

# Postcolonial Critiques on Globalization and Privatization of Education in Pakistan

Gul Muhammad Rind

*Department of Education, Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan*

## Introduction and Background of the Study

Globalization of education is widely contested in the current academic discussion due to its polarizing effects on the economy, society, and culture. Spring (2008) defined globalization as “worldwide networks, processes, and institutions affecting local educational practices and policies” (p. 1). The international trade and free market policies have on the one hand, strengthened the role and importance of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and International Organizations (IOs); on the other, these enterprises have weakened state power and marginalized the Indigenous culture in the formerly colonized regions of the Global South (Rizvi, 2007). Further, globalization is glorified for knowledge production and dissemination, and it is generally viewed narrowly and depicts its non-political impact on education and society. According to Spring (2008), globalization of education includes a global curriculum, discourse of knowledge economy and technology, multiculturalism, standardized methods of instruction and testing, gender equality, and English as a global language. Globalization and colonization have several commonalities because the origin of globalization can be traced to the colonial era. Colonialism has resulted in the hegemony of transnational agreements and global corporations. Through the heavy investment of capital into local communities, these institutions have diluted states' power and mandate in many economic, cultural, and educational activities (Enslin, 2017).

The privatization of education has also emerged with globalization. It operates through a neoliberal framework of competition, public choice, and market efficiency (Verger et al., 2016). Neoliberalism is a politico-economic model "which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the Privatization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 145). The Education for All agenda (later revised as 2030 Sustainable Development Goals) is a global initiative that also pressures countries to usher in private investment in education, as well as multilateral and bilateral aid (Draxler, 2020). Alarming, globalization deploys aid of soft or hard conditions and standardized practices (e.g., privatization of education) to impose the cultural objectives of the Global North onto the Global South (Johnson, 2006; Verger et al., 2016). In general, globalization and privatization of education in the Global South have created power asymmetry in policymaking, western hegemony, marginalization, and subjugation of local culture (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

Applying a post-colonial critique and analysis, this paper will discuss how globalization is a colonial legacy that transforms Western educational policies in developing countries like Pakistan and how it creates Westernization, supremacy, and marginalization of teachers and students (Spring, 2008).

### **Post-colonial Critique of Globalization in Education**

Postcolonialism and its meanings are not limited to the time period after colonialism and imperialism, but rather a dialectical concept of historical decolonization, sovereignty-building, and confronting the existing economic, political, and cultural imperialism (Young, 2016). The emergence of post-colonial theories can be traced through the period of the 1970s in cultural studies and in the writings of literature (Andreotti, 2011). By the same token, the perspective of postcolonial studies developed in other fields such as politics, history, and education. Education becomes the key theme to challenging colonialism and its legacy of marginalization by developing indigenous resistance and decolonial thoughts (Enslin, 2017). Post-colonial theories are mainly related to anti-imperialist arguments contributed by non-western scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak (Gandhi, 1998). It also challenges the western epistemic power and paradigm in education disseminated through World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and other contemporary IOs (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009: Spring 2009). Young (2016) sums up the scope of postcolonial critiques to all kinds of oppressions inherited from colonization.

In this era of globalization, the colonial legacy operates its power and hegemony in formerly colonized countries through IOs such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, and other development agencies (Spring, 2009). Said (2003) informed that every single empire justified imperialism with a special situation. The justification of today's imperialist IOs is the mandatory enlightenment and civilization of local people. Besides, IOs contend that the use of force is the last resort. Along with the development funds and loans, these IOs also perpetrate their neoliberal and capitalist policies and practices that promote privatized and standardized education.

Globalization and colonialism have several similarities by sharing the same conceptual ground (Rizvi, 2007). During (2000) stated that "From this post-colonialist perspective, colonialism in effect becomes an episode in the longer sweep of globalization, and all events that once fell under the rubric of colonialism are ripe to fall under the rubric of globalization" (p. 392). It is criticized by post-colonial theorists and scholars that Western academic enterprises are not based on true knowledge and evidence, but rather on a rational approach to Western supremacy (Andreotti, 2011). Specifically, in the field of education, post-colonial theory offers an analysis of power structure within the education system, ethnocentric and Eurocentric hegemony, and cultural supremacy discourse in curriculum and instruction. Further, this theory helps explore how the Western approach creates more fragmentation and hierarchy in the education system.

### **Privatization of Education**

The privatization project of IOs (such as the World Bank) is hailed in post-colonial states through loans and aid. Through neoliberal policies, governments rely on market forces to obtain educational services, which creates an elite system and marginalization among disadvantaged communities (Apple, 2006). In the context of low-income countries and the postcolonial world such as Pakistan, the World Bank, IMF, and other organizations

shape the colonial legacy of education through their various policy tools. As it has been analyzed by critical scholars (Johnson, 2006; Spring, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012) that in this neoliberal and globalized world, educational policies are developed in the western countries and transferred to the recipient countries through demands and coercion in low-income countries without their consent.

Other scholars (Shahjahan, 2012; Spring, 2009) believe IOs initiative in the education of client countries is a form of neocolonial domination that reproduces Western epistemic knowledge and neoliberal ideology. Looba (2015) explained that globalization apparently reduces economic and social boundaries. The free flow of capital due to globalization integrates recipient nations into the world system and the development discourse. Globalization creates disintegration, suppressing local industries and extracting money from third-world countries through debt services.

In this setup, educational policies emanate from IOs that transfer Global North policies to the Global South. Examples of this phenomenon are the spread of policies fostering the private management of public schools, and vouchers or subsidy schemes, advocated by the World Bank (Klees et al., 2012; Moschetti & Verger, 2019; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). Due to the unequal power relations in the global world, these neoliberal education policies are mostly based on efficiencies and measurable outcomes that override equity and social justice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). To some extent, the modernization and globalization of mass education that entails Western cultural values have improved the material standard of living; however, what is constantly ignored is the impact on developing nations' social cohesion and mobility (Samoff, 2003).

### **Socio-political and Educational Context of Pakistan**

Pakistan was formerly the colonized region of united India under Great Britain's empire. It gained independence in 1947 after the atrocious partition of India. The colonial legacy and Western dominance persisted because of the fragile economy which led to its heavy reliance on external (predominantly Western) aid and debts from IMF, World Bank, and other financial institutions (Durrani & Halai, 2020). Soon after Pakistan's founding, a national education conference took place in 1947. Along with government schools, there were additional policies for other schools based on the European or covenant models (Bengali, 1999; Rahman, 2004). These schools catered to elites, like children of bureaucrats, armed forces, and politicians. English as the medium of instruction generated a perception of better education quality. However, the rest of the government schools taught in local languages like Urdu, Sindhi, and the like (Rahman, 2004). This was the pure replication of the colonization model because the graduates of the government school system ended up getting low-cadre and clerical jobs.

It has also been acknowledged in the National Education Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2009) that such parallel education systems violate the uniformity of the national education system (Fancy & Razaq, 2017). Further, it has been reported this uneven education system buttresses the marginalization and inequity in human development; ultimately it hampers inclusive and sustainable development of the country (Government of Pakistan, 2009).

### **Globalization and Privatization of Education in Pakistan**

Globalization in education policies are rapidly changing the current educational landscape in several countries including Pakistan. According to Rizvi and Lingard (2009), previously public school policies were developed exclusively at the nation-state level, where the role of government was prioritized. In the current era, these policies are manipulated by the international system operated by World Bank, OECD, and other development agencies. It has redirected education from social democrats to the neoliberal market system. The role and purpose of education have also diminished within the discourse of human capital development and knowledge economy to meet international labor market needs (Lauder et al., 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Spring, 2009). This approach in education continues the colonial legacy in countries like Pakistan, where approaches to social justice and equity fizzle out.

The emergence of globalization in tandem with the expansion of privatization has impacted every level of the education system including K-12 and higher education in Pakistan (Rind & Knight Abowitz, 2022). The Western epistemology and knowledge production dominate Pakistan's education system. Generally, people falsely associate the European model or English-teaching schools are superior in quality (Dato, 2014). Yet, the majority of the country's population does not fit the Western culture and values because Islam is the religion of more than 90% of the population. The emerging educational policies (e.g., National Education Policy 2009) show that Pakistan responds to the pressure of globalization and embraces dominant discourse such as knowledge economy and human capital development to attract international aid which has increased after the 9/11 incident (Lingard & Ali, 2009).

When the donor gets interested in education policy reform, curriculum reform is one of the critical aspects. As Lingard and Ali (2009) pointed out, Pakistan shifted its curriculum more toward enlightenment in the Musharraf regime after getting more funding from the USA and the United Kingdom through United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID) and UK Department for International Development (DfID). However, Pakistan's social structure and culture are essentially rooted in Islamic values. The role of DfID also resulted in defunding Pakistani teachers for the sake of low-fee or low-cost private schools. Similarly, USAID has also invested in education through public-private partnerships. In this setup, the private sector is considered efficient in school management (Rind, 2022).

The low-fee private schools mushroomed in Pakistan over the past few decades; the World Bank and DfID widely supported these schools and connected governments with private actors through public-private partnerships in education (Rind, 2022). Currently, more than 40% of Pakistan's educational institutes is offered through private mode with loose regulations (Pakistan Education Statistics, Government of Pakistan, 2018). Steiner-Khamsi (2004) cautioned that the privatization, decentralization, and standardization of education always have global dimensions and influences. Social scientists (e.g., Ball, 2007; Lauder et al., 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Spring, 2009) worry that a large scale of deregulation weakens the nation-state and creates structural inequality. For instance, the World Bank Third Punjab Education Sector Project in Pakistan aimed to promote sustainable development and poverty reduction by improving access to schools for the poorest. The goal was achieved through providing

vouchers to parents, expanding PPPs through increasing low-cost private schools, and providing incentives through stipends for secondary schools attendance. This mechanism ultimately promotes privatization policies in the country. Rind's (2022) study noted that some degree of efficiency and improved governance exists in low-fee private schools and PPP schools in Sindh based on subsidies and private management of public schools. However, this schooling model fails to reduce inequality or ensure quality education. Ironically, these schools resulted in more inequality among schools. They also marginalized and de-professionalized teachers through low-paid contractual jobs.

Besides school education, globalization has also influenced the higher education system. The government of Pakistan also allowed private universities through charter to work during the 1980s (Halai, 2013). This practice has widened the education divide between the elite and the common people. Currently, these universities are reinforcing social stratification and dominating the job market. The elite universities are all private institutions charging huge tuition fees. According to the Higher Education Commission Pakistan Statistics 2017-18 (HEC, 2020), 76 out of 187 universities are private urban schools that target high-income families. Elite graduates have the opportunity to obtain lucrative jobs, while graduates from ordinary public schools end up in low-paid clerical jobs or remain unemployed (Mukhtar, 2012; Rahman, 2004). Pakistan's current IMF package also reduces the government's education budget and other social services in lieu of adopting pro-privatization policies.

### **Cultural Identity Crisis**

Currently, Pakistan is facing a serious identity dilemma. Islam remains the religion for most Pakistani people. They adhere to the cultural values of family and social justice. Therefore, Pakistanis' reality is incompatible with IOs' advocacy for imported modernity facilitated by the so-called enlightening curriculum and the best practices. In fact, modernization further marginalizes the Pakistani people and deprives them of their local languages and culture (Lingard & Ali, 2009; Rahman, 2004). Due to inconsistent curricula and widening socioeconomic inequality, these IOs-mandated pro-privatization policies will jeopardize Pakistani democracy and further polarize the country (Rind & Knight Abowitz, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

In the name of the best practices, IOs' dissemination of policies from the Global North to the Global South renders underdeveloped countries vulnerable to losing their cultural values and epistemic knowledge. The advancement of global forces enhanced standardization and privatization in the education system of Pakistan which has increased educational inequity along with the loss of indigenous language and culture. The Pakistani government has recommended policy action through public-private partnerships in education to reduce the government's burden. Simultaneously World Bank and DFID have promoted low-fees (through low-cost) private schools in Pakistan. This narrow commodification of education encourages the private sector to invest in education and thrive at the cost of social cohesion and equity (Rind & Knight Abowitz, 2022).

The post-colonial and indigenous scholarship in education will offer better frameworks of equitable access to quality education for all. There is also a need for regulations of schools in Pakistan so that they are no longer aggravating the plight for the oppressed population based on their cultural identity, language, religion, gender, and other socioeconomic factors.

**Gul Muhammad Rind** is a PhD. from Miami University in Fall 2022 in *Educational Leadership, Culture, and Curriculum*. Dr. Rind is currently working as a lecturer in the Department of Education, at Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan. His research interests are comparative education, education policy, and leadership for equity and social justice.

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