure is that all reform incorporates a certain level of consensus on the part of the actors involved, but that would be an ideal which rarely occurs, and then only when there is a national or regional vision.

Introduction

The objective of educational reform is to fulfil the world-wide commitments made on the subject of the education. When speaking of the educational reform, reference is often made to changes and transformations in the scholastic system in relation to such factors as educational philosophy, student policy, curriculum, pedagogy, didactics, organization, management, financing and links with national development in this century, the consensus that the prime purpose of education is care for and improve holistic education in early childhood, especially for the most vulnerable and underprivileged children, and to guarantee access to free, compulsory and high quality education.

The present document attempts to review some reflections made by the researchers, and by teachers, on some aspects of the dynamics established to take address the educational challenges at present in our country, recognising among them some facilitating aspects and some obstructive aspects, which in turn affect the course of reform in Mexico and Latin America.

Educational Reform

Within the field of education, reforms of education are undoubtedly one of the most complex and controversial subjects, because of the effects that they generate in the societies and countries where they take place. Nevertheless, this situation makes it possible to investigate the reasons why such reforms generate substantial changes in the school systems where they are applied. The present study takes as its object the analysis of great educational reforms across the world in order to relate some of the main lines of development: when the curricular design is changed and the consequent curricula; when the system as a whole is modernised, imposing more agile and effective dynamic for institutional operation; when decentralizing the central bureaucracy; when an attempt is made to raise the general quality of education, in order to improve the academic yield of students and reduce school failure; when an attempt is made to adapt educational formation to the demands of the labour market; when changes in pedagogical styles are introduced for educational reasons; when there is a wish to transform the institutional cultures of

the schools; when the intention is to improve the organization and institutional management of schools.

It is not possible to avoid the fact that the reforms arise in a historical, social, economic, and political context. Consequently, it is important to consider this when designing, implementing, evaluating or analyzing reforms. For Popkewitz (2002), educational reforms imply questions of social production and state regulation, which they in turn “construct”. Reforms, then, depend on a discourse that often remains hidden, or implicit, and that determines our way of looking at the school world; visions that produce social values and relationships of power that are not neutral.

The purpose of educational reforms is to transform school structures with the aim of raising the quality of education in a country.

Reforms and Their Objectives

Educational reforms deserve a holistic examination of their reasons, objectives, application and results generated, by those within the school systems where they are implemented. These reforms are always on the political agenda of countries and the international organisations involved in their design and application, in relation to one view of development and the world-wide conception of education. Nobody would deny the strategic nature of education as a vehicle for development and social progress. World-wide discussion of the subject does not focus on this point, but on the effects and results of reform in terms of policies of economic and social development, as well as on implementation, financing, quality and effectiveness which is desired by all the actors involved in this transforming vision.

This contribution is developed from a review of the policies, continental programmes and realities that are necessary to understand the present situation and to glimpse future of reforms in the education of present century.

It is important to understand the object or intention of the educational reform, which normally focuses on certain common factors such as quality, access, equality of opportunity, finance, management, effectiveness, efficiency and competitiveness in the school systems of primary, secondary, tertiary and non-university education. In the same way, it is important to understand the type or model of reform according to the intention that drives these processes at the regional or global level, adding to the complexity of implementation, and generating barriers that can prevent the attainment of goals. In this context, a number of authors have worked on these questions.

And finally, reforms that originate in or are influenced by the world-wide consensus on education generate educational products that somehow eclipse the degree of success or failure of these reforms in a particular framework of frame and management.

When speaking of educational reform, one speaks of changes and transformations in the school system involving such factors as educational philosophy, student policies, curriculum, pedagogy, didactics, organization, management, finance, and their links with the development of the nations.

In relation to this last point, the world-wide consensus around the reforms of the education and their links to development is almost total, and influenced all educational reforms in the twentieth century. This is confirmed by the consensual nature of many of the relevant treaties relating to education, including the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World-wide Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), the World Summit for Children (1990), the Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (1994), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (1996), the International Conference on the Adult Education (1997) and the International Conference on Child Labour (1997) (UNESCO, 2010).

In the twenty first century, this world-wide consensus on lifelong education continues as can be seen in the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, and the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals in the year 2000.

These agreements on education were promoted by international organisations as a unifying focus for educational policies directed to all the regions of the planet, but were directly addressed mainly to the developing countries, because of their lack of organisation and funding – among other things.

From the point of view of the developed countries, these reforms unfolded with more autonomy because of the interests these states had and the social pressures of educational actors in these nations. These demands were taken up with certain effectiveness due to the strength of their school systems that could respond to such pressures appropriately to the needs of the prevailing economic system, which saw education as a vehicle for the development (Miñana, 2000).

The Causes and Origins of Educational Reforms

Among the processes of transformation that result from routine actions of the actors in education, a differentiated situation emerged. On the one hand, some institutions began to develop a process of developing greater institutional autonomy, as a result of which they began to make decisions about curricular and educational aspects, that in some cases can be described as producers of quality and fairness. On the other, a perhaps greater number of institutions consolidated traditional styles of operation that ritualised the fulfilment of activities, and lost any sense of their purpose, contributing to the deterioration of quality.

Nevertheless, and in spite of variety of circumstances, it would seem that in all the countries of Latin America it is the nation states that they are causing, articulating, leading and determining the new processes of regulation and configuration of educational systems in the form they have maintained over time. The industrialists and other actors in the sector are more influential than the politicians who propose reforms in an erratic and discontinuous cycle: at certain times they worry and they occupy themselves with educational issues, while at others, they ignore the initiatives and cannot be bothered to delegate.

In spite of this, in these countries there is also a clear consensus that considers reform to be necessary to adapt educational structures and school management to sustainable development and the strengthening of socio-economic conditions in the region through quality education for all.

Conclusions

It is no easy task to determine the extent of effectiveness of educational reforms in the world. Each country has its successes and failures in these reforms. Nevertheless some efforts have been made to evaluate the outcomes of reform internationally from a qualitative/quantitative perspective. It is believed that to evaluate this process, one should start from some of the most important outcomes, starting from the goals that have been set in international accords, as well as of the main benefits of school reform, which are on a par with the socially accepted indicators proposed by each country involved.

In this sense, the agreements of the 1990s allocated the dominant role to primary education in the development of nations. The results obtained depended upon the circumstances and the difficulties faced on each continent. Nevertheless, the objectives drawn up in the declaration of Education for All were partly fulfilled.

The strengthening of the belief that the fundamental basis for development is education is even clearer. In the poor countries, this commitment is still greater, since for historical, cultural, political and economic reasons, the educational reforms are so swamped in complexity, that the expected benefits of achieving the goals established in the global consensus on education is only now bearing fruit. The commitment continues, and everybody needs to make an effort.

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