

Purpose-Driven Education System Transformations

History Lessons from Korea and Japan

Luis Crouch and Deborah Spindelman

Abstract

This paper is an essay in comparative educational history and its possible relevance to educational development today. It addresses the question of whether Japan and Korea's history in using educational development to further national development can be useful as (partial) models for dealing with the educational challenges of today's lower- and lower-middle income countries. The hypothesis of the paper is that there is much to learn from these countries, but that the lessons one could learn are not at all obvious or superficial, and are only partially about what was done (specific education policies) and are more importantly about how it was done (the high purpose and thoroughness of policy engagement).

The paper first characterizes educational development, especially in terms of the intense emphasis on equality of high achievement in Korea and Japan, in quantitative terms, to demonstrate that these countries possess certain admirable characteristics. Caveats regarding learner stress and rote learning are dealt with by looking at the relevant statistics. A framework for assessing the quality of policy borrowing processes is built, based on the literature on this subject. The paper then analyzes the historical development of education as a means of resisting Western colonialist probes into Japan and Korea (end of the 19th C), but also Japan itself into Korea (first half of 20th C). How both countries borrowed from the West, but in a contested and very deep manner, and as part of a resistance to being colonized, is documented. The paper also shows that part of the healthy, contested borrowing was the involvement of teacher groups and civil society.

The paper concludes by taking into consideration the fraught issue that potentiating the role of education in national development could be seen as tantamount to using education for nationalism. The paper links to the possibility that there may be a more inclusive and rights-oriented use of the concept of the nation to foster human well-being, and that education could play a role in such processes. Some practical suggestions for taking these ideas forward, or at least exploring them in more depth, are made at the very end.

Purpose-Driven Education System Transformations: History Lessons from Korea and Japan

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“Measures of national development are not even on the same ontological basis as national measures of human wellbeing. For the latter the individual is the ontological unit and aggregation is secondary... In contrast, countries have characteristics that are not the simple aggregation of ontologically individualizable characteristics of its citizens/residents.” – Lant Pritchett (2021, p. 4-5)

“Such a situation [ongoing low state capability] prevails in no small part because the dominant approaches to institutional reform promoted by international agencies – especially those centered on adopting universal ‘best practices’ as determined by external ‘experts’ – are too often part of the problem (rather than the solution), changing what systems look like rather than what they can actually do.” – Michael Woolcock (2019, p. 2)

“It is not an easy task to go through a period of transition, and it becomes even harder when extraneous factors intervene in the renovation process, greatly hindering a normal adjustment. How often we have been misled by presumed needs which we considered natural but which we later realized were proper to alien forms of civilization. We discover too late that such demands can be satisfied only with difficulty or not at all from our own resources. Dissatisfaction has thus befallen us, and worse: slowly but surely we have become alienated from our own people and our own environment. This alienation would have been bearable had it not been that in our case the abandonment of our own culture did not at the same time bring access to another civilization. Thus we have sacrificed what was ours but have not gained in its place anything that might be considered its equivalent; we have lost our world, but we have not entered another.” – Ki Hajar Dewantara (cited in Harper 2011, p. 193)

“The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate: our ancestors have made us what we are.” – Ernest Renan (1882, p. 10)

Executive summary

This paper is an essay in comparative educational history and its possible relevance to educational development today. It addresses the question of whether Japan and Korea's history in using educational development to further national development can be useful as (partial) models for dealing with the educational challenges of today's lower- and lower-middle income countries. The hypothesis of the paper is that there is much to learn from these countries, but that the lessons one could learn are not at all obvious or superficial, and are only partially about what was done (specific education policies) and are more importantly about how it was done (the high purpose and thoroughness of policy engagement).

The paper first characterizes educational development, especially in terms of the intense emphasis on equality of high achievement in Korea and Japan, in quantitative terms, to demonstrate that these countries possess certain admirable characteristics. Caveats regarding learner stress and rote learning are dealt with by looking at the relevant statistics. A framework for assessing the quality of policy borrowing processes is built, based on the literature on this subject. The paper then analyzes the historical development of education as a means of resisting Western colonialist probes into Japan and Korea (end of the 19th C), but also Japan itself into Korea (first half of 20th C). How both countries borrowed from the West, but in a contested and very deep manner, and as part of a resistance to being colonized, is documented. The paper also shows that part of the healthy, contested borrowing was the involvement of teacher groups and civil society. The process was also hardly linear: the contestation went back and forth (particularly in Japan), for several decades. In all this, however, the issue of values and their interaction with education come to the fore.

To begin to link these cases to today's countries using a comparative history approach, the paper then shows how today's developing countries interacted with colonial schooling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Using Anglophone Africa as a case in point, we find that colonial education provision was contested in deep and creative ways by students, families, and communities, but these efforts were thwarted by the style and depth of colonization. We also find that early independence leaders had a vision of using education as a tool for national development much as Japan and Korea did. The nature of this vision is demonstrated using historical documentation. Yet this focus was diluted due to an inability of the bureaucracies to respond to the vision, and due to the lack of interest in this topic among the supporting development agencies. Other exogenous factors may have also accounted for the difficulty in translating vision to action. The paper analyzes UNESCO and World Bank education programs in depth, from about 1945 and about 1970 onwards, respectively, to show that neither agency was interested (as revealed by written policies, plans and behavior) in education's role in national development.

Though one might hesitate in doing so, since a main point of the paper is that the policy borrowing that Korea and Japan carried out was so careful, the paper does have a section showing the specific structural and pedagogical policies that Korea and Japan used in their

education sectors, and that today's developing countries could consider, after judicious review. Perhaps the biggest lesson here is on the equality of provision that Japan and Korea developed.

As a way to contribute to the notion that today's agencies could assist developing countries in a manner that learns from history, JICA's and KOICA's programs are analyzed as an interesting case in point. These countries' programs are different from each other, but neither seems particularly deeply reflective about what can be learned from their own histories. Yet their histories, more so than those of other bilateral agencies, are of interest because Japan and Korea's development in education was intentional and purposive, unlike development in the UK or the USA, which was more evolutionary. JICA in the last decade or two does seem to be using a process of learning from iteration and adaptation, in the field and based on close observation of schools, that is indeed reminiscent of how Japan engaged with Western ideas in the late 19th C and early 20th C, and is reminiscent of the strongly empirical spirit of the "lesson study" approach (but applied to schools and systems).

The paper concludes by taking into consideration the fraught issue that potentiating the role of education in national development could be seen as tantamount to using education for nationalism. That very real danger is acknowledged. However, the paper links to the possibility, posited by political scientists in recent decades, that there may be a more inclusive and rights-oriented use of the concept of the nation to foster human well-being, and that education could play a role in such processes. Some practical suggestions for taking these ideas forward, or at least exploring them in more depth, are made at the very end.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose, context in RISE Programme, organization of the paper

How the idea for this paper arose, and where it ended up, are more distant from each other than is the case with most papers. This work started out with relatively narrow curiosity about whether it might not make more sense for certain development agencies such as JICA and KOICA² to be more reflective about their national educational pasts in how they offer advice to developing countries today. But it ended up being more broadly about how the role of education in national development has been under-conceptualized and under-emphasized by development agencies, with, it seems, perhaps unfortunate consequences—consequences that make it much harder to achieve educational goals for a given amount of fiscal and social effort. We conclude that agencies—and countries—may want to think about how to rescue this potential role, while noting that rescuing this role is not without pitfalls (e.g., the dangers of a cheap nationalism and intolerance), though we believe these pitfalls can probably be avoided if they are known ahead of time. Stated specifically as a hypothesis for the paper, it is that there is much to learn from these countries, but that the lessons one could learn are not at all obvious or superficial, and are only partially about what was done (specific education policies) and are more importantly about how it was done (the high purpose and thoroughness of policy engagement).

One of the authors worked as an advisor to staff of development agencies working in education and witnessed, in real time (or even participated in), acts of “policy borrowing” (term expanded upon later) and how they happen. In that role he has had the opportunity to sit around the table with donors and developing country officials (particularly in Africa) in discussions around what sorts of interventions donors and countries might want to focus on.³ It came to his attention that, in particular, JICA and KOICA seemed to act as if the concerns of interest, and possibly the solutions to such concerns, in their countries of origin, today, or at any rate in the very recent past, ought to naturally be of interest to even fairly poor developing countries. Knowing a bit (emphasis: *a bit*) about the history of educational development in Korea and Japan, he hypothesized that there may be more to learn from that history than from what was going on, educationally, in those countries today. In particular, the guess (a mere guess to be explored, since, as noted, he knew only a bit of the history, and knew it non-systematically at that), was three-fold. First, that prioritizing education as a real engine for the development of the nation in a broad sense, to include economic growth but to also include equality, social cohesion, national survival (including, not to gloss over such things, military power) was key to those countries’ educational success. That is, that seeing education as having a high and noble

² And, by extension, other development agencies’ reflections on the record of societies such as Japan and Korea (and also Vietnam, and others) which, within the last 100 years or so, set out with great intentionality to develop their education systems as a means of national enhancement or even survival.

³ This paper, sometimes pointedly, eschews the pious term “development partner” and other such expressions that obfuscate the obviously asymmetrical game (wishful thinking aside), in the development business, between those who dole money out and those who receive it. “Development agencies” is also used here as a neutral term that does not gloss over the inequality of influence.

purpose, and according to it the creative social and bureaucratic effort that such high purpose would command, was key to their achievement.⁴ Second, a key argument of the paper is that important purposes such as boosting learning outcomes, and especially equality of learning outcomes, might be easier to achieve if the high purpose of using education to build the nation is a deeper and overarching motivation than objectives such as access or learning (which are of course extremely important). And third, that that sense of purpose made those countries' education thinkers singularly focused on doing whatever the evidence (especially evidence accumulated through careful incremental evolution based on tight observation of natural variation, along with intense debate and study) suggests works, even if it does not “feel good”—e.g., tolerate double shifting, large classes, a very tight and sequential curriculum, etc., as long as those classes were led by superb and highly disciplined and professionally accountable, proud teachers.

The reader will be the judge of whether those guesses are sufficiently tested by the reading and studying we report in this paper, at least sufficiently to generate interest in further study and above all dialogue. The reader can also judge whether, to the degree the guesses are borne out, they might apply not only to the development agencies that motivated our study, and not only to the two Asian countries in question, but to other countries, such as Vietnam, that have made education central to their national development recently and with clear intentionality as opposed to in long-ago centuries and evolutionarily as was the case in the West.

In writing this paper we have to express deep humility along at least two dimensions. First, given that the paper does somewhat upbraid or chide the development agencies (and countries to a lesser extent) for failing to do something the paper argues is important, we hasten to admit that at least one of the authors was part of these institutions at least briefly, and has collaborated with those institutions all his professional life, yet not only did he not internally agitate for the very things this paper discusses, but he had not even really reflected deeply on their importance until recently, having had conversations with other RISE colleagues working on the theme of “purpose,” and having decided it was potentially an important theme to explore. As the cliché goes, it is easy to point fingers—but in this case the finger also points back (as goes the other finger-pointing cliché) at one of us. Second, the paper covers a lot of related themes, each one of which could be (and indeed has been) the subject of long work by specialists. For instance, neither of the authors had any prior expertise in the history of Korean or Japanese education, or in JICA's or KOICA's education foreign aid programs, and these are fields of

⁴ A definitional pause. In this paper we sometimes use the term “high purpose.” The RISE Programme, and we too in this paper, often refer to “purpose-driven” education systems, to denote systems that are working coherently towards an explicitly and publicly-acceptable purpose. At the risk of being pedantic or even metaphysical, we sometimes use “high purpose,” instead, for a few reasons. First, sometimes a purpose can be a mere emergent property of a system's rules (in the usual non-teleological sense of systems theory, e.g., the species equilibrium in an ecosystem, which is not a goal but an emergent property of the system's implicit rules), and this may be a relatively “low” or publicly inadmissible purpose, such as generating patronage. Clearly neither we nor RISE in general use “purpose” in that sense, so by adding “high” we may be being excessively careful. Second, a system's purpose can be publicly admissible and explicit. Learning (or access) would be an example—generally RISE means learning outcomes as the purpose in question. But by using the phrase “high purpose” at least occasionally we are implying that purposes such as learning can play into a higher purpose such as national development.

scholarship that can, and do, occupy the lifetimes of scholars. We are also neither Korean nor Japanese nor African. So in these two respects we are “trespassers,” in the sense of Albert Hirschman’s famous ideas about straying across disciplinary boundaries (Santiso 2000, Woolcock 2019). But we believe that this trespassing is justified in that bringing together all these threads hopefully serves a valid and useful purpose. The reader can judge whether we can be justified or forgiven, depending on the degree to which the purpose has been achieved.

The RISE Programme,⁵ funded by then-DFID and now FCDO, has, towards the second half of its life, touched upon or explored deeply the issue of purpose in education systems to test the possibility that a lack of high purpose can explain the systematic under-performance of education systems, and their focus on form rather than substance, or “isomorphic mimicry” (surface imitation for the sake of local legitimacy and legitimation with donors) as per the writings of Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock, and others (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock 2012, Dimaggio and Powell 1983). This paper is part of that effort. Other “purpose” papers in the RISE Programme include, centrally, Kaffenberger (2022), which argues that a “consensus-based commitment to the purpose of learning is a critical missing link to addressing the learning crisis,” (p. 1) but also papers such as London (2022), who focuses (among other things) on the purposefulness of Vietnam’s education system and its relation to high achievement; Honig (2022), who argues (or we interpret him to argue) that, without deep motivation, process compliance controls are at least expensive and inefficient if not outrightly negative; and Aiyar (2021), who concludes, regarding an experience in India, that “the problem of low student learning was recognized. However, teachers and administrators did not accept responsibility. After all, they too are victims of a system. In sum, what we encountered was a system that has lost all sense of public purpose. This is the challenge of governance and state capacity that must be at the forefront of all debates on reform” (Aiyar 2021, p. 73). Levy (2022), in a somewhat related paper (although dealing more with the political economy of educational quality), warns about the danger of over-reliance on pure process compliance when elites (and the rank and file) have not absorbed motivation.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The rest of this section motivates the task further: why look at Japan and Korea as interesting cases? And how might one contextualize ideas regarding Japan and Korea’s educational development in terms of the sorts of policy lending and brokering, and policy advice, that development agencies spend so much time thinking about, debating, and providing? Section 2 sets out a policy borrowing framework that can be used to evaluate how Japan and Korea themselves borrowed from the West, how developing countries today are borrowing ideas from the development agencies and the West, and (more implicitly) how one might improve upon the process of borrowing. Section 3 contains some statistical background that characterizes the precise nature of the achievements in Korea and Japan and the slow progress in developing countries today. Section 4 contains a historical narrative that explains what and how Japan and Korea developed and borrowed (and rejected

⁵ From <https://riseprogramme.org/>: “School enrolment has dramatically increased worldwide, but millions of children spend years in school without gaining foundational skills. Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) is an international research programme investigating how education systems can overcome this crisis.”

in many cases) ideas in order to develop. Section 5 explores whether, at independence, African leaders accorded education a high purpose as Korea and Japan did, and, to the extent that they did, how that high purpose seems to have been lost to bureaucratization in large part induced by the donor agencies. Section 6 explores specific policies that might be borrowable from Japan and Korea's history with great caution and with the same sorts of questioning and rejecting and selective adopting that Japan and Korea carried out with regard to the West. Section 7 analyzes current JICA and KOICA policies and projects in Africa to document that the extent to which these policies and projects benefit from Japan and Korea's own history has been more limited than perhaps it ought to be. Section 8 concludes with some "substantive" lessons learned about whether, and how, more national-development high purpose can be inserted into donor agencies' work, as well as how to do it, in terms of the policy-borrowing framework we adopt in Section 2.

1.2 Why learn from Japan and Korea?⁶

The notion of educational policy borrowing and educational tourism are nothing new. In many circles, for instance, it has become popular to study "what Finland did." This is even formalized, in development partner agencies, into the notion of "study tours," whereby a donor agency might finance travel by Ministry of Education officials to another country, and many NGOs and consultancies organize such tours. In education fairs, especially those aimed at wealthy countries with education ambition (at least on the surface, not perhaps always willing to do the hard work that Finland did), such as the oil-rich Gulf states, it is not uncommon to see Finnish organizations exhibiting the possibility of learning from Finland's education system.⁷ The attempt can take forms that seem rather industrialized.⁸ There are even Finnish graduate or MBA students who analyze the market for such exports, as a means to support Finland's potential exports.⁹ This suggests an incipiently well-developing industry, not just a few random attempts. The United States has often tried to export its famed (and deserving of fame) agricultural land-grant public university system.¹⁰ Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, justifiably proud of their approaches to technical education, often recommend something similar to developing countries. While scholars might interrogate the viability of such exports (see Chang, 2002, Chung 2017, Woolcock 2019), development agency officials and the educated lay person do not often stop to think about whether the contextual conditions that gave rise to such systems are determinant of the success of those systems (in their environment of origin), and precisely which features of those systems might be worth thinking about exporting. Perhaps as a result, the track record of some of these exports has not been stellar. For example, the US-based land-grant approach has not been shown to work well outside of the United States.

⁶ This section has appeared in slightly different form as a "Viewpoints and Controversies" short article in the Journal *Prospects* (Crouch 2023).

⁷ See for instance <https://finland.fi/life-society/finnish-education-expertise-goes-global/>.

⁸ <https://yle.fi/news/3-6779672>.

⁹ For instance,

https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/154348/Orenius_Aleksi.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y and <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/161277/EDUCATIO.pdf?sequence=1>.

¹⁰ <https://livestocklab.ifas.ufl.edu/media/livestocklabifasufledu/pdf-/Prospects-of-Establishing-LGU-Model.pdf> and Carter (1985).

Similarly, the German approach does not seem to export well, though Germany (and other Germanic countries) seem to continue to try.¹¹ Our paper examines carefully under what conditions Korea and Japan's systems, which did succeed in propelling these countries to the top of learner assessment tables, might be exportable. Korea and Japan present interesting cases to study because, unlike Western European countries (especially Protestant ones) such as the Netherlands or the UK, where mass literacy is older,¹² and where education systems developed in a manner that is highly contextual and non-purposeful, Japan and Korea set out to develop a modern education system to replace previous versions of educational provision for select populations. And they did it via an intense process of policy study, policy rejection, and policy borrowing. We assume that such purposiveness, relatively recent in time, might have interesting lessons.

There would seem to be a bit of a gap between what we might consider the achievements of these systems and the popularization of the achievements of other systems such as Finland's, especially in terms of what other countries can learn. For instance, one wonders why, after 20 or 30 years since the publication of Stevenson and Stigler (1992) or Stigler and Hiebert (1999) or, in a more popular version, Elizabeth Green, ideas pulled from Japanese and Korean contexts seem to have difficulty catching on in the official education sector.¹³ In contrast, praise of Finland's education system is common, and is echoed among public intellectuals of education in the West, and in international development agencies (see Sahlberg 2011 and a fairly typical development agency blog such as the World Bank [here](#)). Yet Finland's case is only to a small degree (especially relative to developing countries) less "peculiar" and rooted in Finland's own history than Korea's or Japan's cases are rooted in their own histories. (In fact, one could argue less so, to the degree that both Korea and Japan are reported to have borrowed explicitly—but not uncritically nor linearly—from other countries.) While both countries experienced rapid economic growth shortly after their astonishing academic skills performance was first documented internationally, their respective performances were all the more astonishing given their poverty at the time. Thus, while the academic performance of similar outliers such as

¹¹ Both the US land-grant public university system and the Germanic technical training system would seem to be highly ensconced in a very peculiar sociology. In the case of the US, the original "customers" of the system were a class of free, small holding, highly competitive family farmers in the 19th C. In the case of the Germanic training system, the deep socio-cultural roots are in its medieval guilds and the current demand comes from another peculiarly German socio-economic phenomenon, the *mittelstand*, namely mid-sized private companies that are highly competitive and rely strongly on exceptional levels of skill for precision production. These are rare in most other economies, even industrialized ones. See <https://english.bdi.eu/topics/germany/german-mittelstand/> and https://nagoya.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/16955/files/bulitv_10_17.pdf. None of these sociological conditions prevail widely in most developing countries of today.

¹² Our own estimate using various secondary sources suggest that Japan's adult literacy rate was about 40% in 1860 (available upon request). The Netherlands and the UK had that level of literacy already by about 1700, judging by data in <https://ourworldindata.org/literacy>.

¹³ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/magazine/why-do-americans-stink-at-math.html> for Green's reflections. On the other hand, Japanese educational exports such as the Suzuki method (Gopnik 2022) and Kumon (Ukai 1994, Begun 2018, Orcos et al. 2019, Ashraf 2018) are widely taken up by parents, in dozens of countries, embody the mix of drill and creativity that seems to characterize much of Japanese education, and seem to be effective (popularity of course does not mean effectiveness, but the methods have been studied, Suzuki less so) at what they promise.

Vietnam stand out beyond Japan and Korea today, Japan's 1964 performance in the First International Mathematics Study and Korea's 1995 performance in TIMSS made them even more spectacular outliers at that time than Vietnam's (still very impressive) PISA performance today. Aside from the natural comfort for the West (but irrelevant for developing countries) in borrowing from another Western country, the neglect of lessons from Korea and Japan may be an issue of information (or, rather, well-intended misinformation) about these countries' the achievements. This section aims to share information as to why these two cases may be just as worthy of emulation as Finland's and therefore of great interest to development and educational agencies.

While many acknowledge the success of Japan and Korea in terms of average scores in assessments such as TIMSS and PISA, they often ignore what is arguably one of the most interesting (and laudable) aspects of these systems, and focus on negative aspects for which there seems to be little empirical backing: they often ignore the equality these systems generate between the least-able and most-able students, and decry perceived but probably exaggerated negative sides, namely stress on students and the reliance on rote learning. Two of the most commonly perceived "negative" features of the Korean and Japan education systems are the pressure on the students and the possibility that Korean and Japanese students are simply good at regurgitating pre-formulated knowledge or only the simplest forms of problem-solving. To answer the question "why would anyone even consider this?", one of the authors sought to investigate some of these issues.¹⁴ We take on one of the insufficiently-praised aspects of Korean and Japanese education and then question two aspects that are perceived as negative even among informed observers.

Issue 1: Equality

As will be seen in the rest of the paper, Japan and Korea emphasized equality both for its own sake in terms of its role in the development of a nation, but also because they believed that overall or average excellence could best be secured through a focus on making sure that even the least able children learn at a good level. Not only do Korea and Japan have average levels of achievement that are near the highest in the world, but (and this is much less known) their levels of equality of achievement are some of the best in the world: few, truly, are left behind in these countries. We took, for TIMSS 1999 Mathematics 8th Grade, TIMSS 2015 Mathematics 8th Grade, and PISA 2015 Science, the scores at the 95th, 50th, and 5th (P95, P50 and P5 respectively) percentiles of the learning distribution, and calculated an index of inequality as $(P95-P5)/P50$, a simple technique often used by economists.¹⁵ The lower this ratio, the more

¹⁴ That investigation turned out to result in more writing than is healthy in the introductory section of a paper. Thus, he sought to publish the results in the journal *Prospects*, as a "Viewpoints and Controversies" piece (Crouch 2023).

¹⁵ Actually P90/P10 is most often calculated. Using P50 uses more information from the distribution and makes it more intuitively obvious that the same absolute point spread between P90 and P10 looms much larger if P50 is low than if P50 is high. So in that sense it is more akin to a Gini coefficient. We acknowledge that learning achievement is not as straightforward a metric as income or wealth or even asset possession, so the ratio in question should not be used to compare to other metrics, but is valid for comparisons of the same metric across countries.

equal the distribution is. [Table 1](#) shows where Korea and Japan stood, against a few comparator countries. The countries chosen represent Korea and Japan themselves, of course, some other important OECD countries that are taken to be paragons of both excellence and equality, and some developing countries that happen to have good (PISA or TIMSS) learning data available.

Table 1. Comparative data on Japan, Korea, and comparator countries

Territory	TIMSS 1999 Maths 8	TIMSS 2015 Maths 8	Territory	PISA Science 2015
Best in world non city-states: Netherlands	0.44		Best in world non city-states: Canada	0.57
Best in world (other than Korea and Japan) non city- states: Taiwan		0.40		
Average of Korea and Japan	0.45	0.38	Average of Korea and Japan	0.58
Average of a few developing countries	0.98	0.83	Average of a few developing countries	0.74
Ratio of developing countries to Korea and Japan	2.29	2.22	Ratio of developing countries to Korea and Japan	1.26
Japan	0.45	0.39	Japan	0.55
Korea	0.44	0.39	Korea	0.61
South Africa	1.41	0.91	Dominican Republic	0.78
Chile	0.72		Tunisia	0.74
Philippines	0.92		Kosovo	0.73
Indonesia		0.75	Algeria	0.69
Morocco	0.87	0.84		
Source: direct downloads of PISA and TIMSS data. Both indices have a practical range of 0 to 1.2, given that the maximum taking the maximum and minimum scores as the mean of 500 plus or minus the standard deviation of 100.				

Clearly, Korea and Japan are: a) close to the most equal in the world (other than city-states such as Hong Kong and Singapore), and b) far more equal than selected developing countries.¹⁶ They have about half as much inequality in TIMSS Mathematics as the developing countries, and about 20% less in PISA Science. Countries such as Finland are often credited for the equality of their education systems, but this is not as often noticed about Korea and Japan.

¹⁶ Chosen as among the lowest-performing countries that did participate in the assessment (but there are not that many that do participate).

The equality levels of Korea and Japan extend not just to learning achievement, but also to years of education. Crespo et al. (2013) estimate that Korea's education Gini coefficient for years of education was, in the year 2000, about 0.05 for the age cohort 35-40, while it was about 0.6 for Sub-Saharan countries—a gap of some 55 points (Crespo et al., pp. 7 and 9).¹⁷ Moreover, that this is a recent phenomenon can be noted by the fact that for the oldest cohort, 55+, the gap between Korea and Sub-Saharan Africa is only 20 points or so (Crespo et al., pp. 7 and 9). Even more interestingly, if one looks at the left-hand-side of the horizontal axis of the Lorenz curve, it is clear that Korea does a particularly good job of eliminating extremely low performance. In India, for example, for the 25-39 age cohort, some 40% had zero attainment, whereas in Korea the percentage with zero attainment is too small to read (Crespo et al., p. 8). See Section 3 for further discussion of these issues. That section provides statistical historical background to show that the countries are historically comparable at the chosen time periods and also provides a deeper analysis of achievements in Korea and Japan in the period after early educational success.

Issue 2: Stress

It is not unheard of for popular commentators to claim that Korea and Japan's education systems (Korea more than Japan) are pressure-cookers for their youth. And many scholars and opinion leaders have friends or relatives in these countries and can personally attest to the pressure. In fact, some Korean parents send their children to live in school districts (typically in well-off suburbs) in the US that have very good schools but that are much less pressure-ridden than Korean schools (Atkins 2008, Yoon 2022).¹⁸ But what do the objective measures say? One extreme case is the youth suicide rate (which is evidently not caused only by schooling pressure and is a fairly good indicator of mental health). This rate, according to World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) data, is no higher in Korea and Japan than in other countries that are generally seen by commentators as having education systems that are far more relaxed. In 2019, the average suicide rate per 100,000 for the age group 10 to 19 in Korea and Japan was 5.7, and for Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and the United States, the average was 6.7 (WHO, 2021). These rates have been increasing over the past 20 years for Korea and Japan, and have been decreasing in the comparator countries. With respect to more general mental issues, the proportion of youth 10-19 with anxiety disorders in Korea and Japan averaged 4.0%, compared with 5.8% in Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and the United States in 2019 (Our World in Data, 2022). Similarly, the proportion of youths with depression averaged 1.7 in Japan and Korea and 4.0 in the other countries (Our World in Data, 2022). (Of course, this could be an issue of perception if mental health issues are differently defined and more stigmatized in Korea and Japan. Also, it may be the case that the stress in Japan and Korea is mostly school-induced and the other countries it is more societal. But in that case perhaps schools, or the overall system, have a protective effect on non-school stress. One can speculate only so far.) So, this does not

¹⁷ These numbers are provided only approximately as they were read from a graphic in the paper.

¹⁸ Here is a typical example:

https://www.inquirer.com/philly/education/More_Korean_families_send_kids_to_US_to_study.html, and another: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1060268/south-korea-willingness-to-send-their-children-to-study-abroad/>.

fit well with the image that is often conveyed in popular, even high-brow, media. That said, subclinical stress is a real-enough issue, and many people may experience that in Korea and Japan.

Issue 3: Rote Memorization

It is also a popular perception that Korea and Japan's systems are dominated by rote memorization and, in more exaggerated versions of this narrative, only by rote memorization. For example, a Google search of the compounded search terms "korea rote memorization educational system" produces some 5.5 million hits. A large majority of those hits, including many from within Korea itself, echo this sentiment.¹⁹ Casual evidence is adduced that no Korean has ever won a Nobel prize in science or literature. Yet it is arguably the case that Korea (and Japan) have some of the best electronics, massive ship-building, and automobile industries in the world. Japanese and Korean firms such as Hyundai, Toyota and Mitsubishi in automobiles (and other sectors), and Samsung, LG, and Sony in electronics, add up to about 12% of the most innovative firms in the world.²⁰ In fact, Bloomberg, as of 2021, rates Korea as the most innovative economy in the world, and INSEAD, the renowned business school, ranks it 5th.²¹ These industries innovate massively, they do not simply imitate. Add heavy industry areas such as the dominance of Daewoo in shipbuilding, and then cultural exports such as K-pop and Korean cinema and serial production for giants such as Netflix. Relevant in the current fraught global environment, Korea has emerged as a creative and efficient maker of advanced heavy weapons: Finland's much-vaunted army is using Korean tanks and even surplus Korean howitzers are considered good enough by Finland.²² And it is not just the giant firms: Korean small firms are also highly innovative.²³ In the realm of common sense and relatively casual empiricism, then, it is very difficult to believe that one could have such best-in-world firms and industries (that do innovate) if one's labor force had only routine and rote skills.

But what can one say about these issues based on the only "hard" data we were able to find? First, generically, it would be hard to argue that one can do well in an assessment such as PISA merely by regurgitating knowledge, despite popular or even specialist criticism in this direction.²⁴ Second, more specifically, in one of few comparative international assessments of something that could be called 21st century skills, or specifically "Problem Solving", in PISA 2012, Korea

¹⁹ For instance, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/181_254202.html.

²⁰ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-the-most-innovative-companies-in-2021/>

²¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-03/south-korea-leads-world-in-innovation-u-s-drops-out-of-top-10>, <https://knowledge.insead.edu/entrepreneurship/the-worlds-most-innovative-countries-2021-17401>.

²² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/25/asia/south-korea-defense-industry-weapons-intl-hnk-dst-ml/index.html> and <https://defence-blog.com/finland-to-buy-more-heavy-howitzers-amid-russia-threat/>.

²³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01466-7>

²⁴ See for example: <https://davidlabaree.com/2021/02/25/lets-measure-what-no-one-teaches-unpacking-the-pisa-problem/>. PISA self-advertises as having a problem-solving and application orientation as its core (see <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/37474503.pdf>), specifically since it does not even claim to measure bits of knowledge acquired through curricula. We are not competent enough in these matters to judge the validity of these claims, but having examined many items in PISA, it seems to us a reasonable claim.

and Japan scored 2nd and 3rd in the world. The skills measured *intentionally* stay away from subject matter knowledge and focus instead on “an individual’s capacity to engage in cognitive processing to understand and resolve problem situations where a method of solution is not immediately obvious. It includes the willingness to engage with such situations in order to achieve one’s potential as a constructive and reflective citizen” (Perkins and Shiel 2012). And, interestingly, in general, across all countries, the correlation between problem-solving scores and the more traditional academic scores that some commentators like to minimize, is very high: between 0.75 and 0.8, and Korea and Japan excel at both. (They were very near the top on both classical items and were second and third on problem solving).

Conclusion: why Korea and Japan?

In short, given that Korea and Japan succeeded in developing their education systems from a fairly low level, very fast and with great intentionality, and using a good bit of policy borrowing and policy rejection from the West, they may be interesting models for developing countries today to study. Korea and Japan not only produce some of the highest results in learning assessments, on average, but inequality in the distribution of learning is extremely low. And it is difficult to believe, based on hard data and on ratings of innovativeness, that Japan or Korea are only rote-learning cultures (though there is certainly some of that). It would seem that there are some cultural feelings of “sour grapes” from the West, or a sort of envy, in the accusations that these systems use only rote learning. And while there is evidence that Korean and Japanese youth are stressed, the data do not seem to indicate that these levels are epidemic or as dire as is often stated by commentators in the popular press. Either that, or commentators are quite mistaken about the notion that so-called rote learning, on the one hand, and problem-solving and creativity, on the other, are cognitively incompatible with each other, or that systems are not able to emphasize both.

There remain many cautions that need to be admitted, which we look at in detail below. We go into detail about what may be some of the lessons one could extract from the experience of Korea and Japan for developing countries, after noting which aspects of the historical context are similar and which are not.

1.3 Policy borrowing in the current environment

This section provides a brief overview of processes of educational policy formation in the current context and focuses on the interplay between national governments and international actors. We do this to document that taking on this issue is relevant, because there is indeed a good bit of policy borrowing that takes place. Section [5.3](#) below describes the historical pathways that led here, with particular attention paid to the rising influence of international agencies and multilateral development banks, as well as recent big goal regimes like the MDGs, SDGs, and Education for All.

Today, proactive bilateral listening tours of the kind undertaken, on a demand-side basis, by Japan and Korea at the turn of the 19th century occur with less frequency, and the role of

multilateral development funders, development agencies, and international regimes like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education for All (EFA) has grown significantly. Taken collectively, their influence spans loan conditionalities and policy-based lending; the production of knowledge (new research, pilot projects, economic and sector analysis, and impact evaluations); the provision of advice, technical assistance, and training; and convening policy dialogues and learning events to disseminate knowledge products (Mundy and Verger, 2016). With the expanding engagement of international regimes in education policy formation, policies are increasingly adopted by these regimes at the international or regional levels first before they are introduced to education ministries (Eta and Vuban, 2018). Edwards (2013) details three useful concepts that can be used to describe how current national educational policies are influenced by international actors. First, *percolation* refers to the manner in which an education problem is framed by knowledge products provided by international regimes, research study committees, and others as background information at the outset of the policymaking process, and how this initial framing tends to anchor subsequent policy debates. Next, *reverberation* refers to national actors' engagement with international knowledge brokers, often donors or development agencies, for guidance and assurance regarding ongoing reforms and their adaptation to the national context. Reverberation, as we'll see in the examples of The Gambia and South Africa below, offers space for formal and informal contestation by national actors including civil society. It also, in our view, encompasses the tendency to go along with international priorities not from external pressure or genuine conviction, but as a way to demonstrate modernity or legitimacy on the global stage, for example via elevated concern for marginalized student populations like girls, learners with disabilities, or students from pastoral communities. Finally, *structural legitimation* refers to events that publicize relevant research by international actors, domestic think tanks, and civil society groups, which legitimize their perspectives and validate their role in national level policy formation. While perhaps Edwards presents these phenomena (and the role of international actors in national-level policy discourse more generally) as a criticism of the agencies, the fact that these things happen does not imply a lack of agency by the government, nor homogeneity of perspectives from national actors in response to international influencing efforts.

Here we dive more deeply into the development and subsequent percolation of knowledge products. Acknowledging that no produced knowledge is politically neutral, we are referring here to the statistical data and technical analyses which describe the vision and rationale represented in official policy and project documents, and which are produced by donors, development actors, and government and non-government organizations (Manion 2012, Brock et al 2004). These knowledge products, and the policies they promote, tend to focus on particular components of educational systems like foundational literacy, girls' education, or teacher training. As political appointees, ministers of education may not always have an education background (Hunter and Brown, 2000), and national funding for education research is rarely adequate to answer all policy-relevant research questions in a timely manner. In his research on education reforms in El Salvador, Edwards (2013) notes that research study committees often generate (with the help of international research support) studies that consider implementation issues (operational/practical level) rather than politically charged issues such as inequality.

Over time, the extent to which statistical data dominate these knowledge products has increased dramatically. Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala's 2003 World Bank report, *Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015*, offers an excellent example of this, featuring 52 tables and figures encompassing educational financing gaps, regression analyses of key education system parameters, class size in relation to teacher salary, and evolution of average teacher salary in primary education by region and sub-region 1975-2000. This increased emphasis on measurement helps guide decision making, but elides aspects of learning that are more difficult to measure. Goodhart's Law posits that an indicator used as a policy target is no longer valid as an indicator, yet the cascade of indicator-informed policy targets (and the tendency to mistake indicators for policy targets following the influence of highly numericalized international goal regimes like the MDGs, SDGs, and EFA) has both enriched and muddied the highly complex technical world of education policy and its associated knowledge products.

While knowledge production serves as a sort of soft power in processes of educational policy development, we should spend a moment here noting the role of policy-based lending by multilateral development banks and their more overt influence on policy formation. This is relatively soft power, but not as soft as simply dissemination knowledge. Rather than paying for specific projects, policy-based lending offers funding to top up government budgets contingent on the enactment of certain policies and policy actions in short or medium term, with funding tranches released only when policy reforms take place. Strong government ownership and commitment to reform is typically mandatory (though very hard to confirm as funds and policy actions can be fungible), as is close coordination with other donors and development agencies in drafting reforms (ADB 2022). Today's policy-based lending grew out of the structural adjustment era, expanded in the post-Washington Consensus among OECD governments with increased focus on poverty reduction, and coalesced around harmonized goals across aid agencies, including a focus on universal education. Despite this increased focus, it is worth noting that only a small percentage of policy-based loans target the education sector. Between 1990-2021, education and social protection projects made up only 7% of the Inter American Development Bank's policy-based loans (Avellán et al. 2022), while a mere \$300m of ADB's \$14.2bn committed to policy-based lending is allocated for education for the years 2022-2024 (ADB 2022).

Thus, we acknowledge that "aid is not an open marketplace" (Crawford et al 2021, p. 10), and that aid recipients in general are rarely in a position to reject decisions made by donors. Yet governments hold considerable agency in implementation, in part because the agencies' officials themselves are often judged on rates of grant disbursement and loan placement, which to some degree leads to collusion and acquiescence in governments' own violation of the conditionalities, or can lead to negotiations that soften the conditionalities. Agency officials and government officials also often get rewarded, either explicitly or in terms of professional esteem, for innovativeness, and this requires collaboration. So, the perspectives of those who ultimately decide and implement education policies deserve a closer look. Crawford et al. interviewed senior government officials in 35 LMICs and uncovered critical misalignments between government officials and the policies promoted by international regimes with regard to the

effectiveness of specific educational interventions, the state of their country's education system and learning outcomes, and the broader purpose of education. While much of the international education ecosystem has coalesced in recent years around the global learning crisis, or the unacceptably high percentage of children who proceed through primary education without achieving basic literacy and numeracy, this discourse has not made as big an impact on national actors as donors might have hoped. (Though, judging by how long it took other priorities, such as girls' education, to become as widespread as they have become, it may be too early to come to a conclusion on this issue.) When asked directly about their educational priorities, education officials consistently ranked technical and vocational education and training above foundational learning. This appeared to be related to different understandings of current levels of foundational learning as well as different valuations of the political risks posed by unemployed youth and a preference for an education system geared toward creating dutiful citizens. "Donors who are committed to principles of 'country ownership'," the authors conclude, "must grapple with the fact that countries have legitimate education goals beyond basic skills, e.g. jobs and political cohesion" (Crawford et al 2021, p. 28).

The cases of girls' education in The Gambia and early grade reading in South Africa, below, show some of the to-and-fro discussion of experiments and policies, and donor role versus country role, in two fairly canonical areas of donor interest in the last 20-30 years. They illustrate much of what has been said in this section so far, but can be skipped without loss of continuity.

Girls' education in The Gambia. Regularly hailed as a leader in girls' education, The Gambia offers relevant insights into national-level policy actors' contestation of the framing of national education policy by global policymakers and practitioners. The education sector's historical reliance on external development assistance has resulted in national education policies which are heavily influenced by the priorities, discourses, and practices of international donors (Manion 2012, p. 234). Since the late 1990s, national documents have formally expressed commitments to girls' education, which are typically framed in terms of its contribution to human capital formation and poverty alleviation and pegged to EFA and MDG targets. Focusing on the 2007 launch workshop for the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) in The Gambia, Manion's 2012 case study documents critical debates regarding the meaning of gender equality, its importance, and what it intends to achieve, as well as distinctions between official policy positions and the positions of those responsible for their enactment at the national level. Intended to forge consensus among national actors around girls' education, the workshop's purpose was formed by UNGEI's partnership approach of using MDG and EFA benchmarks to shape a unified national vision and common goals. Instead, it surfaced outstanding tensions concerning the relevance of girls' education and girls' empowerment efforts more generally, particularly surrounding debates over terminology (equity vs. equality, gender vs. girls) and questioned the emphasis on girls' education at a time of dropping primary enrolment among boys. While these tensions could not be reconciled during the gathering, they raise the question of how common "common goals" truly are, given the power differentials within education partnerships like UNGEI, and

given the different ideological orientations and justifications for participation of various partners.

Early grade reading in South Africa. Between 2010 and 2020, South Africa's Department of Basic Education policies pendulated from a dedicated focus on primary school reforms which emphasized early grade reading, to a diluted focus that encompassed 27 different priorities (effectively deprioritizing reading), swinging back to the reprioritisation of early reading with the stated goal of "ensuring that all children learn to read for meaning by age 10" (Ramaphosa 2019; Spaul and Pretorius 2022). Following 2016 PIRLS results that found that 78 percent of South African schoolchildren failed to meet the lowest proficiency level for reading, South African researchers conducted research including large scale experimental trials to understand how to improve reading outcomes at scale and support policy development. The relationship between this research and policy change has not been linear (Spaul and Pretorius, 2022). A South African RISE Political Economy research team applied the RISE 5x4 Diagnostic Tool to sort out why, despite a well-developed ministerial planning framework that reflected this research and prioritized early reading, decisionmakers were not taking action via resource allocation or implementation strategies (Fleisch et al, 2023). They found high-level political and policy commitments to be a necessary but insufficient condition for improvement in early grade reading, particularly in a context where half of current teachers' pre-service training took place under the highly unequal apartheid-era teacher training system which, among other shortcomings, lacked emphasis on reading pedagogy or content knowledge (Spaul and Pretorius, 2022). Priority areas uncovered include professional capacity (deep sectoral experience and expertise by those in leadership roles at the provincial and district levels), and accurate, regular measurement of early grade learning that is available to stakeholders (including parents and other community groups). To that end, the 2030 Reading Panel has been convened, comprised of former political leaders, former INGO leaders, current literacy NGO leaders, higher ed leaders, philanthropists and faith leaders from across South Africa to provide long-term, apolitical leadership on foundational literacy including budgetary advocacy and implementation research related to key topics including the improvement of preservice teacher training and the publication of teacher textbooks aligned with now-universalised student workbooks (McKay and Spaul, 2022).

Ultimately, borrowed policies (and their implementation) must not be imagined to be static things, but rather "the product of agency and resistance, negotiation, bargaining, and accommodation, constantly evolving over time" (Spren 2004, p. 102). Further, policies get "tired" the more they are borrowed, as there is less and less adaptation or revision of basic design as the idea gets copied repeatedly. While international regimes, their framing of educational challenges, and their emphasis on measurement have emerged as powerful forces in national policy development, the technocratic solutions they promote address, at their best, only components of education systems writ large.

Again, we are not offering a value assessment of the content of these components (indeed, many are essential to educational system functioning), but simply observing that as components, they do not define the educational system's purpose in the holistic way that national development or national identity do. Some countries internalize these components and the external support available for them into their broader purpose (which, depending on the country's negotiating position, may free up internal funds to allocate to national priorities out of vogue with international agencies) and those seem to work well. In countries where the education system's broader purpose is swallowed up by competing internal demands, the changing winds of donor conditionalities, and short-term political thinking, the result tends to be more isomorphic mimicry.

2. Policy borrowing framework

2.1 Literature review

This section introduces policy borrowing frameworks and describes the “signatures” of effective borrowing. We then outline how we have adapted these frameworks for our purposes. A historical narrative of the cases of Japan and Korea provides material for analyzing possible borrowings, in Section 4.

Before turning to our policy borrowing framework, it is worth reflecting on why some of the misperceptions discussed in the previous section exist. This paper is not the only one to note that there are often misperceptions or biases that affect countries’ willingness to borrow ideas from Japan or Korea. You (2020) has even observed that it may be akin to what Said (1978) and others have called “Orientalism,” namely, a Western tendency to stereotype which can lead to the idea that one cannot borrow from cultures that are “exotic” or too different from one’s own. But, importantly, Korea’s and Japan’s systems had already borrowed much from the West. In fact, the ability to borrow carefully, critically, and with adaptation, as Korea and Japan did, may be one of the hallmarks of vibrant education systems. Borrowing, when it does happen, can also be botched, especially when the practice borrowed is itself not clearly effective and the borrowing is more like mimicry than carried out with full understanding (and even re-design) and commitment (see Muralidharan and Singh 2020 on a borrowing of the UK’s OFSTED, when the evidence about OFSTED is not even completely clear to the UK itself, as shown by the many debates around it).²⁵ The debate around Green’s popularizing ideas around Japan’s success underscores the fact that borrowing happens, and happens extensively, but also that one has to take extreme care as to what is borrowed.

A note on language before we proceed: there exists an ever-expanding range of terms and frameworks to describe the interactions between country governments and external sources of policy ideas, as well as their eventual (re)formulation into official policy text. To the extent that “borrowed” policies are not returned when the borrower is done with them, the term itself is a bit of a misnomer and its use varies within the literature.

Some commentators (e.g., Cowen 2000) distinguish proper policy *borrowing* from a *cargo cult* approach, and decry the latter as an approach where “best practice” models are uncritically exported wholesale across national boundaries. Phillips and Ochs (2004) define policy borrowing as a “conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another” (p. 774). Dolowitz and Marsh refer to *policy transfer* as “a process by which knowledge of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, and ideas in another political system” (2000, p. 5). This concurs with *policy enactment*, defined by Bartlett and Vavrus as the process “during which social actors interpret and selectively implement policies, thereby adapting ideas and discourses developed in a different place and potentially at

²⁵ See <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/mar/06/scrap-ofsted-pros-cons-alternatives>.

a different historical moment in accordance with their own interests as well as symbolic, material, and institutional constraints” (2014, p. 132), and acknowledges that this process occurs on a subnational basis as well (Sutton and Levinson 2001).

Raffe constrains his conceptualisation of policy borrowing to a search across the international landscape for universal best practices and contrasts this with *policy learning*, which involves more careful tailoring of policies to the national context (Raffe and Spours, 2007; Raffe 2011). Policy learning elevates the importance of international comparison to learn about one’s own educational system and policy history, to better understand processes of change, to more thoughtfully identify policy options that match national aims, needs and circumstances, to better anticipate issues that possible policies may raise, and to ensure effective policy-practice feedback loops (Raffe 2011, p. 1). He makes the distinction between using international examples to enrich, rather than short-cut policy analysis, and recommends that countries not only study “successful” systems or aspects of systems, but consider policy failures as well. Burdett and O’Donnell (2016) similarly distinguish between *policy borrowing* on the one hand, and *policy learning* and *referencing* on the other, and assert that in the latter two cases, external data and design principles are used to inform local solutions, rather than directly transferring policies and practices.

Edwards (2013) brings together four different perspectives to international processes of education policy formation: policy attraction, policy negotiation, policy imposition, and policy hybridization. Using primarily the work of David Phillips, Edwards notes that *policy attraction* refers to the proactive efforts of a country to borrow policies (usually bilaterally) from another country and customize them for implementation in the borrowing country. In Phillips and Ochs’ later work, policy attraction is considered one of four stages of their policy borrowing model, followed by decision-making, implementation, and internalization (2004). *Policy negotiation* acknowledges the contestation processes that take place as national groups reference international rhetoric and knowledge products via three stages of educational change, namely external transactions, political manipulation, and, like Phillips and Ochs, a final internalization stage (Spren 2004). *Policy imposition* uses a political economy lens that places development aid relationships at the center of reforms, although we also apply it to Japan and Korea’s relationships with occupying forces following World War II. Policy imposition is concerned with structural issues, unequal power relationships, and the framing of educational reforms as always necessitating external funding for implementation. Donor perspectives are embedded in the structure and procedures of aid. Importantly, this includes commissioned or in-house research which frames the problem to be addressed (and brackets the range of possible solutions) and provides evidence to validate funding conditionalities (Samoff 1993). Finally, *policy hybridization* abandons the dichotomy of global forces and national governments, and confronts the complex nature of education systems, and the non-linear, multi-directional relationships between countries, country actors, and international actors (Popkewitz 2000a,b; Schriewer 2000). While policy hybridization does a good job of acknowledging just how complex these systems are, it seems to have limits in terms of its applicability to analysis.

Rather than delving too deeply into the various distinctions and debates across each of these terms and their usage, in this paper we apply the broadest possible usage of the term *policy borrowing* to encompass all of the activities and dynamics described above, as we do not want to turn the paper into a scholarly discussion of the term itself, and instead focus on a relatively common-sense, but not hopefully not naïve, understanding of the term and the concept.

Educational policy borrowing is defined by two (non-mutually exclusive) schools of thought: normative and analytical. Normative approaches are concerned with the identification, dissemination, and results of best practices borrowed from elsewhere. They use standardized comparisons to identify the specific practices (e.g., class size, level of training of the teachers, use or non-use of more structured pedagogy) of effective and high-quality education systems, and extract the most effective system variables which can then be used as indicators when setting global benchmarks. Sometimes whole systems are touted as effective, as a package. The analytical approach addresses why a specific (borrowed) policy resonates in a specific (borrowing) place and time, how that policy is translated and adapted, and its influence on existing power dynamics (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). A key distinction is made between policies borrowed from specific contexts via direct contact and “study tours” between countries, and those which form generalized “best practices” derived from a variety of contexts and often filtered through academics or consulting firms. The latter emerge from a flurry of transnational policy borrowing which results in a policy becoming deterritorialized and reframed instead as international standard, “everyone’s and nobody’s reform simultaneously” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016 p. 386). Discussing policy borrowing as regards teacher education reforms, Yeom and Ginsburg note “a certain degree of convergence (versus divergence) in educational ideologies, structures, and practices across countries” (2007, p. 299). For our purposes, in addition to intentional borrowing from policies and best practices we also include unintentional borrowing which comes as part of a larger package of intentionally-borrowed policies. This is likely more common in developing countries, where policy borrowing is often linked to external funding which may be contingent upon the import of a particular reform package.

Educational systems are most receptive to new ideas at moments of heightened policy contestation, as decision makers seek external validation or a “certification effect” for their ideas. A particular context’s success is interpreted by would-be borrowers through the lens of controversial policy debates in their own countries, rather than the actual system variables. For example, Finland’s PISA performance is interpreted differently by Germany, Japan, Korea, and the United States (see Green Saraisky, 2015 and Takayama, Waldow, & Sung, 2013). In the narrative case studies below, we see that Japan’s Iwakura Mission (1871-1873) and Korea’s *Bobingsa* delegation (1883) were both undertaken during times of radical opening and transition, fueled by fears of falling behind and ultimately falling prey to colonization from Western powers. Full-throated educational reform as a response to the threat of annihilation is, in fact, not uncommon, with several historical European examples following this pattern. Tsar Alexander II reformed Russia’s education system following their defeat by the West in the Crimean war. Similarly, after its humiliating defeat by Napoleon’s army in the early 19th century, Prussia reformed its education system to the form that was subsequently borrowed by the United States, Japan, much of Europe, and beyond. Following Prussia’s victory in the Franco-

Prussian war of 1870, a proverb emerged that “the battles of Königgrätz (1866) and Sedan (1870) have been decided by the Prussian primary teacher” (Nipperdey, 1990). In the late 19th century, the Colombian government hired six Prussian teacher training experts to develop Colombia’s teacher training college system (Loy, 1971), paying them out of their own pocket under a nine-year contract.

This highlights the importance of translation and adaptation: if leaders do not re-discover the rationale for a policy for their context, the policy is likely to be inadequately internalized and cannot be properly implemented, as limits to implementation are best discovered through consultation and openness to contestation. In the case studies below we make it clear how when these countries were “borrowing,” this borrowing was heavily contested by academia, a dawning civil society (in the modern sense), and professional organizations. It should be noted that all this happens not just in education but in other contexts. For instance, the privatization of savings schemes and incentives to get individuals to prudentially save for their own futures, to some degree borrowed by Chile from Singapore (Eisen 2000) but then copied more from Chile than from Singapore, often lost inertia when countries borrowed the design without deep evaluation of Chile’s own experience and discussion of how the borrower’s context shaped a possible *de novo* re-design (Kritzer 2000). It is also interesting that, as with education, countries sometimes turn their own success into a bit of a policy-export industry (at least through academics and consultants), somewhat as Finland has done as noted in the Introduction.²⁶

A few of the criteria that can be used to evaluate policy borrowing, and to help countries do it well (or not do it at all) are as follows, as derived from the literature (Saraisky 2015 and Takayama, Waldow, & Sung 2013, Cowen 2000, Pritchett 2011, Luhmann 1990). In this paper we apply these criteria, as listed below, explicitly or implicitly, both to how Japan and Korea borrowed from the West, and to how today’s developing countries could borrow from Japan and Korea in a solid manner.

2.2 Criteria, distilled from the literature, for use in this paper

Having reviewed the literature, we distilled the following criteria to determine whether reasonably appropriate policy borrowing, by Japan and Korea at the outset of their educational expansion processes, and by developing countries (and the agencies that provide assistance to them) today, are taking place. Sections [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), and [6](#) cover these issues, among others.

Substantive issues

1. Is there evidence that the country where the education policies are being borrowed from is successful in education (defined however is relevant) and also that those policies were in fact substantially responsible for the country’s educational success, and that that success is not due to third factors?

²⁶ See this somewhat self-promoting argument for exporting Chile’s system to the US, by one of the architects of Chile’s system: <https://fee.org/articles/how-we-privatized-social-security-in-chile/>.

2. How tied are the policies being borrowed to the historical sociology and politics of the originating country (e.g., the USA's land-grant university system being rooted in its independent 19th C. family farm system, or Germany's vocational-technical education being rooted in its guild system for hundreds of years)?
3. Is the borrowing motivation deeply in line with goals of improving the borrowing system or is the motivation relatively more superficial, having to do with being seen to be in fashion, or meeting a bureaucratic checklist or an electoral political promise that is not deeply felt and is as consensus-based as necessary?
4. How much questioning and adaptation can be done, or has been done? In particular, have constraints to implementation been analyzed carefully by involving the implementers on the ground? We note that adaptation, aside from its substantive value, can be useful because the very process of adaptation can "sell" the idea internally so that it does not come as a surprise to the officials who would implement it.
5. Is the borrowing done as a form of *cargo cult* copying, in Cowen's terminology (Cowen 2000) or "isomorphic mimicry" (Pritchett 2011²⁷), in the sense that adoption of the surfaces of the practice is not deepened into the structures and drive and deep purpose of real reform, or does not recognize the need for adaptation, or does not note that recognizing that need is a first signal that the borrowing is sincere rather than shallow.

Salesmanship or policy marketing issues

6. Whose impulse drove the borrowing: the borrowers, the "lender," or a third-party such as an aid agency or consultants?
7. Do the policy lender or lender-based consultants have an agenda to export the model for enhancement of national reputation, or even from a consultancy-sales incentive?

Of substantive relevance to our narrative, and as noted elsewhere, Steiner-Khamsi (2016) notes that South Korea has internalized and critically reflected on some of the negative stereotypes of their own system, which resulted in despair when, around 2008, public sentiment had turned against Korea's extremely competitive road to advanced education, and against increasing family investment in cram schools and paid tutors. Its chart-topping performance on PISA the next year wasn't celebrated as a victory for the public education system, but rather used as a warning to demonstrate the dependency on a high-stress, privatized, and increasingly inequitable education industry. In the Introduction to this paper we also note this internalization, but note also that there may be empirical reasons to think that the stress issues are somewhat overplayed. Nevertheless, "(a) against all international expectations, Korean policy makers refrain from 'glorifying' their educational system even though—with a few exceptions—their system ranks top in each and every OECD- and IEA-type student assessment study" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016 p. 385). In contrast, Japanese media glorified the Japanese educational system after the findings of TIMSS had been reported (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). We note this interesting

²⁷ See also an interview by the Center for Global Development at <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/one-size-doesn%E2%80%99t-fit-all-lant-pritchett-mimicry-development>.

difference between Korea and Japan when we discuss the bases for their education ODA programs.²⁸

²⁸ In this area of policy borrowing, Korean officials and commentators (foreign and domestic) hold Korea to high standards. Two examples, with our comments: 1) "Despite the consistent effort, Korean education is still blamed for the absence of its own identity in both theory and practice. Much of the problems are alleged to be associated with the indiscreet acceptance of educational theories from foreign countries" (Chung-II et al. 1985, p. 46). Again, another example of the high expectations to which Koreans hold themselves; from our outsider's perspective (and in comparison with elsewhere) their acceptance of educational theories from foreign countries involved a lot of nuance, iteration, and discretion. Another: "To that end, a variety of teaching methods, mostly borrowed from the U.S., were introduced to Korean education. For example, child-centered, experience-centered, and community-centered learning, programmed instruction, individualized learning, discovery learning, mastery learning, audio-visual aids, and standardized tests, to name only a few, were introduced. However, these innovations were rarely fully incorporated into Korean schools and consequently exercised limited influence over student learning" (Masoner & Klassen, 1979, p. 51). However, just because Masoner and Klassen said they weren't "fully incorporated" doesn't mean that they weren't piloted, adapted and iterated to a state that the authors could no longer recognize, or were unwilling to recognize as a reproduction with adequate implementation fidelity.

3. Statistical background: context and achievements

In this section we hope to accomplish two things by looking at numbers in some detail. First, we hope to show that, in terms of economic and demographic context, the periods and countries chosen, namely Japan roughly 1880 to 1930 (at least for the rapid-expansion period) and Korea roughly 1945 to 1985, and a range of developing countries more or less now and in recent decades, are appropriate. Second, the statistics help characterize some of the features of the Korean and Japanese education systems that make them tempting targets for borrowing and emulation, though with the great caution noted in Section 2. The countries chosen for this section generally represent Korea and Japan themselves, of course, some other important OECD countries (UK), a late-industrializer OECD country (Spain), and three developing countries that are important recipients of development agency attention and range from the relatively educationally more effective to the less effective.

3.1 Historical appropriateness of context

A succinct summary of the appropriateness of comparison can be had by looking at how long it took various countries to go from approximately 1 year of schooling (note: not grades of schooling but years of schooling, that is, counting in repetition—data on systematic and historical data on actual grades are hard or impossible to come by) for their population to approximately 6 years. [Figure 1](#) below shows the average years of schooling for the population since 1870, for our key two countries, and also a few comparisons: the UK, as an early industrializer, Spain as an OECD late industrializer, and three African countries, Kenya (relatively high years of achievement and learning outcomes), Uganda (medium), and Malawi (low).

The three large triangles made up of dotted lines show the change from about 1 year to 6 years for Japan and Korea individually, and then an approximate composite of Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda (Malawi had not actually achieved 6 years yet, at least not according to these data). The time from 1 to 6 was about 60 years for all of these. Thus, the pace of increase was about the same, though of course both the initial year, and the number of years of schooling by 2010, are very different, about 6 for the African countries and 12 for Japan and Korea. In this sense the comparisons are appropriate. The black symbols (triangles for Japan, circles for Korea, and diamonds for the composite of the comparator countries) also show when the change happened and that it happened over approximately the same period of 50-60 years: roughly 1890 to 1950 for Japan, 1915 to 1975 for Korea, and 1970 to 2010 for the African countries.²⁹ (As a bit of an aside, it is interesting to note that this process of transition has taken about as long in today's context, even with all the foreign aid and international goals, as it did for countries that had no aid and no global goals, a point also made by Clemens 2004.) Thus, the periods chosen for the main focus of our comparisons are also reasonable: these periods were, in Japan and Korea, historically consistent in their time path, although earlier in time, featuring large education efforts

²⁹ We focus on a period later than 1915 to 1975 for Korea because it is nearly impossible to find data on education in Korea prior to 1950 or so, as it was not an independent nation but occupied by Japan.

of the same kind that developing countries have attempted, and succeeded at, to a significant degree but only partially as we will see, in the last few decades.

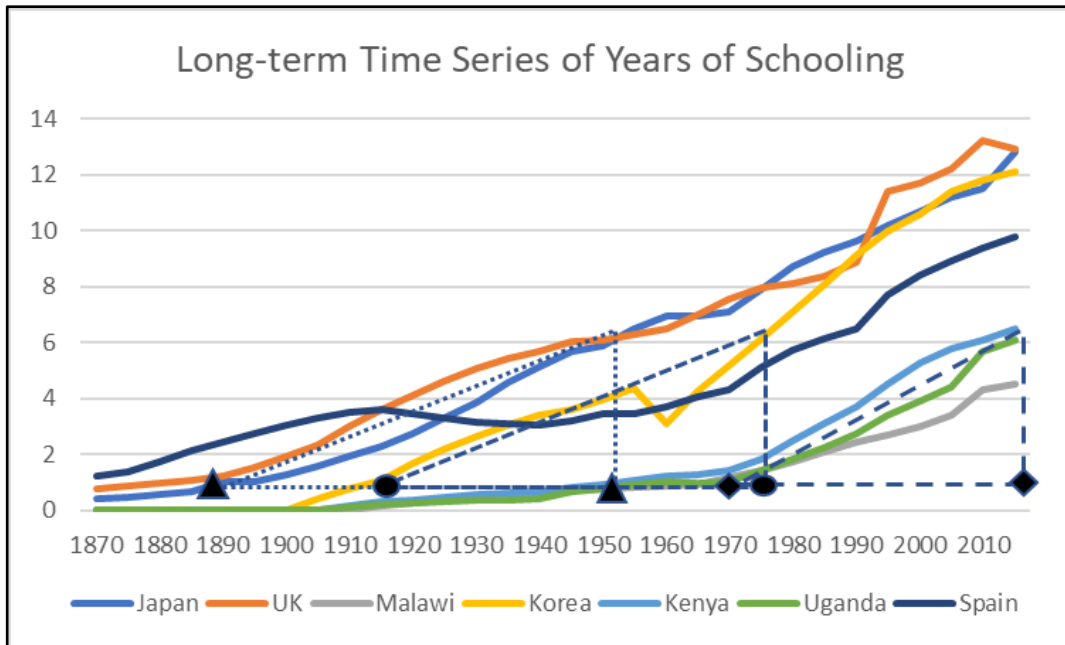


Figure 1. Time to transition in Japan, Korea, and comparator countries
 Source: composed with data downloaded from [Our World in Data](https://ourworldindata.org/)

If the changes in Japan and Korea took as many years as the same changes have taken in the comparator developing countries, one might then ask, why look to Japan and Korea? The answer is that Japan and Korea achieved a large increase in the number of years of schooling, quickly, but did so without neglecting both excellence, proxied by learning outcomes, and equality, measured either directly via learning outcomes (as in the Introduction and below in this section, in the subsection on equality) or as signaled by the fact that *all* children completed primary and lower secondary schooling very early on, so that none were left behind. As we will see below, this is hardly the case today in the comparator developing countries: many children do not complete even primary education and it is invariably the poorer children who do not complete, while a significant proportion of the privileged go on to secondary and even higher education.

In making comparisons, it is key to take context into account. We start by noting that there are many factors that affect educational supply per child that are either completely or partially out of the control of education authorities in any country, at least in the short and medium term. A useful way to look at this is to consider an “accounting decomposition” such as the equation below. An “accounting decomposition” is a heuristic or mnemonic device that has to be true by definition, but ought not to be made up of ideas that are inherently extraneous, since they are true by definition. They are not, by any stretch of the imagination, a “causal” model of anything. To be useful, the concepts can be relatively synthetic, summatory, or stylized.

The equation is:

$$\frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Child}} = \frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Ed Inputs}} \frac{\text{Ed Inputs}}{\text{Ed Budget}} \frac{\text{Ed Budget}}{\text{GDP}} \frac{\text{GDP}}{\text{Pop}} \frac{\text{Pop}}{\text{Child}}$$

We “model” education per child, or $\frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Child}}$, in terms of five factors: 1) the amount of education that can be produced by a basket of educational inputs (teachers and their quality, books and their quality, the quality of the curriculum, etc.), denoted as $\frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Ed Inputs}}$, 2) the affordability of that

basket, denoted by $\frac{\text{Ed Inputs}}{\text{Ed Budget}}$ (that is, how many such baskets can be afforded by the budget),

3) how much effort the country is making, denoted by $\frac{\text{Ed Budget}}{\text{GDP}}$, or the share of education in the national income,³⁰ 4) the size of the economy, namely the resources the country has available, denoted as $\frac{\text{GDP}}{\text{Pop}}$, or GDP per capita, and 5) the level of total support per child as driven by the

age structure, denoted by $\frac{\text{Pop}}{\text{Child}}$ —the more people there are per child (the inverse of the child dependency ratio), the more easily they can be taxed to support each child, and the more likely there will be individual parental effort spent per child. Note that every denominator in the first four terms crosses out with the numerator in the next term, leaving as a result $\frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Child}}$. This is why

the equation has to be true by definition. Now, the only factor over which education authorities have much say is education policy and planning and pedagogy, namely $\frac{\text{Ed}}{\text{Ed Inputs}}$: how

productive and what is the quality of the education inputs used, such as teacher labor, books, etc. The authorities have some control over how expensive inputs are, namely $\frac{\text{Ed Inputs}}{\text{Ed Budget}}$, but

only within limits as, say, teacher salaries are affected by other salaries in the society: they cannot be too out of line especially in the downward direction, or else the sector would get no teachers. The last three terms (out of five terms) are just as important as the others, and yet are totally out of the control of the education authorities. This is why context matters.

There are factors that affect, in particular, the cost of inputs or $\frac{\text{Ed Inputs}}{\text{Ed Budget}}$, that are also highly

contextual but cannot be shown in this simple decomposition equation. For example, population density and urbanization make it cheaper to afford education (affect the second term right-hand

³⁰ Note that this is implicitly a combination of overall fiscal effort (total budget over GDP) and educational effort (educational budget over total budget).

term above), as one does not need so many small schools, and also affects the amount of education one can get out of a basket of inputs, as it is easier to keep parents involved and both supporting and holding schools accountable, and children do not have to walk as far. Also, urbanization is related to the overall level of development and probably factors into how much education can be produced by the basket of inputs, since the children of literate parents tend to be easier to educate, thus making the basket of inputs more apparently productive. These “deep context” factors should also be taken into account, even if they do not figure directly in the equation.

[Table 2](#) shows the contextual factors discussed above, for which one can find numerical and/or historical data for the periods in question. The more qualitative factors, especially those that are amenable to educational policy, planning, and pedagogy, are discussed in the narrative sections of the paper, though some of the indicators that denote the achievements of good planning and policy are also highlighted in this section, below, as well as in the Introduction. For most of the data the base period is the year in which educational achievement, as measured by years of schooling per person, stood at 1: a very low but non-zero number. For most of the poorer parts of the developing world, that is roughly 1965 or so. For industrialized countries, that is 1890 or so. For Korea, a late industrializer, it is 1915.

Table 2. Key context indicators: Korea, Japan, and comparator countries

	Start of educational growth period	GDP per capita		Education expenditure as % of GDP, during period of expansion	Demographic burden (youth dependency ratio) at beginning of expansion	Population density		Urbanization (% population urban)		Fractionalization ³¹
		At start of educational growth period	2010			Start	2010	Start	2010	See source
Japan	1895	1854	NR	1.6% to 3% dep. on estimates	0.46	109	NR	11	NR	0.28
UK	1880	6132	NR	1.7%	0.35	150	NR	75	NR	0.39
Spain	1870	1809	NR	1.1%	0.48	32	NR	22	NR	0.43
Korea	1915	1261, 998 in 1915 and 1950	NR	2.3%, 1955 onwards only	0.75, 1950	104	NR	16	NR	0.33
Kenya	1955	1144	2580	5.6%	1.1	12	74	6	24	0.73
Malawi	1965	633	1092	4.0%	0.83	44	154	5	16	0.83
Uganda	1965	1382	1831	2.8%	0.93	34	162	4	19	0.78

Notes and sources:

Education expenditure as a share of GDP:

Japan: Japan Statistical Association. (2006). Historical Statistics of Japan. <https://japanknowledge.com/en/contents/toukeisouran/>, <https://ourworldindata.org/financing-education>

³¹ Fractionalization, here, is defined as the degree of differences in ethnicity, religion, and languages.

Korea: Cha, M.S., Kim, N.N., Park, K.J., Park, Y. (2022). Historical Statistics of Korea. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3874-2>

UK and Spain: <https://ourworldindata.org/financing-education>

Kenya, Malawi, Uganda: World Bank's EdStats, <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=Education%20Statistics#>

Demographic Burden:

Japan and Korea: Mitchell, B.R. International Historical Statistics: Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Fifth Edition. Hampshire, UK, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan

Kenya, Malawi, Uganda: United Nations. World Population Prospects. 2022. POP/DB/WPP/Rev.2022/POP/F02-1. IGO:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/>

UK and Spain: calculated from the L_x function of the United Nations Model Life Tables West, using LE of 38 and 27 respectively for life expectancy in the UK and Spain at the appropriate point in time, namely 1885 and 1870.

GDP per capita (in constant 2011 international US\$):

All: <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth#economic-growth-over-the-long-run>

Urbanization:

For all except UK: <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization#urbanization-over-the-past-500-years>

UK: Davenport, R. (2020). "Urbanization and mortality in Britain, c. 1800–50". The Economic History Review. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12964>

Fractionalization: Alesina, A., Devleeschauwer, A. Easterly, W., Kurlat, S. and Romain, R. (2003). Fractionalization. Journal of Economic Growth 8(2): 155-194. https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4553003/alesinassrn_fractionalization.pdf.

We created an index of the weighted average of ethnic, linguistic, and religious fractionalization, with weights of 0.25, 0.25, and 0.5 respectively.

Population density: <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth#:~:text=Globally%20the%20average%20population%20density,large%20populations%20for%20their%20size>

[growth#:~:text=Globally%20the%20average%20population%20density,large%20populations%20for%20their%20size](https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth#:~:text=Globally%20the%20average%20population%20density,large%20populations%20for%20their%20size)

Note: in some cases estimations or interpolations had to be made. Details can be provided by lcrouch@rti.org.

Another contextual factor is GDP per capita growth over the period of educational expansion. A more expansive economy would make it easier to expand education (or any other spending). This is not simply because of affordability, but because of the psychological and political space created by the fact that, with growth (and a little bit of inflation), when adjustments need to be made, it is easier to keep one line of spending (e.g., agriculture) the same while allowing another (e.g., education) to grow. The former thus shrinks, but only relatively, not absolutely, and so there is less social tension.

Figure 2 shows the growth experience of Korea and Japan compared to some of the developing countries we are using in this section. The lines are keyed to 100 at the beginning of the *educational* growth spurts noted above, so they are not in real calendar time but only relative to each other and relative to when their educational growth spurt started (that is, going up from 1 year of schooling on average up to 6). The years of the start of the educational growth period are the same as shown in Table 1, and range from 1895 Japan to 1965 for Malawi and Uganda. Clearly, one of the comparator countries grew as fast as Japan, and the other two comparator countries grew a bit more slowly than Korea. Note that both Korea and Japan faced major turmoil sometime within the included period, and so did some of the comparator countries. But the point is that the story is varied in that Korea and Japan were not uniformly more outstanding in terms of growth of GDP per capita, during the period in question, than the comparator countries.

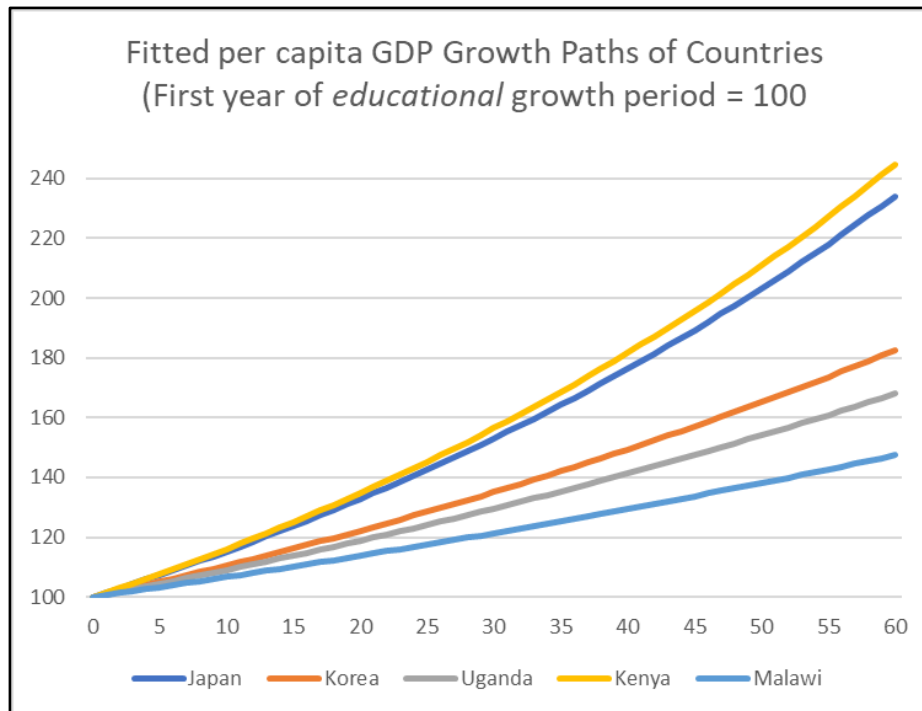


Figure 2. Long-term growth of GDP per capita

Source: Estimated from Our World in Data using standard natural logarithm growth rate estimation. <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth#economic-growth-over-the-long-run>.

The following can be concluded from [Table 2](#), and [Figures 1](#) and [2](#), in terms of context:

1. At the outset of its educational growth period, Japan was already a bit richer (GDP per capita) than the comparator developing countries at the outset of their own educational growth periods. Korea was about equally rich. During the period, however, the comparator developing countries were as well off as Japan and Korea were at the start of their educational growth periods. So, the basis for educational effort was almost as good for the comparator countries. Japan and Korea grew economically during their educational growth period at varied rates as did the comparator countries, so neither set is particularly advantaged, though the comparator set did grow a bit more slowly.
2. Japan and Korea spent a much smaller proportion of their GDP on education, either because they made less public effort (less *fiscal* effort, more focus and intentionality in a qualitative, managerial or social sense—as borne out by the historical empirical evidence presented below), were more efficient at leveraging private effort, or were more efficient, got more “juice” out of their inputs (double shifting, mobilizing in-kind resources, leveraging private effort, tolerating large class sizes yet managing well despite them, teaching in a pretty industrialized way, etc.). Today’s comparator countries have been spending much more. So in a sense they have had an advantage. Though, in a different sense, perhaps they *had* to spend more to make up for the disadvantages in the following points, so the greater spending is not as much of an advantage as it might seem.
3. Today’s comparator countries have twice the demographic burden: roughly 1 adult per child, whereas Japan and Korea had 2 adults per child. This did not change during the period of expansion of the comparator countries. Thus, more effort was required from each adult (or reliance on foreign aid). Aware of these issues, countries and donors have been trying to reduce their demographic burden by expanding more reproductive rights to women and making contraception more available, though it is not clear that making these available is causally related to reduction in fertility.³²
4. Japan and Korea were much more densely populated, and more urban, than the comparator countries at the start of the period. This is a disadvantage for the comparator countries.
5. Lastly, Japan and Korea are vastly more homogenous societies (fractionalization column in the table), with less ethnic, linguistic, and religious fractionalization. This reduces costs (e.g., of producing books in many languages), increases pedagogical ease (e.g., teachers can teach anywhere, and one single approach to teaching reading can cover the enormous majority of the population because the language and orthography are mostly homogeneous), and transaction costs are lower and collective action cheaper. It is well known that fractionalization decreases economic growth, all other factors being the same (e.g., Karnane and Quinn 2019, Miguel 2004 using two relevant African countries as examples, but there is a large literature on this).

³² This is a much-debated area. Some scholars (e.g., Pritchett 1994) argue that contraception is demanded by development, as it were. Others (e.g., Bailey 2013) argue that availability of contraception, and the increase in reproductive rights, has an impact not only on fertility, but also on the human capital of younger generations.

The overall impression created by this comparison is that context disfavors today's developing country comparators to a significant but not huge degree, and that those factors have been somewhat reduced over the past few decades. Thus, as has been noted elsewhere in this paper, especially in the Introduction and Section 2 on policy borrowing, much caution is warranted both about the possibilities of borrowing and, just as importantly, the effects of such borrowing.

3.2 Results: a focus on equality

In the Introduction we noted how Korea and Japan have achieved an unusually high degree of educational equality, and, in particular, we note that Korea has done this in an extremely short period of time. In the narrative sections we discuss the policy emphasis on equality. Here we note some numerical or graphical evidence on just how significant that achievement is.

Formally-measured equality in years of schooling

The three graphics below allow for several key comparisons. (For an explanation of how these sorts of graphics work, analytically, see the explanation at this [popular economics help website](#).) Suffice it to say here that the Gini coefficient measures the degree of equality in a society, according to any reasonable metric such as income or years of schooling. It ranges from 0 to 1. To anchor these numbers comparatively, consider that the degree of income inequality in South Africa is about 0.63, in the United Kingdom about 0.35, and in Iceland about 0.25.) The Lorenz curves in the second set of panels show the cumulative percentage of the population on the horizontal axis and the cumulative percentage of education (as measured by years of schooling) of the population on the vertical axis. (The Gini coefficient is a single-valued summary of the Lorenz curve, but it conveys less information than the curve itself.) The diagonal is the line of perfect equality: each percentage of the population has access to the same percentage of schooling. Thus, the more bowed out away from the diagonal line, the more inequality. The curve provides more information about the whole distribution than a single number (the Gini coefficient) can, and it also allows us to focus on a sub-population of interest, namely the poorest, or rather those with least educational attainment – which are often nearly the same sub-population).

Several things stand out. First, in comparing Korea with India in [Figure 4](#), it is notable how the degree of inequality is affected by the attainment of those who attain zero.³³ Even in the more current population cohort studied (red line), about 30% of Indians had zero attainment and thus zero of the educational “wealth” (measured as years of schooling, that is, ignoring quality), whereas in Korea that amount is graphically undetectable: essentially no one is completely left behind. Thus, because in Korea the curve intercepts the horizontal axis at zero and is straight, it is essentially the same as the diagonal or the line of perfect equality—it has to be. While we do

³³ We used India as a proxy because there are no similar data in our source paper for other developing countries.

not have a similar graphic for comparing Korea to the comparator countries we have been using (or ones more geographically similar to them than India), the situation is likely much the same—it certainly is when it comes to learning, as shown by the dismal results at the foundational level in UNICEF’s Foundational Learning assessment, EGRA, and PAL network’s Citizen Led Assessments.³⁴

Second, in comparing Korea (Figure 4) to Sub-Saharan Africa in general (Fig. 5), it is remarkable that in Korea the line for the most current population cohort is essentially at the line of perfect equality. The Gini coefficient for Korea is around 0.025, whereas for Sub-Saharan Africa it is about 0.35, or many-fold (approximately 14 times) more inequality.

Third, while inequality has been vastly reduced in Sub-Saharan Africa, as can be seen from the difference between the light blue and red lines comparing the oldest and youngest population cohorts (about 40 points of difference in 2010), the decline in Korea was even faster, about 55 points.

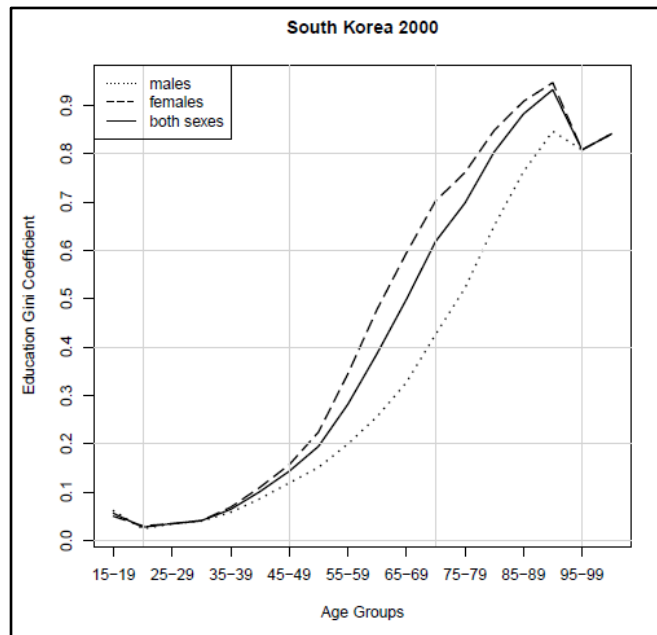


Figure 3. Education Gini in South Korea over time (as represented by cohorts)

Source: Crespo et al. (2013), p. 7.

³⁴ See <https://earlygradereadingbarometer.org/benchmarks> for lists of countries where assessed children could not read a single word of connected text in Grade 2 based on EGRA assessments. (The site also discusses what an EGRA assessment is.) For UNICEF results see: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/are-children-really-learning-foundational-skills-report/>. Discussion of a sample of PAL network results are at: <https://palnetwork.org/uncategorized/there-are-more-and-more-children-in-school-but-are-they-learning/>.

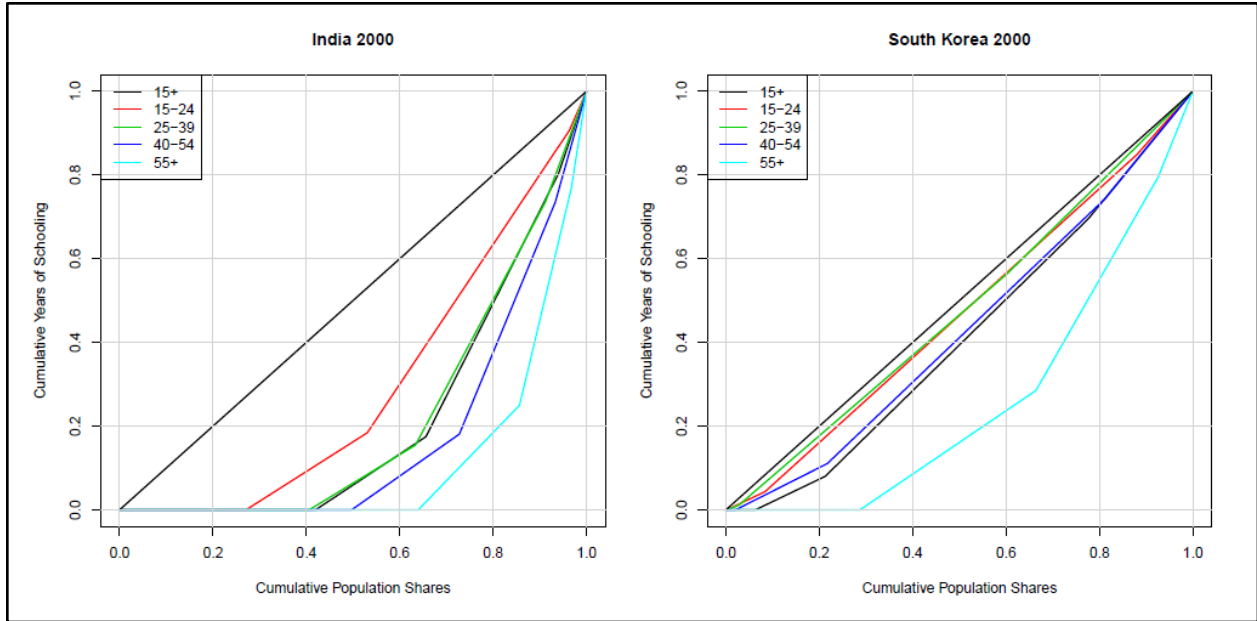


Figure 4. Comparisons of education Gini coefficients, India and South Korea
 Source: Crespo et al. (2013), p. 8.

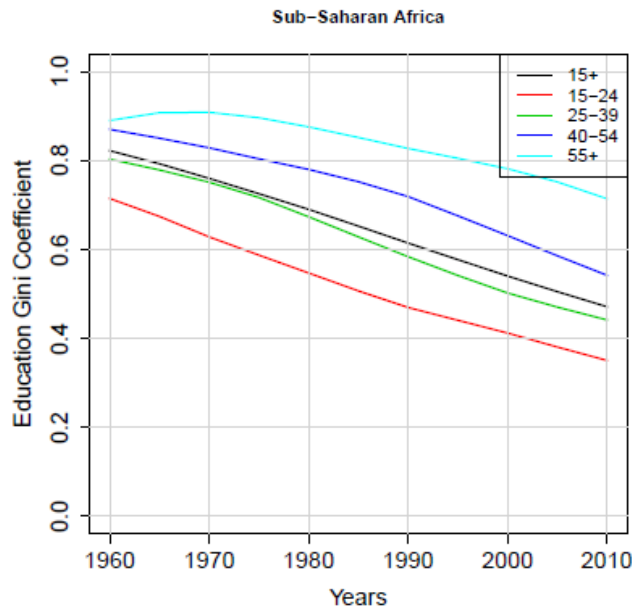


Figure 5. Education Gini coefficients, Sub-Saharan Africa
 Source: Crespo et al. (2013), p. 9.

Korea's achievement in reducing inequality is of global significance. Today, Korea has less inequality by this metric (years of schooling, about 0.025) than even the most developed regions of the world (about 0.10).

Planned and disciplined increases in access to higher levels

In other sections (section 4) of this paper we have noted that the expansion of access to secondary education in Japan and Korea was not based so much on providing a sense of opportunity and rights, but on a sense of what the society (and economy) needed and could accommodate, and what could be accommodated by the budget. In this section, and in section 4, we show just how disciplined and timed that expansion was, and we will argue that that discipline, rather than being anti-equality or anti-opportunity, was pervaded by a strong ethos of equal access and opportunity to quality in the lower levels, before access to the higher levels was expanded too much or too rapidly. It was also informed by a policy of careful attention to the foundations, so that there is hardly any repetition and dropping out in primary school, and so that even the poorest learners completed primary school before largish proportions of the upper middle class were accessing secondary school. This is far from—in fact almost the opposite—of what happens today in the developing world.

A first take on this issue can be shown by looking at the percentage of primary enrollment contained in each grade. Figure 6 shows this for a) an average of comparator developing countries that have serious problems with student flow-through, b) comparator developing countries that do not have the problem (to drive the point home that the problem is not something that developing countries are necessarily condemned to), and c) the average of Korea and Japan.

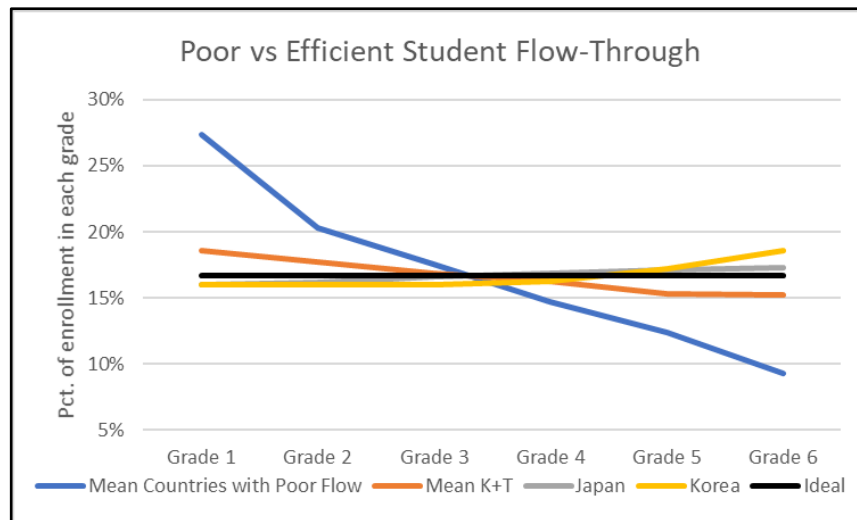


Figure 6. Student flow-through in Asia and comparator countries
 Source: created from data download from the World Bank’s EdStats database

The blue line is the average of many countries (in this case, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, but one could use others that have similar issues), that have very inefficient student flow-through, where enrollment in the terminal grade is often only around 10% of total enrollment when the ideal, in a “perfect” 6-grade system is 16.7% (1 in 6, since there are 6 grades and the last grade is 1). In these systems, around 27% of enrollment is locked up in grade 1, when 16.7% is the ideal. And this is after development partners have

poured in billions and billions of dollars of education aid into these countries over the past three decades. The average of Kenya and Tanzania shown in rust red shows that not all developing countries have to suffer this fate. Korea and Japan are shown as an example that comes close to the ideal, where the ideal is shown in the thick black line.

[Figure 7](#) shows the primary school completion rates for the poorest, middle, and richest quintiles in the comparator countries. In the poorer two of the comparator countries, only about half of students in the middle wealth quintile (and thus about half of the total population, given the linearity of the curve) make it through to grade 6 and completion; invariably, the majority of the students who do not complete are the poorest students, either in income terms or just in terms of poor provision (which mostly coincides with income but by no means 100%—some of it is just the random bad luck of having a bad school that does not come to standard).³⁵

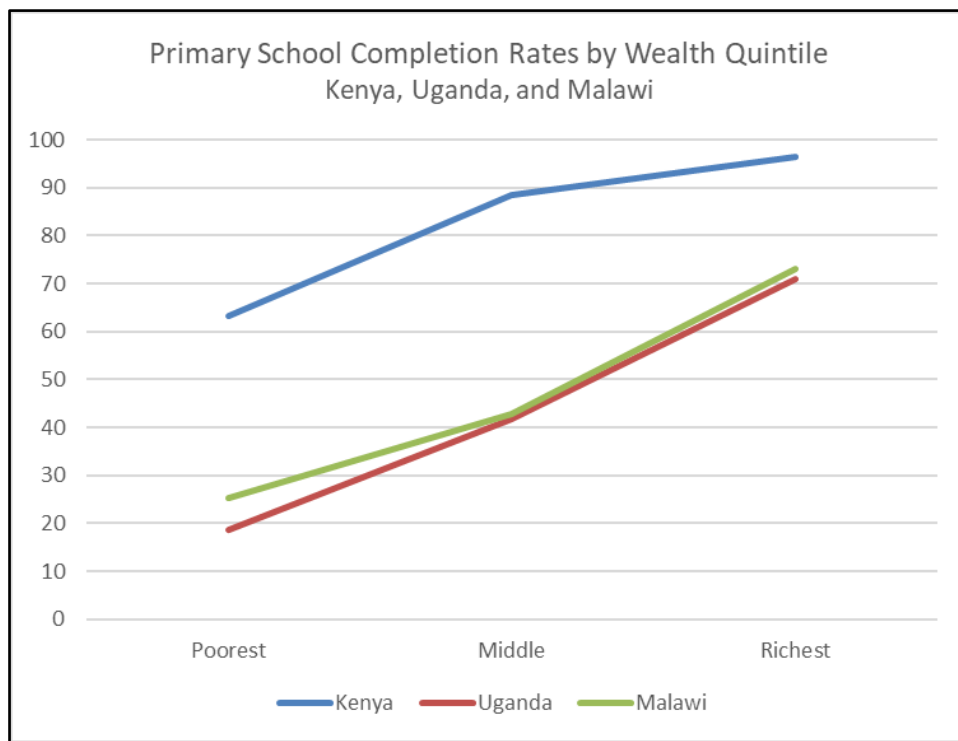


Figure 7. Primary completion rates by income group, African comparator countries
Source: created from data download from the World Bank's EdStats database

So, when completion is not equal, the inequality is not random. It disfavors the poor, as one would expect (though poverty is far from the only determinant: there is also a good bit of randomness related to having weak standards, and much less related to gender).

³⁵ Notice also that the difference between the poor children and rich children, in Kenya on the one hand and Malawi and Uganda on the other is about 40 points, but the difference between the richer children in the two sets of countries is only about 25 points. To paraphrase Leo Tolstoy's opening sentence in *Anna Karenina*, richer children tend to be the same across countries, it is poorer children that differ.

Another way to look at the issue of internal efficiency as a response to planning and equal provision is to focus on enrollment by age and see how the theoretical duration and age of entry and exit into primary and secondary school show up as breaks in the age pattern of enrollment. [Figure 7](#) shows the proportion of the population that is enrolled in either primary or lower secondary school, by age. The shaded areas show the “theoretical” and desirable proportion of enrollment, namely 100% (or 1.0) for the ages of duration of the phase. The lines of the same color represent the actual enrollment. The countries shown are Japan in 1960 (the earliest period for which we could find these sorts of data, though the system had stabilized many decades earlier, by 1920 or so), Ghana, as a relatively well-off comparator, in 2017/18, and Malawi, as a much poorer comparator than Ghana, in 2018.³⁶

³⁶ Note that we had to use different comparator countries as these sorts of highly detailed data are hard to find. They typically can be found only in household surveys, and sometimes in countries’ own statistical systems. We use UNICEF’s MICS survey data. We could not find relevant data for Uganda and Kenya.

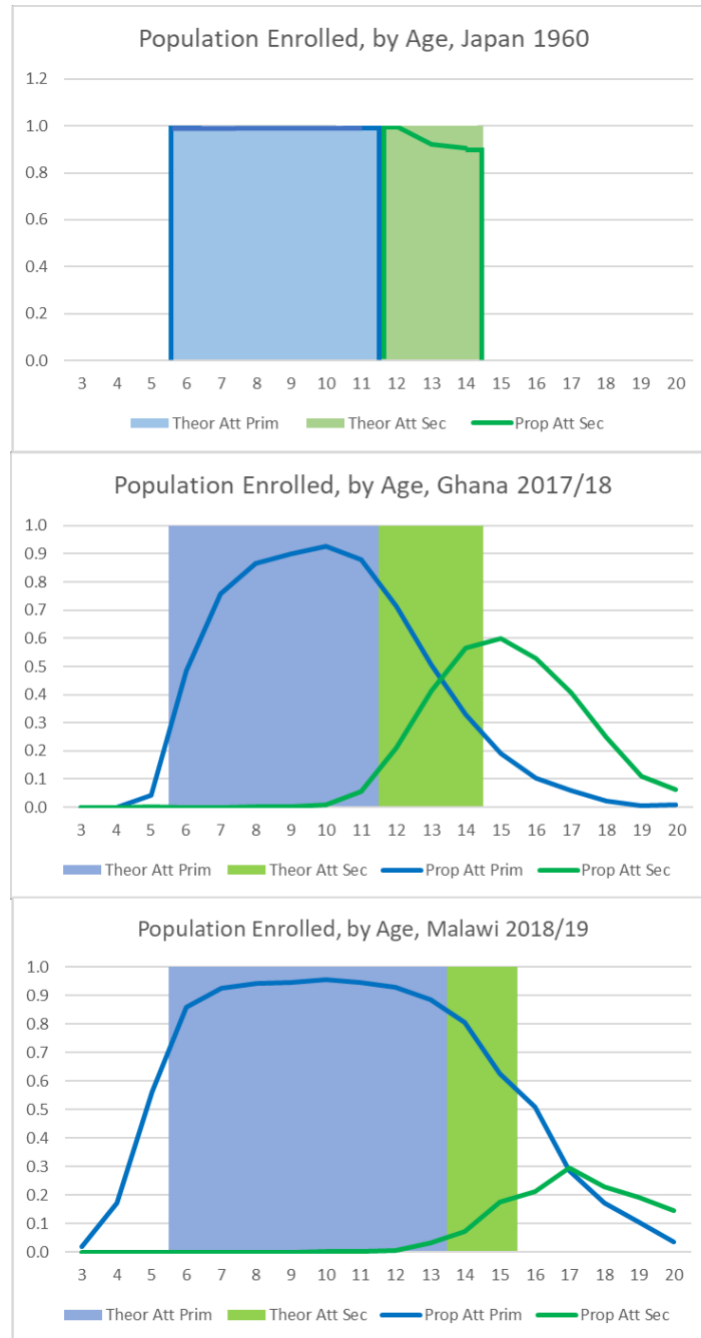


Figure 8. Data on enrollment by age, Japan and comparator countries

Sources: Japan: UNESCO (1972); Malawi National Statistical Office (2021); Ghana: Ghana Statistical Service (2018). Original graphics file: "grade structure.xls" in Luis' hard drive. Note that the graphic file copied from "age structure" in turn refers to "Copy of MiCS..."

The comparison could not be more stark. In Japan, enrollment in primary picks up sharply at age 6 and then drops immediately to zero at age 12, picking back up to essentially 100% in junior or lower secondary at age 12, and staying at nearly 100% until age 15. Note that this evenness in flowthrough was achieved already by 1960 (or probably much earlier but 1960 is the earliest year for which we have been able to find systematic evidence), when Japan was

providing its children about as many years of schooling as the comparator countries are providing today. What levels of education were indeed provided (primary and lower secondary), were provided to all. The same profile for Malawi shows a very gradual pick-up around age of entry (but with extremely early entry for some) for primary and secondary and also a gradual tailing off at both levels. Partly (but only partly) because primary education is inefficient, with a lot of under-aged and over-aged students, more (relatively speaking) has to be spent on it, and there is less opportunity at secondary, which accounts (in part) for the fact that the height of the secondary enrollment curve is so much lower than for primary in Malawi, but not for Japan in 1960. Ghana offers an interesting intermediate point, in that with the added insight that essentially 100% of the appropriate age cohorts are in primary school at some point, yet even in Ghana there are tremendous delays and lags. As can be seen from the comparison of the blue curve and the blue area, about half of the enrollment in primary school is outside the bounds of the “theoretical” ages, and clearly much more than half is beyond the theoretical age in lower secondary. Note that, remarkably, the modal age for both Uganda and Malawi, in lower secondary education, is higher than the theoretical highest age in the cycle.

Note the tie-in between these flow-efficiency data and the equality data discussed before these efficiency data. In Japan and Korea 100% of children complete primary school, so there are no children with zero attainment (which in other countries tend to be the poorest children and those with multiple disadvantages, such as poor, rural, female, with even mild disabilities in some cases, etc.) thus driving up equality. There is a popular misperception, even in some donor circles, that focusing too much on efficiency works against equality. The cases of Japan and Korea show that precisely the opposite is true: efficiency of flow through and equality go hand in hand, as only a system with a 100% efficient flow-through can, by definition, ensure that education truly is “for all.”

In short, this section has argued that the Japanese and Korean systems’ focus on equality shows up, in part, and is also partially caused by, a concern with fairly traditional notions of student flow-through: making sure that essentially 100% of every cohort completes (no dropouts and no repeaters, essentially, but not only through fiat, but by actual delivery of instruction and the belief that all can succeed) before the next level is opened up widely. This focus is additional to the focus on equality (or perhaps it is the focus on learning equality that allows 100% completion) with the distributional results of learning outcomes noted in Section 1.2.

4. Historical Narrative on Japan and Korea

In this section we present the respective educational transformations of Japan and Korea in the form of historical case study narratives. Rather than attempting to cover all aspects of the social, political, and economic shifts that occurred during these remarkable chapters in each country's history, we focus here on the specific conditions and dynamics that shaped educational policy borrowing and adaptation. In each case, we wish to note the historical and ongoing role of opposition in these dynamics, as neither country has ever been a monolith and each decision made at the national level reflected compromises between many different perspectives. Each case study begins with the introduction of relevant themes that might hold the most interest for other countries, followed by a narrative arc through the time period under study that documents in more detail what was done and how.

4.1 Japan

Introduction

This section outlines the trajectory of educational policy and practice in Japan from the 1600s onward. To situate Japan's current overseas educational development policy advice in context of its own educational transformation, a series of relevant themes are laid out first, followed by a recounting of evolution of educational provision over the past two hundred years.

While history documents often describe a rapid educational transformation, the story of Japan's ascendancy to the top of global educational power rankings involves many stops and starts. The Edo period (1603 to 1867) set the stage for educational demand across all social classes, while policy decisions during the Meiji Restoration (after 1868) sped up the process. The single-minded nationalistic focus of education during the pre-war and wartime period expanded educational access while muddling the quality of provision, while the strategic negotiation of educational planning decisions under Allied occupation and after independence brought Japan into its current era of educational excellence. After highlighting a few key themes, the narrative below is chronological.

Confucianism

Much has been made of the influence of Confucian thought on Japan's educational transformation. While Confucianism could and did function as a religion elsewhere, its educational manifestation shaped an approach to instruction in political science, history, literature, and ethics that was entirely secular in Japan. Prior to the Meiji Restoration, the Chu Hsi school of Confucianism was widely embraced as a dominant ideology which was notably absent of space for critiques of the existing class system. More heterodox schools of Confucianism began to gain acceptance toward the end of the Edo period, and in the latter years of the Meiji restoration, debates on national education systems included arguments made by an influential Confucian scholar for the necessity of compulsory school attendance regardless of class and a search for talent throughout the schools (Kobayashi, 1965). Thus,

while many schools of Confucianism have exercised influence on Japanese culture and values over the centuries, to declare it the reason for Japan's dramatic educational transformation following the Meiji Restoration ignores the limited educational access in the hundreds of years that preceded: a constant cannot explain a variable.

Related to Confucianism, and key to Japan's educational development to this day, is that great honor accrues to teachers, who tend to come from upper classes even during the modern era. Compared to other OECD countries, Japan allocates its educational funds to teachers and instruction, rather than school infrastructure, non-teaching staff and administrators, or glossy textbooks (OECD, 2012).

Foundational Learning

Japan ensured that foundational learning was uniform and universal across the country before investing in progressively higher levels of education. While demand outstripped supply at the high school and college level, the private sector was allowed to fill the gaps until the Ministry of Education was prepared to provide free universal education at those levels. Today, in the intellectual milieu of the MDGs and SDGs, presupposing an assigned role for the private sector is somewhat controversial or even a matter for alarm, if not in all development circles, at least in some influential ones.³⁷

During periods of rapid elementary educational expansion, Japan avoided making large investments in infrastructure, appropriating existing buildings as needed. Larger class sizes were acceptable and indeed welcomed amidst post-war pedagogies which saw larger groups of students as providing a better base from which a wide range of problem-solving strategies may emerge, promoting deeper understanding of the topic at hand, instead of being seen as a great disadvantage as often happens in other countries (OECD, 2012).

Centralization and uniformity

Japan is a relatively culturally and linguistically homogeneous society, at the 18th percentile rank in Fearon's (2003) index of heterogeneity in 216 countries and territories. At 13th, Alesina's (2003) rank is similar. However, while cultural and linguistic similarities eased centralization, the rapid educational transformation of the early Meiji period took place alongside a rapid development of previously nonexistent national identity. This active embrace of a new national identity stood in contradistinction to previous centuries, wherein individuals had been more or less passively identified with their feudal lord.

There is a tendency for Western researchers and journalists to critique uniformity of educational provision as evidence of overly centralized or top-down administration, and this is often seen as

³⁷ See <https://campaignforeducation.org/en/take-action/demand-financing-for-education/privatisation> or <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/27172:the-toxic-influence-of-the-private-school-system>, a formal Board member of the Global Partnership of education, which considers private schools to have a "toxic influence."

limiting the applicability of the Japanese model (see Cummings, 1989). This is exemplified by think pieces like John Cogan's 1984 *Phi Beta Kappan* article, "Should the U.S. mimic Japanese education? Let's look before we leap" and James Fallows' 1987 *Atlantic Monthly* piece, "Gradgrind's Heirs: Despite what the US Department of Education says, you would not want your kids to go to a Japanese secondary school." The standardization of the educational experience in Japan, at least at the compulsory stage, has been supported by wide swathes of Japanese society during its most effective periods of educational transformation (Aspinall, 2010). Ability grouping and tracking is considered taboo at the elementary and middle school levels because of associations with the rigid class distinctions in education which brought down the Tokugawa regime, as well as later militaristic war-time education.

Uniformity is exercised in a particular way: while classroom infrastructure, curriculum, and textbooks are set by the Ministry of Education and teachers are expected to teach the entire curriculum, local Boards of Education select textbooks from an approved list and teachers exercise a great deal of freedom in curriculum delivery. The OECD notes that teachers have been adjusting instruction to individual needs for decades before it became a policy goal in the West (2012). However, the teacher-based adjustments to teaching approaches and methods used, is collectively deployed by smallish groups of teachers and is then generalized to the broader collective by the education system, in the famous Japanese "lesson study" approach (Lewis, 2010). Whether, and the degree to which, such approaches can work in countries where pre-service training is very poor, and in-service support is almost non-existent, is discussed in section [6](#), below.

The developmental state

Educational access and provision has been closely linked with Japan's national developmental goals since the mid-nineteenth century. During the late Edo period, exceptions to the ban on Western-style education were made for the sons of lower-ranking *samurai* (warrior/administrator class) and scholars or doctors to study applied sciences when it became necessary to avoid colonization from the West. While pre-Second World War educational strategy focused mostly on imperialist ideology and military sciences, the need for upskilling of working and enrolled youth also led to an emphasis on training young people in the skills demanded by industrialisation and new technologies (Saito, 2002).

In the two decades after Japan regained its independence after the Second World War, rapid economic growth saw the sons of farmers streaming into urban areas following middle or high school to become salaried employees. In response to requests from industry and the post-war baby boom, the government designed further educational plans to produce ever more educated and qualified laborers (Ishikida, 2005).

Incrementalism and contradictions

Outsiders who look at Japan's current levels of technological development, underpinned by high levels of achievement in education, might be tempted to think that this is the result of a single

grand plan, implemented gradually and with certainty. In fact, Japan's education landscape has always had a good bit of tension between reformists emphasizing modernization and more conservative forces, even, or perhaps particularly during the Meiji Restoration (JICA nd, Yamasaki 2010). Some of these debates may be familiar or similar to debates in other cultures and nations, such as the tension between driving academic achievement and a more integral, humanist, or relaxed approach (Ishii 2017, Yamasaki 2010). Others, such as the tensions between an ancient elite (*samurai* or remnants of the *samurai* class) and modernizers/democratizers, or between militarists and pacifists, are less familiar in other contexts. These tensions were quite significant. Two factors probably prevailed in keeping these tensions from distracting from achievement: a consensus around the importance of teaching the most basic fundamentals extremely well,³⁸ and the fact that teachers have, at least since the 1880s or so, been highly proactive and professional, partly based on high-quality pre-service training, which had become nearly universal by 1905 (JICA nd, p. 20) (up from only 42% in 1890), and put a great deal of effort into ground-up interpretation of curricular mandates in practical ways, such as the eventual development of the famous lesson study approach (Ishii 2017, JICA nd, NIER nd). It is difficult to quantify and ascertain precisely, and at the classroom level, how much emphasis is provided to skilling and automaticity. However, amid the back-and-forth over schooling in Japan, the repeated and explicit calls for relaxation and frustrations with measurable academic achievement, over the years, suggest that despite the authorities' efforts, in reality Japan places a great deal of focus on the more academic or skill-oriented side of things.

A signal of the central role assigned to education in Japan's renewal as a nation during the Meiji restoration is that in the Iwakura mission to the West (1871-1873), which had the highest level of national importance, given that its aim was to renegotiate the foundational treaties that set the terms of relations between Japan and the West, one of the principal aims of the delegates

³⁸ It may be useful to pause for a moment to give evidence, via classroom observation through a Westerner's eyes (Pieronok 1978), about how the teaching of reading in the very earliest grades takes (or took, at the time of the observations) place. First, there is clear emphasis on basic skilling and fluency, reminiscent of the early-grade reading programs that have been researched in the last few years based on structured pedagogy and which have good results (Conn, 2017; Evans, Popova, and Arancibia, 2016; Friedman et al., 2016; Snilstveit et al., 2015). Children were drilled in the syllabic Hiragana code, through practice but also with conceptual explanation. New characters are combined into new words, much in the same way as phonics is taught in the US. A complication is that children have to master both the Hiragana syllabic code and the Kanji ideographs. Because of this combination, children were seen to spend as much as 10-12 hours repeating the reading of, and practicing simple stories, over seven days or so "with much repetition of each character" (Pieronok 1978, p. 512) before moving on. In a close integration of curricular "theory" and classroom practicality, the readers introduce new characters in a highly prescribed and controlled manner, a few at a time, much as modern "structured pedagogy" (Conn, 2017; Evans and Popova, 2016; Friedman et al., 2016; Snilstveit et al., 2015) experiments suggest. "Teachers follow a guide book and are instructed to follow stories in the *exact* sequence of the text" (Pieronok 1987, p. 513, our emphasis). Lest such teaching appear rigid and focused only on rote and parroting, note that during the lessons observed, much emphasis was given to comprehension, by having good back-and-forth between students and teachers, e.g., around guessing what happens next in the story, creatively making up cards with the characters as they are learnt, etc.

(which numbered 107) was to look into education as a key underpinning of development (Yamasaki 2010, p. 575). The ideas brought from the West clearly aimed, to some degree, to undermine Japan's class or caste system *via* education. Yukichi Fukuzawa, one of the members of the Mission, who would become subsequently important in driving Japanese education thinking, noted that "Heaven does not create one man above or below another man. Any existing distinction between the wise and the stupid, between the rich and the poor comes down to a matter of education" (as cited in Yamasaki 2010, p. 576). It is natural that this would lead to some tension. In more general terms, in the period under consideration, "it was clear that the kind of education system that could serve as the foundation of a modern nation state simply did not exist. Against this background it came to be strongly felt that there was an urgent necessity for a *unified national* education system to be introduced under the leadership of the *central* government" (JICA nd, p. 14, our emphases). Another signal of the value assigned to education in national development, and the felt need to develop it using whatever means necessary, was the fact that the first Minister of Education, Mori, was an experienced diplomat to both the US and the UK (JICA nd).

This incrementalism was possible in part as a result of Japan's successful resistance to colonization by external powers. Because of this, it was able to develop its own modern education system from various models observed by the Iwakura mission, rather than being faced with the task of perpetuating or dismantling an education system introduced by former colonial rulers (Saito, 2002).

Edo Period (Tokugawa Shogunate) (1603-1868)

The relatively high standard of education during the two and a half centuries known as the Edo period or Tokugawa shogunate built the foundation for modern Japanese education. Mostly illiterate at the beginning of this period, by 1850 an estimated 40% of Japanese were literate (Ishikida, 2005) and by the late 1860s Japan was one of the most literate societies in the world (OECD, 2012).

The conservative nature of education during this period reflected broader societal conservatism which emphasized peace over progress, held in place by an elaborate socio-political hierarchy (Kobayashi, 1965). Despite its feudalistic appearance and a lack of centralized educational ministry, educational practice was highly uniform within (but not between) *samurai* and commoner schools (Kobayashi, 1965). Distinct educational texts existed for the *samurai* class, which imparted the skills and capabilities required to rule, and commoners (farmers, craftsmen and merchants, whose learning emphasized efficiency and obedience (Kobayashi, 1965; Sonoda, 1990).

With carefully codified social stratification and a governmental policy expressly forbidding communication with the outside world, education was considered one of the most important means by which people were inculcated into their role in Japan's socio-political hierarchy (Okano, 2010). This was exemplified by the absolute authority of teachers over learners, dogmatic pedagogies, and early prohibition of Western learning due to its novelty and

association with Christianity (Kobayashi, 1965). The third Tokugawa shōgun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, imposed a policy of isolation beginning in the 17th century, fearing (not inaccurately, it would turn out) that the trade, guns, and religion that resulted from international influences risked shifting the balance of power between the shōgun and his feudal lords (Magoc and Bernstein, 2015).

During this period, it is estimated that 40-50% of men and about 15% of women in the commoner class had some degree of literacy or formal education (Kobayashi, 1965). The *samurai* class were highly literate, with girls educated informally at home and boys educated in schools aligned with the central government (*bakufu*), local feudal domains (*han*), or private schools (*shijuku*) (Okano, 2010). *Bakufu* schools emphasized Confucian literature, history, and composition, and were taught via lectures, seminars, and individual tutoring. *Han* schools in the 18th century originally followed this approach, eventually expanding curricula to include applied math, military science, medicine, and astronomy. Facing less government control, *shijuku* typically specialized in one subject, and *samurai* children often attended a *shijuku* followed by or alongside a *han* school. Towards the end of the Edo period, there were some 1,500 *shijuku* across Japan (Kobayashi, 1965). While the *samurai* class remained nominally a military ruling class, the two centuries of peace that defined this period meant that opportunities to distinguish *samurai* from commoners shifted to educational content, in particular the study of Confucian classics and their application to government administration.

Education for commoners during this period originated in the temple schooling (*terakoya*) dating back to the 12th century. Increased educational demand during the Edo period led to the expansion of *terakoya* from Buddhist temples to Shinto shrines and private houses which mostly avoided direct control from government. Despite these religious origins, Edo-period *terakoya* used Confucian or secular texts, rather than Buddhist sacred books (Kobayashi, 1965). Accepting both boys and girls, children attended *terakoya* from 6-7 to 10-13 years of age, engaging in rote study of reading, writing, social studies, vocational arts, and moral values, with the addition of sewing for girls (Dore, 1965). By the end of the Edo period, there were an estimated 15,500 *terakoya* in Japan (Kobayashi, 1965), serving 79% of boys and 21% (or about 45% of the total) of girls in the commoner class (Passin, 1965).

During the Edo period, commerce expanded beyond local communities and apprenticeships began to require prerequisite knowledge and skills. Alongside this, upper-class farmers increased their contacts with merchants and expanded into a range of small businesses. This economic development fostered demand for education, while increasing social and administrative responsibilities at the village level required some degree of literacy. Popular culture trends became a driving force for literacy, with townspeople and the upper farming class increasing their consumption of popular literature which served for some as a gateway to Japanese and Confucian literatures, often read and discussed to signal aspirational social status (Kobayashi, 1965).

In the context of tightly prescribed social and political roles, this increased educational attainment led to limited but important increases in the exercise of self-assertion, as well as

limited consideration of individual qualities as determinants of life outcomes, rather than traditional family or class determinants (Kobayashi, 1965). With over half of the population excluded, this was by no means universal. Nonetheless, the geographic spread and provision of education at multiple levels of social strata laid the groundwork for its universalization during the Meiji era that followed (Okano, 2010).

Near the end of this period, education provided limited but important opportunities for social mobility and offered the chance for a small number of commoners to become professional scholars, priests, or doctors and eventually enter the *samurai* class (Kobayashi, 1965). In response to new external pressures and internal economic turmoil, access to these opportunities expanded somewhat during the latter decades of the Edo period (Kobayashi, 1965; Saito, 2002; Sonoda, 1990). This expansion of educational access is considered to have contributed to the eventual downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate by allowing educational attainment to form the basis of elite status (Saito, 2002) and in doing elevated new social elements which typically possessed less loyalty to the status quo (Kobayashi, 1965). These intellectual developments led to diversification in permissible schools of Confucianism, which also expanded to include *kokogaku* or study of Japanese classics, as well as some limited openness to Western learning (Kobayashi, 1965). Scholars who emerged from these heterodox lineages eventually formed the driving force for the political reforms that resulted in the Meiji Restoration (Kobayashi, 1965).

On July 8, 1853, a fleet of four United States Navy ships led by Commodore Matthew Perry (including two imposing steamers outfitted with the latest weapons and technology) entered the Tokyo harbor (Magoc and Bernstein 2015). The Americans demanded the opening of two ports for refilling and provisioning American ships, as well as a most-favored nation clause which stipulated that all future concessions granted to other foreign powers would apply to the United States as well. Rattled by Perry's display of gunboat diplomacy, as well as news of recent British success in using military force to compel a similar opening in China, the Treaty of Kanagawa was reluctantly signed in 1854. Russia, Britain, France, and Holland followed the United States' example, arriving with well-armed fleets to force Japan to sign treaties opening up relations and trade.

With these treaties, foreign currency flooded the Japanese monetary system. The weakness of the Tokugawa shogunate in the face of Western demands (backed by Western naval technology and firepower) and the economic and social disruption brought by these treaties, as well as the internal shifts resulting from expanded educational access led to the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Meiji Restoration (1868-1912)

In 1868, lower-ranking *samurai* bureaucrats led a rebellion which ended the Tokugawa shogunate and restored the emperor to the throne. The Meiji Restoration can be seen as being driven by both fear of external colonization following Western incursions elsewhere in the region, and internal class rebellion against the Tokugawa social order (Saito, 2002). The

elimination of feudal fiefdoms and replacement with a modern system based on prefectures represented a dramatic shakeup of the past centuries' social order (Okano, 2010)

Following centuries of self-imposed isolation, Meiji oligarchs recognized the importance of education in transforming feudal Japan into a modern independent nation-state capable of resisting Western powers (Okano, 2010). A national system of schooling was to play a central role in creating "a shared sense of nationhood among people who had until then associated themselves with their respective feudal lords and classes, and second, to select able leaders and train the masses for building a modern nation-state" (Okano, 2010 p. 190). Markedly Western in character, largely as a strategy to fend off Western colonization (Sonoda, 1990) and rectify leaders' sense of national dishonor (Shibata 2004), the Meiji government's plan for educational provision was a stark departure from that of the Edo period. The educational system they designed was thus tasked with the dual responsibility of catching up with Western advances in science and technology while maintaining a distinct Japanese identity inspired by Confucian morals (Aspinall, 2010). Many Meiji-era leaders and influential thinkers came from peripheral lower-class samurai families who had conducted study in multiple Japanese, Chinese, and Western schools across multiple subject domains (Duke, 2008). This *à la carte* approach to learning may have predisposed them to borrow and adapt external ideas selectively, rather than adopting any single Western model wholesale (Okano, 2010).

The Iwakura Mission (1871-1873) was a diplomatic mission undertaken by leading statesmen and scholars to the United States and Europe to promote the newly restored imperial dynasty, to begin (ultimately unsuccessful) renegotiation of treaties with Western powers, and to benchmark modern industrial and educational systems in the United States and Europe. While the Tokugawa shogunate had sent several smaller missions in the preceding decades, this one had a significant impact on the modernization of Japan as it followed the Tokugawa era's extended period of isolation (Duke, 2008). Efforts to reopen treaty negotiations proved unsuccessful, as co-signing nations had little interest in changing the highly advantageous terms previously agreed. Here we note the application of Edwards' reverberation phenomenon within the policy reform process, as Meiji leaders sought to demonstrate their interest in modernization to the international community. The treaties they were so keen to renegotiate were based on Western arguments that Japanese legal systems, political structure, and recognition of individual rights lagged behind the West and only through Western recognition of their reform efforts could they maintain national sovereignty and recover a lost sense of national pride (Shibata 2004).

The 107-person delegation encompassed half of the new government's high-ranking officials and included several dozen students, many of whom stayed behind to complete their education in Western countries and who ultimately returned to influential roles in government, and in at least one case, founded prestigious Japanese universities by the turn of the century (Duke, 2008; Nish, 1998; Shibata 2004; Yamasaki, 2010). With a delegation this size, spanning this many countries, it was inevitable that not all participants would interpret their observations in the same way. Mori Arinori and Tanaka Fujimaro, Japan's first education minister and vice minister, were impressed by the sense of individualism and social equality they encountered in the United

States, but other members of the delegation would later push back on these ideas as inappropriate for Japan. The delegation was united, however, in their poor impression of elementary education provision in France, England and Russia compared to the United States and Prussia. They were unimpressed with the social disparities they observed related to education and society as a whole, singling out working class British schools for particular derision as they reminded the delegation of their own recent history of unequal education provision and did not represent their aims for a modern Japan (Shibata 2004). Thus, while the collective knowledge gathered on the mission was to be used to create the blueprint for a modern Japan, the process of selecting and adapting specific Western ideas evolved via trial and error. This approach is characterized by Okano as “imitative study of a master, at least in the initial stages” (2010, p. 195), wherein the student was expected to learn carefully from a master before ultimately surpassing them.

1872 Fundamental Code of Education (Gakusei)

1872 saw the first comprehensive education plan in modern Japanese history, the Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*), drafted by a committee of twelve including several influential Occidentalists and multiple members of the Iwakura mission whose impressions departed from those of Mori.

The *Gakusei* drew from several Western educational systems and imagined a single, uniform educational system for children of all social classes and geographical locations (OECD, 2012; Duke, 2008). Designed in a top-down manner, it adopted the centralized and orderly administration of the French school system. Particularly compared to Edo-era education, the *Gakusei* was “individualistic, utilitarian, and pragmatic” (Kobayashi, 1965). Under the Ministry of Education, the country was divided into eight academic districts, each with their own university, and 32 secondary school districts, each of which had 210 elementary school districts, with normal schools established to train teachers. It is worthwhile quoting from the preamble to the *Gakusei* at some length as it makes transparent, in the most fundamental ways, the role assigned to education in reform and national dignity:

It is only by building up his character, developing his mind, and cultivating his talents that man may make his way in the world, employ his wealth wisely, make his business prosper, and thus attain the goal of life. But man cannot build up his character, develop his mind, or cultivate his talents without education – that is the reason for the establishment of schools. Language, writing, and arithmetic, to begin with, are daily necessities in military affairs, government, agriculture, trade arts, law, politics, astronomy, and medicine; there is not, in short, a single phase of human activity which is not based on learning. Only by striving in the line of his natural aptitude can man prosper in his undertakings, accumulate wealth, and succeed in life.³⁹

³⁹ <https://worldhistorycommons.org/preamble-fundamental-code-education>.

A few things are worthy of note. First, military affairs are listed as the very first in the list of practical things that education can be applied to: a link to the notion of the nation's dignity (and even survival), given the danger of subjugation to Western countries whose militaries applied science and technology. It is doubtful that this listing of military skill as the first in the list was not intended as a clear message regarding purpose. Second, the approach is fundamentally based on *equity* and a revulsion to the previous class or caste system. This raw appeal to what in modern terms might be called "class struggle" is fundamentally different from the bureaucratization of education that is common today and its emphasis on equity as a matter of gender, geography, and even income, but not exactly class. Third, the contempt for the sorts of non-practical learning that characterized the *samurai* of the Edo period, and hence the focus on "language, writing, and arithmetic" as foundational and practical. Fourth, the focus on education (and its finance) as the most fundamental obligation of all citizens (and, hence, presumably, the collective of all citizens). Fifth, the language is visceral and yet elevated and poetic—at the same time. This is in striking contrast to the nature of the language in modern, bureaucratic versions of education laws and plans (in all countries, not just developing countries). Of course, this was in keeping with the times and the situation, but this language aspect is interesting nonetheless.

The translation of the *Gakusei* used above comes from Yoshida (1931) and is distinct from the semi-official translation released by the Ministry of Education in 1872 and reproduced in Duke (2008, p. 72). An independent translator hired by the authors analyzed both translations and found that the Yoshida version hews closer to the content and spirit of the original Japanese, justifying our use of it here. Among other distinctions, the emphasis on education's contribution to military affairs noted above is missing from the 1872 translation, and may reflect different faces of the *Gakusei* that the Ministry of Education wished to present to different audiences.

Under the new mandate of four years of compulsory elementary education, the establishment of elementary schools became top priority. Governors appointed education officers, including school district officers, to supervise elementary school districts. Initial responses to the new system varied, with enthusiastic adoption reported in some areas. The strength of the relationship between school attendance and literacy had varied by region during the Edo period, and different regions entered the Meiji period with different educational legacies (Rubinger, 2000). Local school district officers typically came from the upper farming social class, which had been involved in establishing and maintaining *terakoya* during the Edo period.

In the early days of *Gakusei* implementation, financial burdens for education were highly localized and areas with existing enthusiasm for education, typically carried over from the Edo era, surged ahead in educational development (Aspinall, 2010; Rubinger, 2000). Schools charged high fees and required additional compulsory contributions (Duke, 2008), more closely resembling compulsory versions of earlier experiments in centrally provided schools for commoners than the *terakoya* which were developed locally and voluntarily. The expansion of enrolment, abolition of elementary tuition fees, and lengthening of compulsory education resulted in rapidly increasing financial costs borne by local governments and, in some areas, violent pushback against educational provision thus defined (Saito, 2002). As direct imitations of

Western elementary schools (Saito, 2002), these schools offered educational content that was also quite foreign and, to many rural families, wholly unrelated to their daily lives (Okano, 2010; Rubinger, 2000). While enrolment rose dramatically during the first few decades of the *Gakusei*, these challenges kept attendance in rural areas lower than elsewhere.

The newly compulsory nature of elementary schooling was not accompanied by commensurate investment in infrastructure, resulting in large class sizes and the appropriation of existing buildings such as temples and private houses as needed. Demand for teachers was massive. The first instructor at the Tokyo Normal School, Japan's first teacher training institute, was American Marion McCarrell Scott. First enrolling teacher trainees in 1872, Scott's graduates were assigned to other teacher training institutions around the country in an effort to rapidly scale up production of trained teachers. Despite the appearance of Western influence, teaching within these schools remained quite conservative under the 1872 *Teacher Training College Code*, which instilled a military ethos in its code of conduct and approach to learning (Saito, 2002; Yamasaki, 2010).

Elementary school teachers were required to be at least twenty years old and to have completed either middle school or teacher training school, while middle school teachers needed to be at least twenty-five years old and to have completed a university degree (Duke, 2008). As of 1876, only 6,450 of 54,262 working teachers had been trained in one of the new normal schools (Kobayashi, 1965). Demand for teachers continued to outstrip supply, and educated samurai, Tokugawa-era teachers, and "public spirited citizens" made up the majority of Japan's teachers through the first decades of the 20th century (Sansom; 1977 in Ferguson, 1985; Sonoda, 1990). Averaging eighty students, most elementary schools had only one or two teachers, most of whom were likely to be former *terakoya* teachers from upper classes with limited exposure to the new Western-style curricula (Kobayashi, 1965; OECD, 2012; Saito, 2002).

By 1875, 41% of boys and 18% of girls between the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in elementary school, with 74% of those enrolled in regular attendance (Ishikida, 2005). Elementary enrolment rates rose from 35% of children aged 6-14 in 1875 to 49.5% in 1885, 61.2% in 1895, and 98.1% in 1910 (Kaisha 1995). Historically excluded groups, namely girls and children from urban lower classes, did not reach near-universal elementary enrolment until 1918 (Ishikida, 2005). By 1882, ten years into the *Gakusei*, Japan had 29,081 elementary schools, 194 secondary schools, 71 higher schools, and one university (Kobayashi, 1965). During this time, *han* schools were abolished and secondary schools were mostly private, with post-elementary access limited to elites (Aspinall, 2010). Expansion of secondary and higher institutions did not emerge as a priority until the end of the 19th century (Saito, 2002).

In the late 1880s, some elementary schools began to offer six months to one year of supplementary night classes, and in 1893-1894, supplementary vocational schools were established for elementary school graduates (Ishikida, 2005). This supplementary education addressed topics including literacy, accounting, agriculture, and business, and offered programs that ran for up to 3 years, followed by apprenticeships lasting up to four years (Ishikida, 2005).

The inclusion of literacy in supplementary classes in some areas highlights the variable quality of learning outcomes across regions at this time. While literacy data from this era is incomplete, military conscripts from districts with commercial activity had a higher rate of literacy than rural districts or districts with early industrial factory development despite similar enrolment rates (Rubinger, 2000). Even as elementary school enrolment neared 100%, only 11% of male students and 5% of female students advanced to secondary school by 1915, with 2% of male students and 0.1% of female students pursuing post-secondary education (Aramaki 2000 in Ishikida, 2005).

While the development of early teacher training courses of study relied heavily on foreign advisors, the 1880s saw efforts to regulate normal school curricula, modifying Western pedagogies and reintroducing Confucian methods in response to growing conservative reactions to Western educational approaches (Ferguson, 1985).

Dramatic changes among the former elite class continued in the decade following the Meiji restoration, as disaffected *samurai* who did not find roles in the new government lost significant money and status. Many expressed frustration with perceived corruption and found the adoption of Western ideas to be a perversion of the purposes of the restoration ("expel the barbarian"). By 1877, thousands of *samurai* had moved to Satsuma province to take part in paramilitary training under Saigō Takamori. A key player in the Meiji restoration, following the rejection of his idea to provoke a war with Korea in 1873 (which he asserted would be ultimately successful for Japan, and which would give all remaining samurai who adhered to the *bushido* code a chance to die honorably), Saigō resigned all government positions and moved home to Satsuma (Buck, 1973). In 1877, the nine-month Satsuma Rebellion/Seinan War (War of the Southwest) that followed resulted in the death of all but a few hundred of Saigō's 30,000-strong *samurai* army (Buck, 1973). Quashing the rebellion was financially devastating for the Imperial government and resulted in the abandonment of the gold standard and issuance of paper money (Mounsey, 1879).

1890 Imperial Rescript on Education

Drafted and released in the context of the economic aftermath of this conflict, the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education formally replaced the *Gakusei's* comparatively liberal Western-style approach to education. As the philosophical foundation of pre-war Japanese education, it pushed back against increasing Westernization and emphasized traditional principles including trust among family and friends, filial piety, modesty and moderation, and obligation to educate oneself (Ishikida, 2005; OECD, 2012). Via a strong appeal to the Confucian value of loyalty to the emperor, constitution, and law, the Rescript encouraged the pursuit of education for the service of the state (Nolte & Hajime, 1983).

The text itself is quite brief, with the middle paragraph included here in its entirety:

Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and

*moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth.*⁴⁰

By design, it never had the force of law in the manner of other imperial rescripts, and this made it more of a moral rescript than a legal or political one. It can be understood as a consensus document, with Confucian, Shinto, and Western references, but one that frames imperial divinity as the overarching authority shaping how each of those influences informed Japanese social and moral behavior (Nolte & Hajime, 1983).

Appointed as the first minister of education in 1885, Mori Arinori was tasked with operationalising the Imperial Rescript on Education, serving as architect of the overtly nationalist educational system which persisted until the end of the Second World War. Deeply committed to the role of education in Japan's national development (Saito, 2002), he introduced a multi-track system for national education that provided "academic study" (science, technology, Western civilization) for those selected to become leaders of the state, and "education" (literacy, numeracy, and moral education) for the remainder of students (Okano, 2010). It was during this era that lingering regional disparities in literacy finally disappeared (Rubinger, 2000).

Educational content was nationalized through primary school textbooks in 1904, taking a distinctly imperial view of history as well as recent victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Students educated during this era were to become the teachers leading the ultra-nationalistic wartime curriculum during the Second World War (Ienaga, 1978).

Once nationalist schooling following the Imperial Rescript was in place, attention turned to skill automaticity with a particular focus on technology. In 1907 the period of compulsory education was extended from four to six years, and by 1908 attendance rates exceeded 97% (OECD, 2012). This was implemented in recognition of an urgent need for semi-skilled technicians in Japan's increasingly industrialized economy, and was accompanied by a reorganization of post-primary schooling for students on the non-elite track to emphasize vocational skills for boys, while becoming "good wives and wise mothers" was emphasized in post-primary schooling for girls (Okano, 2010).

Nationalistic education during this era was interrupted by the period of the Taishō democracy (1912-1926), as progressive educators pushed back on the multi-track system, successfully

⁴⁰ This translation seems to be the official and ubiquitous one. It was published in the Journal of Education in 1908: The Imperial Rescript on Education in Japan (1908). The Journal of Education, 67 (4(1664)), 102–102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42811291>. It is referenced in Nolte and Hajime (1983) as "The Imperial Rescript on Education is translated in Ryusaku Tsunoda et al., ed., Sources of Japanese Tradition, Columbia U.P., 1958, pp. 139-40."

advocating for child-centered education which emphasized children's innate agency and creativity (Okano, 2010), supported by educator groups such as the Progressive Education Society (Yamasaki, 2010). While these efforts were most successful among teachers of middle-class children in urban areas, progressive teachers nationwide became involved in the Life Writing Movement, which had students reflecting on their life experiences, including experiences of poverty (Cave, 2010). This indicates a considerable degree of agency among both teachers and teacher educators to push back against growing ultranationalist education policy directives, as "some teacher educators endorsed the new trend; others tried to ignore it; and a few resisted the intrusion of ultranationalism into the normal school curriculum" (Ishidoya, 1940 in Ferguson, 1985 p. 22). However, this heterogeneity was effectively quashed by the resurgence of militaristic wartime education that followed in the 1930s.

Pre-War and Wartime Period (1926-1945)

By the 1930s, militarist and ultra-nationalist ideologies were pervasive across the Japanese educational system (Ishikida, 2005). Textbooks were nationalized, particularly history and ethics books, to emphasize the deification of the emperor and glorification of the imperial military. Committees were formed to consolidate imperial ideology and to develop labor power for the explicit aim of ensuring national security, concepts that were deployed in the colonies of Taiwan and Korea as well (Okano, 2010).

Around this time, approximately 20% of boys and 17% of girls who completed primary school advanced to five-year secondary schools, segregated by gender (Aramaki, 2000 in Ishikida, 2005). In higher education, enrolment rates were approximately 6% for men and 1% for women (ibid.). However, stark discrepancies in achievement existed between urban and rural students, and middle- and lower-class students.

In 1935, new institutions known as youth schools absorbed supplementary vocational schools and youth military training centers, with all young men in the workforce required to enter youth schools starting in 1938 (Ishikida, 2005). Youth schools assumed that all attendees had completed lower elementary school and offered two-year general courses for young men and women with no higher attainment, and longer courses for those who had completed higher elementary schools. For young women, this included an extra year of study. For young men, the required five-year youth school courses included 510 hours of general and vocational study, 350 hours of military training, and 100 hours of ethics and civics (Takano, 1992 in Ishikida, 2005). At the same time, mandatory military service for teacher trainees graduating from normal schools was increased from six weeks to one year (Okano, 2010).

In 1938, approximately 2,210,000 students attended 17,743 public and private youth schools. Public elementary schools became "National People's Schools" in 1941, taking a central role in militaristic wartime education, featuring imperial worship, and by 1942 2,910,000 students attended 21,272 youth schools (Ishikida, 2005). Here we note one of the darker hours in educational policy borrowing: enforced nationalistic rituals like bowing before the portrait of the Emperor and reciting the Imperial Rescript on Education came from observations of American

children singing the National Anthem and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with a hand over their heart during the Iwakura Mission, which more conservative delegates saw as valuable for inculcating patriotism and moral discipline in children (Shibata 2004).

At the devastating 1945 finale of the Second World War, all students above elementary school were conscripted to work in farms and factories, while many urban elementary school students were relocated with their teachers to rural areas, leaving their families behind (Ishikida, 2005).

Post-war period (through 1970s)

Immediately following Japan's defeat in the Second World War, the Imperial Rescript on Education establishing militaristic wartime education was abolished by the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces (Ishikida, 2005). Japanese leaders recognized that the international acceptance that would follow from educational reform was likely to enhance national security in the postwar years (Booth 2006). This resulted in a purge of militaristic teachers, blackened out depictions of militaristic viewpoints in textbooks, and suspension of ethics, history, and geography courses (Ishikida, 2005).

In 1947, a contingent of 27 American educators briefly visited Japan to conduct the U.S. Education Mission, the report that served as the blueprint for post-war educational reform throughout the occupation (Kawase 1999 in Ishikida, 2005). Modeled on the American educational system, the GHQ transformed the education system in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, many of whom were eager to embrace democratizing efforts following the devastating war (Aspinall, 2010; Ishikida, 2005). Indeed, in certain aspects the Japanese insisted on deeper transformation than the Americans demanded, perhaps because aspects of American education systems had been influencing Japanese education reforms since the Meiji restoration (Shibata 2004). American-led reform goals included increased egalitarianism and democratic accountability alongside decentralized educational provision (Aspinall, 2010).

Emphasizing educational autonomy, the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were enacted in 1947 with the stated objective of building student character (OECD, 2012). National People's Schools were transformed into six-year elementary schools, and a 6-3-3-4 education system replaced the pre-war multi-track approach (Ishikida, 2005). Nine years of elementary and middle school became compulsory, and schools became co-educational at the pre-high school levels (Cummings & Kobayashi, 1985). Five-year secondary schools became high schools, and high school enrolment rates rose from 42.5% in 1950 to 51.5% in 1955 (Monbukagakushō, 2001), marking the first time that over half of students completing compulsory education entered upper secondary school (OECD, 2012).

At the same time, two- and three-year professional schools, preparatory high schools, normal schools, and all other schools became four-year colleges (Saito, 2002). Modeled on the state university system in the United States, at least one national university was established in each

prefecture. Professional schools not meeting the requirements to become universities became junior colleges, formally recognized in 1964 (Ishikida, 2005).

The 1947 and 1951 Courses of Study emphasized child-centered education and creative problem-solving methods, replacing geography, history, and ethics with social studies (Ishikida, 2004). In a reversal of very strong negative pressure from the government in prewar years, labor union activity by teachers was made legal and encouraged in postwar reforms. The Japan Teachers Union (JTU) was formed in 1947, and quickly grew to 500,000 members (Saito, 2002). A little over a decade later it encompassed 86.3% of public school teachers and staff (OECD 2012). In the immediate postwar years, the JTU focused on improving teacher living standards and promoting the democratization of education via completing the transition to a 6-year elementary, 3-year lower secondary system. With the JTU's support, free distribution of textbooks began in 1951, although they were only provided for the entire compulsory period starting in 1969 (Saito, 2002).

Despite the power of GHQ, critiques of the wholesale adoption of Western educational practice were influential during this period: a book of critical essays by Yagawa (1950) provoked a period of reflection that ultimately shaped post-occupation Japanese education policy. Following the end of US occupation in 1952, centralization once again emerged as the preferred approach to educational administration. In recent times, Japan is more centralist, in terms of percentage of decisions made at school level, than most OECD countries, though not as centralist as Korea, the other country under study (which is at about 75th percentile of centralism in the OECD ranking) (OECD 2018).

Following the Cold War-era restoration of moral education and the generally conservative turn of the early 1950s, relations between the JTU and the government, including the Ministry of Education, took a more confrontational turn. "Never send our students to the battlefield again" was adopted as a defining slogan in 1951 and remained the central feature of JTU efforts for an extended period (Saito, 2002). Through the 1950s and 60s, the JTU and MoE clashed over the implementation of teacher performance ratings and nationwide achievement tests. They also began organizing large-scale educational research and training activities at school levels, which were then aggregated at the municipal, local, prefectural, and national level. The regular occurrence of these activities, and their function as school-based in-service teacher training, were a major contributor to maintaining and raising the quality of teaching in Japan during this period (Saito, 2002).

The year 1953 saw the drafting of legislation to improve educational equity via increased financial support to local governments, which normalized funding for facilities and teacher salaries, particularly in remote or difficult-to-serve areas (OECD, 2012). Following the enactment of these laws, per-student expenditures varied no more than 20% between the poorest and wealthiest districts at the compulsory level (Cummings & Kobayashi, 1985). To address overcrowding in classrooms, a maximum class size of 50 students was written into law in 1959, and the first Teaching Staff Deployment Plan was enacted to meet the teacher training goals required for its implementation (OECD, 2012).

At the same time, the Ministry of Education expanded its mission to include enhanced workforce development in order to peacefully expand Japan's economy (Aspinall, 2010). Expanding educational access, alongside rapid economic growth following Japan's regained independence in 1952, increased the potential for upward mobility. In response to shifting labor demand, educational plans were designed to increase the supply of qualified laborers for new industries. By 1955, 10% of high school graduates attended a junior college or university (OECD, 2012), and in 1957 the government launched a "manpower plan" with the goal of developing 8,000 more science and engineering students by 1960 and 20,000 more higher ed students overall by 1964 (Osaki, 1999 in Ishikida, 2005).

Entrance examinations for high school began in 1963, and admission to elite high schools and colleges became highly competitive (Aramaki, 2000 in Ishikida, 2005). 1965 marked the first time that high school graduates joined the workforce at a higher number than middle school graduates (Ishida, 2000 in Ishikida, 2005), and by the end of the 1960s the majority of 15-year-olds remained in school rather than joining the workforce (Ishikida, 2005). By the mid-1970s, children whose fathers were manual laborers or farmers were as likely to be enrolled in high school as children whose fathers worked white-collar jobs (Aramaki, 2000 in Ishikida, 2005).

Demand for post-high school education expanded rapidly as well, with college enrolment rates rising from 10.1% in 1955 to 38.4% in 1975 (Monbukagakushō, 2001). The number of college entrants increased eightfold between 1960 and 1968, with the increase in demand served almost entirely by a rapidly growing number of private colleges. The 1960s marked Japan's transition into an "educational credential society" – one which uses credentials to gauge the knowledge and potential of job seekers as well as their overall cognitive quality, although achievement itself remained most affected by parental education levels (Ishikida, 2005).

The 1960s also marked the advent of international educational achievement rankings and cemented Japan's place among the best in the world. Japanese 8th grade students ranked second out of 12 participating countries in the First International Mathematics Study in 1964 (OECD, 2012). Japanese students ranked at the top of science assessments of 10- and 14-year-olds in 1970-1971, and mathematics assessments of 13-year-olds in the early 1980s (Lynn 1988).

While Japan continues to perform close to the top of ever-expanding international assessment rankings, social disparities between schools have increased in recent decades despite Japan's emphasis on equitable distribution of learning opportunities, and the social and mental health ramifications of the strong emphasis on high-stakes examinations (though it is hard to find numerical, standardized and comparative objective evidence of this, as noted in the Introduction to this paper) have prompted important self-reflection and numerous policy reform efforts over recent decades. Anecdotally, Japan's (as well as Korea's) education system is characterized by an unusual amount of tutoring, private lessons, and cram schools, as compared to the education systems of other, more flexible, OECD countries. Japan's education system, along with Korea's, often suffers from accusations that, despite academic excellence, it is too much based on rote learning. This sort of criticism is often internalized. But the preponderance of the

evidence is that the Japanese workforce and its industrial sector are both quite innovative⁴¹. It is also the case that Japan's universities are perhaps not as high-quality as the rankings of its basic education system would suggest: in a recent ranking of world universities by Times Higher Education, Japan had only 3 universities among the world's top 100, whereas the UK, with one-half the population of Japan, had 11.⁴²

Thus, modern Japanese educational practice has been shaped by its modification of a range of external pedagogical concepts for application to the needs of the country, impressing a necessary cultural stamp upon this knowledge and appropriating it carefully for their own use (Ferguson, 1985).

4.2 Korea

Introduction

This section outlines the sequencing of Korea's educational policies, with particular attention paid to those following its independence from Japan and especially the period after the Korean war. In the span of a century, Korea saw the end of isolation, the fall of a feudalistic monarchy, 35 years of colonial rule, occupation and massive bilateral investment from a Western state, a liberation government, devastating civil war, successive autocratic governments and military coups, and massive economic and technological transformation (Chung-II et al. 1985). Korea's rapid expansion of education over the past six decades can be understood as the result of interactions between economic development strategies, education policies, and often-competing ideologies surrounding national identity (Kim, 2002). While the chronology of education and economic development policies will be laid out in the sections that follow, the tensions between Confucian, egalitarian, nationalist and capitalist ideologies, and Korea's negotiation of these tensions, deserve attention at the outset.

Confucianism

Much has been made of the influence of Confucian values on Korea's educational successes (Robertson, 2002; Shin & Koh, 2005), but while these values have shaped the region for the past thousand years, Korea's particular success with learning outcomes has flourished only in the past several decades (Sorensen, 1994). As in Tokugawa-era Japan, at the turn of the 19th century, traditional Confucian values toward education focused on history and *belles lettres* for moral instruction, and regarded "practical" subjects such as math and science with contempt

⁴¹ https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_gii_2021.pdf,
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-innovative-countries>.

⁴² See https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2021/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/100/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats, though such university rankings are often criticized for their subjectivity, they would seem to have some merit. Certainly, the universities ranked in the top 10 are quite different from those ranked 90th to 100th, even if a few ranks of difference are probably not objectively real or statistically significant.

(Ho, Peng, & Chan 2002; Masoner & Klassen, 1979; So et al., 2012; Woo & Kahm, 2017), yet modern Korea has excelled in precisely those areas.

Post-independence Korea has creatively applied Confucian principles to the dilemmas of modern nation-building in a manner that maintains the persistence of a hierarchical society, but in which high social status can only be legitimated meritocratically, specifically through academic achievement. While colonial-era education had emphasized Korean assimilation into Japanese culture, subsuming Confucian-based Korean national identity, there was now a strong desire to restore (updated) Confucian traditions in school curricula post-independence (So et al., 2012). Thus, while Korean identity remains firmly rooted in the Confucian tradition, the interpretation of that tradition has been shaped by a series of continuities, departures, ruptures, and transformations over the past 150 years (Ho, Peng, & Chan 2002; So et al., 2012).

Egalitarianism

Post-independence and post-war Korea cultivated a sense of common citizenship through its commitment to universal education—regardless of wealth, location, religion or gender—through a belief in “uniformity of education” (Kim, 2002; Seth, 2012). The end of the Second World War led to a revulsion against the inequalities of the Japanese occupation, where, just to take one indicator, there was only one university in Korea and it was mostly for Japanese students (Seth n.d.). The implementation of this egalitarianism took its shape over the decades through rigorous standardization of curriculum, teaching, and resource provision to ensure, at least in theory and in intent, that a rural girl born to farmer parents in the coastal lowlands attended a public school of the same caliber, and thus received the same opportunities to learn and excel, as the son of a former land-owner in Seoul.

Indeed, despite the impressive levels of equality in educational outcomes that we describe in sections [1](#) and [3](#), researchers at the Korean Education and Development Institute have expressed concerns with rural-urban gaps in education quality that echo those of poorer countries: lower per-student investment (facilities, learning space, audiovisual equipment) and higher pupil-teacher ratios in rural areas, a primarily urban-oriented curriculum, and economic factors leading to lower educational aspirations in rural areas (Chung-II et al., 1985; Masoner & Klassen, 1979). Understood in the context of the statistics presented in sections [1](#) and [3](#), however, these concerns do not indicate uneven quality on the order of magnitude of countries like India or even the United States, but instead a degree of commitment to egalitarian educational provision which eclipses even that of most wealthy nations.

Nationalism

In the process of defending itself from repeated foreign incursions, Korea has developed a nationalism that is deeply imbricated with Korean education (So et al., 2012). In an approach that perhaps ironically finds parallels in Europe and Japan, it emphasizes unity based on homogeneity and promotes an ethic of loyalty to the state and collectivist legitimation of state power (Seth, 2012).

Historically, this has worked both with and against the grain of external influences, mainly the United States, which promoted political stability and economic growth through democratic values and individual rights (Chung, 1994; Seth, 2012). Korean nationalism and national identity contain important tensions between conceptualizations of modernization as adoption of Western-style cultures, and movements to restore traditional cultural identity which have played out in educational policy and practice since independence (Chung-II et al. 1985). The Charter of National Education, released in 1968, is framed as a mission to regenerate the nation “by revitalizing the illustrious spirit of our forefathers... and encouraging the willingness of the people to participate and serve in building the nation” (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). The Charter is quoted at length below.

The developmental state

Korea explicitly saw its developmental needs in rivalry with Japan, North Korea, and, even with regards to one of its benefactors, the United States, and sought to reduce its economic dependence through education for economic growth. The pressure from outside the education sector came largely from the highest level in the country, with, for example, the Rhee regime’s establishment of a Ministry of Education in 1948 proving key to Korea’s national development. As another example, it seems to have been largely through pressure from the Economic Planning Board that the proportion of the budget for post-primary education was doubled in the 1960s to 1970s. The link between education and national development was explicit in such documents as the Industrial Education Promotion Act and the synchronization of the Five-year Plan for Science and Technology Education (1967-1971) with the Five-year Economic Development Plan (1967).

The strategic coupling of Korean educational and economic development strategies sought to control the expansion of an educated workforce to prevent it from growing too rapidly or becoming too large to be absorbed by Korea’s growing economy, while at the same time providing the nation with the skills needed at each particular state of industrial growth (Jeong & Armer, 1994; Bermeo, 2014; Isozaki, 2019). As Korea opened up access to middle school, secondary school, and eventually post-secondary schooling, the government attempted to expand the education system equitably by removing barriers to student access and increasing capacity at the newly expanded level via a quick response by private education providers to fill the gaps while public financing and provision caught up (Kim, 2002; Lee, 1974; Masoner & Klassen, 1979).

While this resulted in the matriculation of students of all social classes, genders, and regions in lower levels of education, state policies at the tertiary level that imposed high fees and meritocratic selection have resulted in the brutally competitive tertiary education system that persists today (Jeong & Armer, 1994).

Chosŏn Era (1392-1910)

Formal education during Korea's Chosŏn period (1392-1910), though highly regarded, was primarily limited to a small hereditary ruling class known as *yangban* which comprised at most 15% of the total population (Sorensen, 1994). Like today, systematic education was driven by an examination system which selected occupants of government posts and as such placed a heavy emphasis on test preparation (Seth, 2012). Neo-Confucian education for elites emphasized history, philosophy, and Chinese writing and poetry, while members of a smaller, lower-status group known as *chungin* studied subjects like astronomy, medicine, and foreign languages, which gained prominence towards the end of the 19th century but date further back (Sorensen, 1994).

At the end of the 19th century, public perceptions of Korea's rigid class structure began shifting under the influence of American missionaries, Meiji-era Japanese leadership, and Korean intellectuals exposed to external ideals of democracy, meritocracy, and egalitarianism. The American punitive military expedition of 1871 against the "Hermit Kingdom" served as an additional demonstration of the power of modernity, especially military modernity (Roblin 2018). Impressed by the results of the United States Navy's gunboat diplomacy in 1853, Japanese Captain Inoue Yoshika followed Commodore Perry's example in opening Korea to Japanese trade in 1875 (Magoc and Bernstein 2015).

An opening of the Korean polity and economy to Japanese and European interests followed, though not immediately or in a simple manner. Foreign influence melded with existing Confucian ideals regarding merit as the only valid source of status, as well as the ideal of leadership capability inherent in each person via their moral example -- a virtue which could be achieved through education (Chung-II et al., 1985). Thus, following the breakdown of class structures a popular belief emerged that education should be accessible to all (Seth, 2012; So et al., 2012). Western contact during the Chosŏn period was minimal (Masoner & Klassen, 1979; So et al., 2012). A popular enlightenment movement challenged the seclusion of the late Chosŏn dynasty and resulted in the 1882 *Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation* between the United States and Korea, followed by the exchange of diplomatic envoys. In July of 1883, King Gojong sent *Bobingsa*, Korea's first ten-person delegation to the United States, where they visited schools, businesses, and industrial exhibitions (Kim, n.d.). At the end of the trip, a Japanese-educated Korean student named Yu Kil-Chun remained in the United States to study math and science, and was later appointed Vice Minister of State for the Home Office under reformist governments, where he pushed for modernizing reforms to Korea's government system—including the opening of primary schools (Kim, n.d.).

The Gabo reform of 1894 abolished the traditional education system, replacing it with a new, modernized Western-style education system that served all levels of society. It emphasized this new approach to education as the basis for modernizing its citizens, simultaneously preserving and developing the nation (So et al., 2012). This was first operationalized by the 1895 ordinance for primary schools emerging from the Gabo reforms. It represented Korea's first policy aimed at providing education to the broader public (Kim 2008).

Resistance to the perceived removal of Confucian values as the dominant norm shaping Korean identity limited the impact of the Gabo reforms, highlighting the perceived tension among conservative elements between Confucian values and the Western-influenced education required to shape modern citizens and a modern nation. Over time, conceptualizations of both Confucian values and modern citizens softened and expanded such that they were able to coexist, with Western influences incorporated to varying degrees which would continue to fluctuate in the century that followed (So et al., 2012).

With the first government-established English school opened in 1883, educational provision had expanded by 1920 to an estimated 3,000 public, missionary, and private schools delivering modern curricula (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). These schools were curbed abruptly when Japan declared Korea a protectorate in 1905 and a colony in 1910 (Sorensen, 1994).

Colonial Era (1910-1945)

The period of Japanese colonization saw relatively high levels of primary enrolment on the Korean peninsula, with 35% of primary-aged children enrolled in 1939, rising to 58% in 1943 (Grajandzev, 1944; Yi, 1947, in Jeong & Armer, 1994). Following elementary education, boys and girls were separated for schooling, with boys' schools providing one more year of education at each level over girls' (Sorensen, 1994). A twin-track system in secondary school funneled students into academic and vocational tracks, with mutually exclusive ends.

While the Japanese were more committed to providing primary education than most colonial powers, the purpose of education during this era was nonetheless to keep ethnic Koreans in a subservient status while assimilating them into Japanese culture (Masoner & Klassen, 1979; So et al., 2012). (In all of this it is important to remember that Japanese colonialism in Korea was a settler type of colonialism, not just an enclave colonialism.) The relegation of Koreans to lower status was reflected in dramatically higher levels of educational attainment for ethnic Japanese compared to ethnic Koreans, and the outlawing of Korean as a language of instruction (Masoner & Klassen, 1979; So et al., 2012). With strict limits on access to upper levels of education, and frequent assignment to inferior schools and educational tracks, the Japanese colonial education system was designed to be "more 'appropriate' for Korea's level of development" (Seth, 2012 p. 14), with Korea framed as a backward society unable to occupy anything but a subordinate position in the empire.

The discriminatory nature of twin-tracked secondary schools during this era resulted in widespread distrust of multitiered school systems that sort young students into different social levels, a distrust which has lasted into the current era (Chung-II et al., 1985; Sorensen, 1994). Because schooling was the primary determinant of social rank and economic status, educational restrictions during the colonial period were the source of tremendous frustration to middle-class Korean families (Seth, 2012). A failed independence movement in 1919 was led by cultural nationalists who believed that "only through widespread acquisition of modern education

could Koreans become qualified to regain their independence”—thus stoking the fires of what would become known as Korea’s educational zeal (Sorensen, 1994, p. 15).

The colonial government announced in 1942 that it would replace the quota system on primary enrolment, which disadvantaged ethnic Koreans, with universal primary schooling by 1946 (Woo and Kahm 2017). This was a consequence of the expansion of military conscription to the Korean population, who now needed Japanese fluency as military servicemen. Ironically, and as we shall see below, the occupying US forces would be the ones to carry out this universalization policy in 1946.

Independence Era (1945-1960)

The years immediately following Korea’s independence in 1945 saw the devastation of the Korean War (1950-53), the split of the Korean peninsula, and the reconstruction of its educational system. Following the radical land redistribution in North Korea in 1946, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) attempted to address stark inequalities and rural poverty caused by the semi-feudal land tenure system that preceded (but was exacerbated by) colonization by Japan. The goal of the land reform was to raise living standards of impoverished farmers, thus laying the groundwork for social stability and thriving democracy, and thus minimizing the appeal of calls to revolution (Kim 2016). While it ultimately fell short of its goals (Kim 2016; Shin 1976), USAMGIK’s land reform (and, perhaps more importantly, the land reforms which followed) exercised an unexpectedly powerful influence over progress towards universal primary education (Woo & Kahm 2017). Prior to reforms, parents engaged in tenant farming were less likely to send children to school regularly than farmers who owned their land; following the land reform, participation increased faster among children of former tenant farmers than among children of owner-farmers. Woo and Kahm estimate that land reform alone increased the enrolment rate by approximately 10%, accounting for about half of the increase in the decade that followed.

The Rhee regime (1948-1960) established an education ministry in 1948 as an essential step in nation building, and reforms quickly followed. Despite the ongoing war, between 1950 and 1953 the new Ministry of Education implemented a middle school entrance exam, reformed the secondary school system, opened more national and public universities, and promoted curriculum reforms which required students to learn Chinese characters in primary school. Educational administration and decision making was generally decentralized during war years (Chung-II et al. 1985), which saw more than half of the nation’s school buildings destroyed, and many students and teachers killed or maimed (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). At the national as well as family level, the massive infrastructure losses sustained during the Japanese colonial and Korean war era encouraged investment in people rather than physical forms of capital (Kim, 2002).

Like the rest of the Korean government, the Ministry of Education was backed by extensive American military and civilian aid in the postwar period (Jeong & Armer, 1994). Linked to nation-building, and to shared reunification and anticommunist aims, the fledgling education ministry’s

goals centered on the universalization of primary schooling and adult literacy. These aligned closely with policy efforts to lay the foundation for economic development following colonization and war, in particular the transition from agriculture, which accounted for more than half of gross domestic product through the 1950s, to export-based light industry (Economic Planning Board 1955, in Jeong & Armer 1994). During this key economic take-off stage, President Rhee's government sent many government officials to study abroad in general economic development, including 102 faculty members from Seoul National University who were sent to study and observe the United States (Wood 1957). For illiterate adults, the *Five-year Project to Eradicate Illiteracy* (1954-58) targeted citizens aged 12 and older who had not attended primary education, and resulted in an adult literacy rate that reached 96% by 1958 (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The spirit of the post-independence education policies is perhaps best conveyed by quoting some of the Preambles to the Foundational Education Law of 1949 (Act 86, 1949) which set out educational policy for the period after the Second World War:

Article 1. The purpose of education is to serve the development of a democratic nation and to contribute to the realization of the idea of human co-prosperity by helping all citizens to complete their personality, to acquire the ability to live independently and as a citizen, under the ideology of Hongik Ingan.⁴³

Article 2. In order to achieve the purpose of the preceding article, the following educational policy is established.

- 1. To cultivate knowledge and habits necessary for the healthy development and maintenance of the body, and also to have the spirit of perseverance.*
- 2. Cultivate the spirit of patriotism to maintain and develop national independence and further contribute to the construction of peace for mankind.*
- 3. To inherit and nurture the indigenous culture of the nation and to contribute to the creative development of world culture.*
- 4. Cultivate the spirit of truth search and scientific thinking to lead creative activities and rational lives.*
- 5. To love freedom, respect responsibility, and lead a harmonious social life in the spirit of trust, cooperation and love.*
- 6. Cultivate aesthetic emotions to appreciate and create sublime art, enjoy the beauty of nature, and effectively use free time to lead a reconciled and cheerful life.*
- 7. Be thrifty, hard-working, competent producers and wise consumers, and lead a healthy economic life.*

...

Article 4 Educational systems, facilities, teaching materials and methods must always respect personality and value individuality so that those receiving education can use

⁴³ The term Hongik Ingan may be loosely and variously translated as "to benefit the human world widely" or "to make everyone harmonize and be happy."

*their abilities to the fullest.*⁴⁴

In 1968 the Charter for National Education, which was seen as an important reaffirmation of basic post-war values (Lee, 1974), was proclaimed by the Legislature after a laborious process of discussion and drafting among scholars and public intellectuals and a final draft by two senior Korean philosophers. Selected passages include:

*“We have been born into this land, charged with the historic mission of **regenerating the nation** (our emphasis). This is the time for us to establish a **self-reliant posture** (our emphasis) within and contribute to the common prosperity of mankind without...*

*With a sincere mind and strong body, improving ourselves in learning and arts, developing the innate faculty of each of us, and overcoming the existing difficulties for the rapid progress of **the nation** (our emphasis), we will cultivate our creative power and pioneer spirit. We will give the foremost consideration to **public good and order, set a value on efficiency and quality** (our emphasis), and, inheriting the tradition of **mutual assistance** (our emphasis) rooted in love and respect and faithfulness, will promote the spirit of fair and warm cooperative activities.”⁴⁵*

A few points are worthy of note. While some of the articles (e.g. 4) emphasize the value of the individual, the main purpose of education is clearly a national one: the nation comes first. In the charter, one develops one’s innate faculties, but for the progress of the nation. (This is a bit different from the more humanist and person-centered philosophy embodied in the preambles to the *Gakusei*, Japan’s foundational education law for the Meiji Restoration, but more consistent with the Imperial Rescript of 1890. See section 4.1 on Japan’s history.) The spirit of patriotism for national independence is key. But so is the spirit of harmony and equity (to use a more current word) and mutual assistance. The orientation is generally less militaristic than that of Japan’s reform, and peace within and outside Korea are given a great deal of weight. The spirit of modernization and science are given about the same weight as in Japan. In contradistinction to more modern and global statements, the value of education as an individual right is somewhat minimized. Efficiency, hard work, and productivity are emphasized.

During this era, the need for foreign capital and technical assistance opened the door for external actors to take a leading role in defining South Korea’s strategy for economic growth, propelling the nation toward export industrialization even as it remained dependent on foreign support (Chung, 1994). Much of the Korean government budget during this time came from occupying Allied forces, notably the United States. Unlike many other countries postwar, Korea did not receive external aid in the form of multilateral loans or foreign direct investment; funding

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<https://www.law.go.kr/LSW//lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=5396&ancYd=19491231&ancNo=00086&efYd=19491231&nwJoYnInfo=N&efGubun=Y&chrClsCd=010202&ancYnChk=0#0000> as translated by the law repository’s link to Google Translate and with additional human translation aided by Seunghwan Lee, personal correspondence July 10, 2022.

⁴⁵ Translation in Lee (1974) with additional help from Masoner & Klassen (1979). Our emphases.

to rebuild came exclusively in the form of economic and military aid from the United States, totaling what was then US\$12.6 billion between 1946-1976 (Woo-Cummings and Woo, 1991). U.S. assistance also provided technical training to a corps of thousands of statisticians, economists, and engineers who helped form the growing body of technocrats which comprised the Economic Development Council (Seth 2013). Technical assistance to Korea made up 40% of education aid from the United States, an impressive proportion for this era given how much postwar aid worldwide focused on facilities, equipment, and materials (Lee 2014). Despite the wartime destruction of school infrastructure, demand for education remained strong enough that classes were held in informal settings that ranged from tents to factories following the signing of the armistice agreement (Seth, 2012; Synott 2007). Four years later, Wood describes schooling taking place “in dark, unheated shacks made of scrap lumber, tarpaulins, and plywood scrounged from the army” (p. 117). This changed quickly, as the vast majority of Allied reconstruction funds were earmarked for infrastructure, including schools (Ministry of Education, 2015).

American-driven technical assistance to education was driven by recommendations from a Florida State University study team which outlined the development of a new educational system for Korea’s primary and middle schools, and subsequently funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). As the product of foreign research, these recommendations were met with suspicion in some circles and the extensive deliberations required to adopt and adapt its recommendations highlighted the ability of Korean education leaders to push back on policy recommendations, even when endorsed and funded by international donors (Masoner & Klassen, 1979).

Recommendations also resulted in the creation of the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), a notionally autonomous educational research and development center initially funded by a US\$7.5m loan from USAID (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). From a 1979 report, KEDI’s stated mission at that time was:

to determine educational ideals and objectives which reflect the cultural heritage, social reality, and future direction of the Korean society; to reformulate and systematize educational content to correspond to educational objectives, and to develop and utilize modern educational methods, facilities, and materials to achieve an effective and economically efficient program of education. (Masoner & Klassen, 1979 p. 60)

The pedagogical content presented by KEDI was rigorously systematized, while at the same time committed to considerable flexibility in service of meeting its goals. The new system embraced a mastery learning concept and framed the instructional process via a five-stage flow model that encompassed planning, diagnosis, teaching and learning, extended learning, and evaluation. The planning stage involved task analysis, lesson planning, and management planning. The diagnostic stage involved identifying the student’s level of understanding of the unit’s prerequisites, accompanied by suggested learning activities for students who required additional support (developed by KEDI staff and included in the Teacher Guide). The teaching-learning stage followed, involving the introduction of the task, development, and elaboration.

The extended learning stage included a formative test to assess levels of mastery, following which learning activities were prescribed while teachers provided additional attention to students who had not yet mastered the content. The evaluation stage involved summative tests at the end of units or sets of units. Teachers had the freedom to develop their own tests, although KEDI provided tests and test items.

Although the approaches to curriculum were structured, strongly sequential, and designed to parallel current textbooks, the system was intended to be extensively field tested through rounds of demonstration and experimentation. In its flagship undertaking, elementary and middle school reforms, KEDI “conscientiously attempted to follow a revision plan that could be realistically managed, could receive widespread acceptance from college and university scholars, could be understood and accepted by teachers, and could include as many of the desired goals as possible” (Masoner & Klassen 1979, p. 130). This approach stands in sharp contradistinction to reforms elsewhere which fail due to the unacceptability of new approaches to teachers, schools, and other key decision makers.

Korea’s dependency on American military and economic support during this era allowed concepts of citizenship and participatory democracy to make their way into Korean textbooks and increase identification with Western-style democracy (Seth, 2012). American educational advisors (and later, American-trained Korean educational advisors) were deeply involved in shaping Korea’s post-independence educational strategy (Adams, 1956; Masoner & Klassen, 1979; So et al., 2012; Wood, 1957), with the Third American Educational Mission closely advising the Curriculum Study Committee as they created the 1955-57 National Curriculum (Seth, 2012).

Korea’s liberation from colonial rule provided an opening for Western approaches to science, egalitarianism, and individualism. Rather than Western-styled modernization drowning out traditional values, it instead resulted in what Chung-Il et al describe as a “unique duality of consciousness” (1985, p. 19) surrounding human interaction and social structures that involves a “wise accommodation” of other cultures (1985, p.27). Although moral education had been removed from the Korean curricula by American advisors as part of the democratization process, it was reintroduced by the Rhee and Park administrations to emphasize a common ideology of anti-Communism and patriotism (Seth, 2012).

Following the end of colonization and the designation of Korean as language of instruction, many (Japanese) teachers returned to Japan, and only a few of the Korean teachers who remained could read, write, or teach in Korean (Yoo & Lee 2014). To address the demand for in-service training, private sector organizations like the Korean Language Society retrained teachers, regardless of subject area, and published textbooks and teaching materials in Korean. Beyond changes to the language of instruction, postwar educators were committed to eliminating reliance on authoritarian-style methods of teaching used by the Japanese and developing improved pedagogies for the new nation (Masoner & Klassen, 1979).

This was the context in which primary education was made compulsory and universal. Early commitments to uniformity of basic education provision sought to mitigate the risk of regional and socioeconomic disparities frequently seen elsewhere (Seth, 2012). Following the *Six-year Plan to Complete Mandatory Education*, which was prepared in 1949 but began implementation in 1954 following the 1950 outbreak of war (Kim, 2002), primary enrolment grew from 54% in 1945 to 95% in 1956 (Ministry of Education, 2015; Domjahn, 2013). The Ministry of Education budget as a percentage of total government budget rose from 9.3% in 1955 to 15.2% in 1960 (Ministry of Education 1988, in Jeong & Armer 1994), although primary education was not (at least nominally) free to all eligible school-aged children until the late 1960s (Kim, 2002).

Short term measures were enacted to respond to growing demand, and included large class sizes, double-shift schooling, and night classes (Kim, 2002). Two or three shifts were common in the lower primary grades (Wood, 1957), and pupil-teacher ratios ranged from 66.5 in 1952 to 55.3 in 1956 to 58.6 in 1960 (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). Approximately 25% of elementary teachers in 1956 did not hold the mandated qualifications of a normal school or secondary school certificate (Wood 1957). In 1956, teacher pay ranged from 21,000 *won* (USD \$42.00 in 1956 dollars) per month in elementary to 22,800 (USD \$45.60) per month in secondary. This was supplemented in various amounts by local PTAs, from 32,000 *won* (USD \$64.00) in Seoul City to nothing in rural areas (Wood 1957). Government-operated schools also provided rice rations for each member of the teacher's family, indicating low levels of remuneration which made it necessary for most teachers to maintain additional jobs to make ends meet.

While the enactment of this plan saw extensive investment in the expansion of primary education, investment in post-primary education remained limited (Jeong & Armer 1994). In 1953, comprehensive entrance exams were instituted for middle and high school in an effort to balance demand for higher levels of education against limited secondary provision and the state's desire to mitigate the supply of advanced degree holders (Seth, 2012). This concern continued through the Park administration (1962-79) evidenced by its voiced concern regarding the "revolutionary potential of idle college graduates" (Sorensen, 1994, p 18).

Expansion of post-primary education (1961-1980)

The period of time following the immediate post-independence era saw the expansion and standardization of post-primary education, as well as early efforts to combat intensifying competition for access to the best schools. Following the Park military government's transition to power in 1961, Korean educational policy set its sights on the universalization of secondary education and expansion of vocational education. General Park Chung-Hee's government was a canonical example of what political scientists have variously called "developmental dictatorship" or "benevolent authoritarianism." While the down-side of this style of government is that if mistakes are made, they can be widespread and costly, Park's approach lowered policy transaction costs and the cost of indecision, boosted by its reliance on high-quality technical advice and technical managerialism.

The portion of the education ministry budget allocated to post-primary education doubled during this era, from 19% in 1960 to 38% in 1980 (Economic Planning Board 1955, in Jeong & Armer 1994). This occurred alongside (and was largely driven by) the national strategy for the development of a labor force with increased manufacturing skills required for a transition to heavy industry and chemical industry. However, class sizes remained large at the primary level, with a pupil-teacher ratio of 63 in 1965, which did not drop below 40 until 1985 (Kim, 2002).

The prevalence of vocational technology high schools increased following the 1962 *Five-year Economic Development Plan*, which emphasized the development of skilled technicians for labor-intensive industrial development like electronics, construction, iron making, steel making, chemicals, railway, mining, and aviation (Ministry of Education 2015).

The *Industrial Education Promotion Act*, written in 1963 and enforced starting 1967, promoted vocational training through training institutions affiliated with the education sector as well as within industry. Its implementation was activated by the *Five-year Plan for Science and Technology Education* (1967-1971), drafted in tandem with the *Five-year Economic Development Plan* (1967), although this coordination, on a practical level, met with varying degrees of success (Lee 1974). These policies increased the quota of science and engineering departments in universities and constructed vocational schools to promote science and technology workforce development and support export-oriented manufacturing. The investments in infrastructure and teacher training that made this expansion possible were funded by enforcement of the *Local Educational Grant Act* of 1963 and *Local Educational Finance Grant Act* of 1971.

Access to higher levels of schooling was expanded through standardization of entrance examinations that set strict quotas for admission and graduation in 1961, institution of a preliminary college entrance exam in 1968, elimination of the middle school entry exam in 1969, and standardization of high school provision in 1974. While a preliminary college entrance exam had been attempted in 1962-3, it was discontinued until 1968 because it was inadequately aligned with preparatory work and only allowed the same number of students to pass as there were university spots available (Lee, 1974). This popular change resulted in a ratio of 1.5 qualified applicants for every accepted university student throughout the 1970s (Jeong & Armer 1994). The introduction of the preliminary college entrance exam standardized high school provision by preventing inadequately prepared high school graduates from entering colleges, while restraining the at-times chaotic expansion of private universities and colleges during this era (Lee 1974). Prior to this, each university offered their own entrance exam, and high schools spent the bulk of teaching time on the subjects that were tested by the universities to which their students planned to apply, undermining the time allotment schedule prescribed by national authorities.

The 1969 *Middle School Equalization Policy* eliminated the middle school entry exam, closed the most prestigious middle schools, and opened a lottery-based selection process for all remaining middle schools including private schools (Isozaki 2019). This was an attempt to mitigate intense competition into the most elite intermediate schools, and to lessen the financial

burden of additional tuition which resulted in an uneven playing field based on family ability to pay (Kim, 2002). This resulted in middle schools that contained not just the top students but a mix of outstanding and poor students which represented a larger and more heterogeneous student body than ever before. Importantly, this forced innovations in teaching methods such as mastery learning and projects for struggling students that raised the equality of provision and attainment (Lee, 1974).

Based on this model, the *High School Equalization Policy* attempted to mitigate fierce competition for elite high schools in 1974 by similarly normalizing quality across schools (Kim, 2002). In 1979, the practice of parents sending their children from rural areas to live with relatives in Seoul to attend better middle and high schools in the capital was outlawed and extracurricular tutoring was prohibited, at least on paper, in 1980 (Sorensen, 1994).

These policies highlighted rising tensions between aspects of Korean national identity which endorsed an egalitarian ethos, and family investment in private education to improve the likelihood of access to higher levels of education. Rather than eradicating these tensions, however, the elimination of competition for elite secondary schools shifted them to higher levels of education. As demand for post-primary schooling quickly outpaced existing provision, public funds were allocated to private schools to fill the gap. Private middle schools began receiving public funds in 1971, expanding to private high schools in 1979 (Kim, 2002). The increase in public education spending at post-primary levels was accompanied by tightened control over the expansion of higher education.

This era also saw the start of policy measures intended to address growing demand for post-primary school teachers and administrators. Teacher colleges began training education administrators and researchers in 1963, and post-primary teachers received incentives such as employment guarantees and tuition exemption following mandatory service (Lee 1974). Teacher pay, at least at the high school level, was on par with that of education officials, general officials, and high ranking military personnel through the 1970s (Chung-II et al., 1985). Temporary teacher training centers were created in the 1960s to provide six-month pre-service training for college graduates, and closed by the late 1970s as the supply of teachers began to exceed demand (Kim, 2002).

It is critical to note here that the Korean government had 18 Ministers of Education during the first 20 years following independence, and policies changed under each minister. In 1968, Prime Minister Chung-II Kwon attempted to institutionalize the first long term comprehensive education plan intended to outlive administration changes, supported by a newly-created planning institute (Lee 1974). During this era, external influences continued to shape ideological approaches to education, in particular toward democracy. By the 1970s, US-trained educational specialists led the Ministry of Education and the Korean Educational Development Institute, and both textbooks and the general educational discourse reflected American ideals such as individualism, freedom of expression, and liberal democratic government (Seth 2012). Beginning in 1972, national history was included in the preliminary college entrance exam, which may have reflected increasing government emphasis on national identity (Lee, 1974). Efforts to balance systematic

instruction and test preparation with more humanist approaches emerged that year through the Free School Day, in which elementary schools were directed to spend one day per (six-day) week on field studies, practical arts, sports, and hobbies in an effort to educate the whole child and mitigate the pressures of more monotonous classroom instructional approaches (ibid.).

Higher education expansion and industrial advancement (1981-2000)

Starting with the Chun government, the era of massification of higher education began in 1981. Economic development strategies called for a highly skilled, college-educated labor force aligned with the needs of a growing technology industry (Isozaki, 2019). This triggered a demand for up-skilling workers from light industry to heavy chemical industry. Taken alongside the relaxation of college admission quotas, this weakened demand for vocational education offerings. Two-year colleges were thus restructured to improve and harmonize quality in all regions of the country, and a system of cooperation between industry and academia was built to guarantee employment in local industries for locally educated graduates (Ministry of Education 2015). Increasing demand for lifelong education—specifically further development of skills for future-proofed employability—was met through newly created open universities linked directly to industry, which expanded higher education opportunities for industrial laborers and working youth (Ministry of Education 2015).

Jeong and Armer portray the expansion of tertiary schooling to previously excluded groups and the curtailment of the private tutoring system that favored middle-class students as a response to political and social pressures, rather than as a move in intentional alignment with economic strategies (1994). Further ideological clashes occurred in the early 1980s when the Ministry of Education announced a campaign to “free young people from ideological contamination” (Korea Newsreview, 1981 in Seth, 2012), by requiring increased attention in teacher training to studying “democracy,” “anti-communism,” and Korean nationalism (ibid.).

After teacher supply began to outstrip demand in the late 1970s—but importantly, not before that—the government’s focus turned to upgrading the qualifications of the teacher force in earnest. Yeom and Ginsburg (2007) note that an emphasis on professionalization of teaching forces tend to occur during periods of economic expansion and when state elites view teachers as key players in defusing or deflecting radical movements, both of which were in play in Korea during this era. In 1985, all existing teachers’ colleges were unified into 4-year institutions (Sorenson 1994), and from 1986 on, in-service teacher training institutes were established at the provincial level (Kim, 2002). Korea’s policies toward deliberate development of the teacher workforce mirrored their larger policies toward education and workforce development, resulting in the continued prestige of the teacher tradition as well as considerable pushback from teachers negatively affected by these policies.

The role of teacher unions in Korea is complicated, in part, by the fact that there are multiple important unions. The Korean Federations of Teachers’ Associations (KFTA) is a conservative teacher union whose documents have historically emphasized professionalization, and is socially and politically expected to play more the role of a professional association. The Korean

Teacher's Union (KTU) is expected to play a role of bargaining with the state in the traditional sense, and another union deals with private schools. In a somewhat-rare instance of alignment with the KFTA, the KTU began endorsing teacher professionalism "aggressively and positively," but only starting in 2002—and linking it explicitly with demands for increased teacher autonomy (Yeom and Ginsberg 2007, p. 303).

Yet even the union most expected to be about collective bargaining would seem to be mostly concerned with broader political, policy, ideological, and pedagogical issues such as the role of education in a growth-oriented trading society, the role of humanism in education, disability-inclusive education, and human rights and privacy concerns related to EMIS tracking. In an analysis of the role of the KTU and the issues they take on, Synott (2007), for instance, covers some 10 or so "grievance" issues. Wages and working conditions are only one of those issues, and a relatively tangentially covered one at that. Part of the reasons why even the presumably more bread-and-butter union does not seem to focus so much on wages is the fact that even as far back as 2000, Korea has had one of the highest ratios of teacher pay to GDP per capita in the OECD.⁴⁶

The dawn of the international educational assessment era coincided with the completion of Korea's educational transformation. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) global implementation of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has seen Korea rank among the top five high-performing countries for reading and mathematics, and in the top ten for science each year it has participated (OECD, 2014). Its consistent high ranking against wealthier countries, as well as the role of education in transforming Korea's economy from independence, has cemented its reputation among low- and middle-income countries as a model to emulate.

⁴⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/48631286.pdf>

5. High purpose in post-independence period in African education

In this section we trace the role of purpose in African education post-independence and in the education boom that started in the 1960s, with or right after independence.⁴⁷ Africa seemed a useful counter-case as it is the region of the world that has undergone de-colonization the most recently, and is the region that, as a whole, has the lowest relative achievement in terms of learning outcomes and equality of learning outcomes. We note that while we focus on Africa for the reasons given and for lack of space and time, similar exercises have been carried out for other regions. Interacting history with the policy present, in the context of policy and idea borrowing, is something other researchers have found useful (see Harper 2000 for a similar discussion with respect to South East Asia).

The section links to previous sections on policy borrowing by showing how highly “imposed” policy borrowing (as it were) implied by colonialism put many of today’s developing countries at a disadvantage relative to Korea and Japan, and how, after independence, policy borrowing of a more well-intentioned sort, as often orchestrated by development agencies, nevertheless missed the mark to a significant degree in two ways: a) by simply avoiding the link between the style of policy borrowing and the focus on national development that Korea and Japan had, and b), as a result, the policy borrowing with development agency assistance was relatively shallow.

While the comparison in this paper of how colonization (or at least the colonial intent) was confronted in Japan and Korea, versus the African cases explored in this section emerged as an important sub-theme of this monograph, we are quick to note that we are not professional scholars of this area. We made our way into this topic as we progressed with our main research, but we thought it too interesting to omit from our analysis. We invite others to critique.

First we start with the situation right before colonization, or in the initial stages of colonization, and then move on to independence and post-independence.

5.1 Indigenous African efforts to adapt to colonial educational policies

This section introduces indigenous African efforts to adapt imported education policies to their needs during the colonial era, and it argues that better learning outcomes may have resulted had these efforts not been stymied by colonial policies and practices. These efforts are organized as follows: first, they can be best described as resistance to the *types* of education offered, not to formal education per se. Second, resistance centered on different ideas about the *purpose* of education. This purpose was defined as education that was relevant for the lives and livelihoods that resisters desired for themselves, was generally more equitable, and was highly varied in content based on context.

⁴⁷ The idea of including this section came from Moses Oketch of UCL Institute of Education.

While European-controlled schools played the dominant role in colonial-era education provision and limited the responses of their subjects, African reactions and initiatives in some cases were quite significant and deserve a closer look (Ranger 1965a; Strayer 1978). Even prior to the rise of mass nationalist movements that paved the way to independence, mission and government provision of education received critique and pushback from elite, rural, and urban sources (Ranger 1965a). Notable examples span Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa and include Buganda (Hanson 2010; Kasozi 1994; Ranger 1965a), Congo (Yates, 1971), Igboland (Ubah 1980), Kenya (Marah 1987; Ranger 1965a; Strayer 1978), Northern Rhodesia (Ranger 1965a,b), Nyasaland (1965a), Sierra Leone (Berman 1974, Corby 1990), Southern Rhodesia (Ranger 1965a; Sithole 1999; Summers 1994), and Swaziland (Booth 2003).

The careful reader will note that most of these examples are former British colonies, which does not necessarily reflect a greater proclivity for pushback among British colonial subjects. Rather, it reflects a necessarily limited scope for this paper, based on principles of economy, as well as the breadth of available literature on Britain's educational adaptation policy. As educational adaptation is mentioned in several of the examples below, and represents the educational policy which garnered the most pushback from the colonies, it deserves a brief exposition here.

In what is itself an interesting case of policy borrowing from the segregated United States, the various Phelps-Stokes Commissions to West, Eastern, and Southern Africa recommended in the 1920s that missionaries and colonial governments work together closely to institutionalize colonial schools. Schools were to emphasize agricultural and vocational training in vernacular languages, rather than the literary-based English language education demanded by Africans themselves. Educational adaptation was understood by Europeans to encompass a form of education which would train Africans to be “good Africans” in the manner of good colonial subjects who would be inured to destructive (to the metropole) demands of economic equality and political sovereignty (Marah 1987, p. 462; Booth 2003). The intention was to undo the “damages” of the past decades of European-style education (which Africans now correctly identified as their only route to power in the colonial state) to preserve colonial notions of a static, rural African society. This approach stands in stark contrast to that of Japan and Korea, both of which sought to provide rigorous, quality education to the whole nation as they identified that everyone was needed to build a nation capable of withstanding the West.

Initial or early colonial demand patterns

To explore the first theme, we highlight examples of demand for education during the colonial era to highlight that the resistance which emerged was in response to the *type* of education offered, rather than a wholesale rejection of Western-style education.

In the Congo, Igboland (Nigeria), Swaziland (eSwatini), and elsewhere, mission schools were initially met with indifference (from children) and hostility (from adults) who saw no intrinsic value to schooling and considered it to be on par with other missionary demands for labor that took children away from helping their families (Ubah 1980; Yates 1971). In the Congo and Sierra Leone, parents and chiefs regularly demanded pay for attendance through the 1880s and 1890s

(Corby 1990; Yates, 1971). This shifted dramatically at the end of the 19th century, and by 1900, 50% of primary-school aged children in the Sierra Leone colony were in primary school, exceeding the enrollment rates in many European countries at that time (Corby 1990). By 1908 delegations from Congolese villages near mission stations began actively requesting teachers and books, volunteering young people as unpaid assistant teachers, building schools at their own expense, and purchasing any books they could find in the local language. In the absence of formal schools, missionaries and government officials alike reported that Congolese were teaching themselves to read and write (Yates, 1971).

When Standard VI certificates began to lose their value as employers demanded higher qualifications, parents began to fear that the promises of returns on investment in education would remain unfulfilled, particularly as those students who failed their certification exams or dropped out prior to completion no longer wanted to farm but did not qualify for formal sector employment (see Corby 1990 for Sierra Leone and Ubah 1980 for Igboland). Yet even when the job market began insisting on qualifications which were not available via existing educational provision, faith in the new educational system only grew stronger.

In the kingdom of Buganda, exposure to Swahili literacy and training in craftwork stoked enthusiasm for literacy and mechanical training prior to the arrival of Christian Missionary Society in 1877 (Ranger 1965a). Early conversion efforts were more effective here than in some of the other countries discussed in this section, but this didn't mean that Baganda Christians didn't push back on mission provision of education. Baganda beliefs about the responsibility of every learner to teach others, regardless of gender, meant that Baganda Christians pushed the expansion of education faster than missionaries preferred. As this particular set of beliefs was not religious in nature, it could not be supplanted by missionaries as easily as other beliefs that clashed with religious teaching. Village schools (sometimes pejoratively called "bush schools" or "substandard schools") were in high demand amid local initiative and ownership. They offered a "creative blend of indigenous patterns of education with the new knowledge brought by missionaries" (Hanson 2010, p. 156).

Competition between communities and kinship groups, as well as between various missions, drove the explosion of new schools across the continent. In Buganda, competition between Catholics and Protestants for followers resulted in the broad dispersal of lay teachers who established "reading-houses" that, under the supervision of local church councils, became institutionalized as village schools featuring beginner and advanced classes that focused on reading, writing, basic numeracy, and Bible study (Hanson 2010). These were entirely self-funded until 1909, at which point the poll tax paid by teachers was refunded to them by the Protectorate government. This allowed teachers to keep teaching, as pay was so low that teachers were forced to stop teaching to work to pay the poll tax.

Debates over the purpose of education (schooling, socialization, or acculturation) reached a crisis point in the interwar years spanning the 1920s-1930s (Summers, 1994). Prior to this, schools were run exclusively by missions in many territories, and the problems they faced tended to relate to droughts and epidemics, sexual abuse of students, and excess corporal

punishment. By the 1920s, Southern Rhodesians had refined their educational expectations and had developed mechanisms to voice their discontent (complaints, stay-aways, strikes, cultivating European allies outside of the school, moving to different schools). Summers (1994) asserts that Africans' methods of voicing concerns about and demands from the education sector were more effective than in any other sector of the economy or society. By the late 1930s, testimony to the De La Warr Commission indicated a "single-minded focus on learning what Europeans knew" (Hanson 2010, p. 162), which stemmed from the extreme wealth difference between local and foreigners evident in clothing, food, and possessions. This leads to the second theme of this section, which is the purpose of education as envisioned by indigenous Africans as compared to missionaries and European administrators.

Competing purposes of colonial-era education

As the primary provider of colonial-era education, missions often engaged in selective borrowing of curriculum and pedagogies originally designed for the British working class, as the purpose was the same: teaching the virtues of hard work and the principles of evangelical Christianity (Hanson 2010; Strayer 1978). Prior to the educational adaptation policy, the British colonial government did not explicitly name a purpose aside from educating a small cadre of low-level clerks and functionaries to support the cost-efficient administration of the colony (Booth 2003). Thus the colonial government and missionaries disagreed about the purpose and goals of native education, which in many contexts created space for Africans to negotiate policies for their own purposes (Berman 1974). Reasons for attending mission schools varied, but most related to clearly defined political, social, or economic goals (Berman 1974). Ranger (1965a) explains the evolution of these reasons over the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries:

Early African criticisms were often directed against deficiencies of technical education...For a variety of reasons such demands fell away... As it became clearer that economic opportunity would lie rather in entering the system being created by whites and as it became understood that the technological skills offered were not capable in themselves of reproducing white material mastery but were rather skills which equipped men only for very subordinate positions, the demand for improved education came to concentrate almost exclusively upon literary and clerical education. In a situation where a newly exclusive demand for literary education ran into a new European insistence on technical and agricultural instruction of 'relevant' kinds, there was widespread expression of African criticisms of education provision in the 1920s and 30s in many areas where it had not previously been heard (Ranger 1965a, p. 69).

The distinction between educational purposes as defined by the different groups is highlighted by the recollection of ZANU founder and one-time MP Ndabaningi Sithole whose single year attending a South Rhodesian mission school emphasized the kinds of agricultural training ("ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting") that they already did at home: "What we knew was not education; education was what we did not know" (Sithole 1999, p. 68).

Where utilitarian education was in demand, there was a focus on advanced skills rather than menial ones. Following its establishment in 1920, Southern Rhodesia's first government school saw a general strike among the majority of its students in 1921 over food and curriculum, and again in 1922 for more instructional time on academic learning and less time on "industrial training" (Summers 1994). A second government school opened in 1922 and was promptly shut down by a strike as students demanded to be trained to "make buildings with corners" (i.e., skilled or semi-skilled construction work). Insisting that students not acquire skills that would put them in competition with European artisans, so the principal forced striking students to build a series of round huts for the principal's primary residence. Strikes and agitation continued until he resigned. Ultimately, and against the designs of educational administrators, most graduates of these government schools did not return to the reserves or even employ their manual skills, but instead found jobs using their English skills.

By the 1940s, the curriculum in Igboland was firmly rooted in literary studies. Classes like handcraft and agriculture (i.e., labor on the school farm) were not offered on Standard VI exams, and students and parents favored a literary curriculum with non-manual emphasis, aligned with the bias of the labor market as education was valued as a means toward salaried employment. Because schooling was not mandatory, this demand shaped missionary offerings to de-emphasize vocational offerings. "People who wrote, read, and spoke English... represented a reference group which meant success and achievement in the new era" (Ubah 1980, p. 384).

Given the current state of evidence surrounding mother tongue language instruction, it's worth explicating the colonial-era demand for instruction in English in Igboland, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Southern Rhodesia, and elsewhere. Current policy recommendations on the use of mother tongue as the initial language of instruction are based on evidence regarding ease of literacy acquisition (as well as perhaps some higher-level pendulum swings against the supremacy of colonial languages). These recommendations assume that most students will persist in school until at least the end of primary, at which point they should have benefitted from a few years of instruction in the national language and be functionally bilingual (both verbally and in reading and writing). As the most common form of pushback on educational provision, colonial-era demand for English instruction was different: there was no way to advance from the inferior social, economic, and cultural station that colonization conferred without speaking the language of the metropole, and the resisters knew that. This desire extended to petitions by the Ugandan elite for instruction in Latin, "not because it had any intrinsic value but, as Serwano Kulubya explained, because not knowing Latin kept their children out of British school" (Hanson 2010, p. 163).

During this historic period, students were much less likely to complete a full course of schooling and at the time even a couple of years of schooling in English may have been enough to pick up a low-level interpreter or clerk job. In the Congo for example, connections between schooling and wage employment were understood quite differently between indigenous Congolese and missionaries. Congolese emphasized attendance for only a little while (i.e., the mechanics of attendance, rather than learning), plus exposure to the new material objects and goods from

European sources that had only been heard about in the villages, before moving on to towns and administrative posts where jobs and imported goods were available. Missionaries generally preferred that Congolese stay on the mission station and support mission plantations/workshops or return to rural villages as proselytizing Christians (Yates 1971). This stands in distinction to Japan and Korea, whose linguistic homogeneity made it easier to standardize the language of instruction across each territory, and indeed part of their respective bids for education to build a defensible nation was driven by the desire to not be colonized, and not have to learn someone else's language in order to get ahead (as was the Korean experience during the Japanese colonial period).

Demand for equitable provision

Indigenous African demands for relevant educational provision were remarkably equitable in terms of age, gender, and class, particularly when compared to colonial and missionary preferences. In Buganda, community schools sought to include a range of learners who would be later excluded from colonial educational provision: students from poor families, girls, and adults who sat in classrooms alongside children. In particular, they actively pushed back against white clergy/ed leaders who wanted girls out of the schools, or in inferior schools that only prepared them to be housewives and mothers.

One of the Phelps-Stokes reports dedicated an entire chapter to a curriculum for girls that intended to socialize them along Western lines. Recommendations that followed showed a commitment to the committee's view that Western education would "rectify the poor place African women held in society" (Booth 2003, p. 52) despite a colonial education system that reinforced and strengthened female domestic roles, and despite high female enrolments in places like Uganda and Swaziland.

Equal numbers of boys and girls attended the village schools in Buganda; educational offerings for girls at mission schools, where they existed, were biased toward homemaking, child-rearing, and food preparation. This indicated a much smaller social role than that which was held by Baganda women in the pre-colonial era. Every Baganda who spoke to the De La Warr Commission expressed some concern that the mission school offered girls less education than boys when compared to the village schools (Hanson 2010, p. 161). Responding to a question about increasing refusals to pay girls' school fees, the treasurer of the Buganda kingdom explained that "the reason for that is that they think education the girls are receiving today is not as good as that of boys; and they are not willing to pay for anything for which they do not receive proportionate value" (Delawarr 1937, no. 41, Jan 20 1937 in Hanson 2010, p. 162).

In Swaziland, despite the lower-quality education that proceeded following recommendations from the Phelps-Stokes Committee, girls were both over-enrolled and more likely to drop out than boys. In 1937, girls made up 63% of enrolled Swazi pupils (Booth 2003, p. 48-49), constituting one of the highest ratios of girls to boys in British colonial Africa.

As noted above, the Baganda approach to education saw every learner as capable of teaching, and it resulted in a flurry of literacy activities among Christian converts who taught everyone they knew how to read once they were able to do so themselves, while demanding consistent, quality education for all (Hanson, 2010). They pushed for the education system to be expanded to include all children in the Protectorate, and suggested that village schools could be improved by greatly increasing the numbers of inspectors (who would be tasked with helping teachers improve as well as inspecting them). Missionaries, meanwhile, discouraged these movements toward compulsory state-provided education as it would necessarily become secular. Instead of improving the schools Africans had created, the Ugandan Protectorate in 1937 moved the limited money spent across village schools to a large handful of the highest-performing schools which tended to be in the wealthiest areas. These efforts also sought to professionalize the teaching sector by establishing teacher training schools, developing standards, and expanding the curriculum beyond basic literacy and numeracy. These policies effectively shut out those who had enthusiastically taken up responsibility for teaching under their own local initiative, branding them as unqualified and effectively ending the era of broad social involvement in education that had followed initial encounters with literacy (Hanson, 2010).

Context-specific resistance

Indigenous African resistance to misaligned colonial education provision was highly varied in its approaches and demands. After some initial hesitancy at its introduction in many parts of the continent, this gave way to a warm welcome for missionaries and mission schools, followed a few years later by thoughtfully articulated criticism of mission and government schools. In doing so, students, families, and communities expressed clearly their existing expectations of education and what it should do for the educated.

In Swaziland and the Congo, young people pushed back not only on the purpose for education as defined by missionaries, but also those defined by elders and elites. Swazis held heterogeneous opinions toward missionary educational institutions. While mission school graduates described their educational experience as “racist and degrading” (Booth 2003, p. 39), some were generally sympathetic to its aims, while others saw it only as a means to a desired end: “the empowerment of Swazi commoners and the corresponding diminishment of royal absolutism” (Booth 2003, p. 40). Despite having received a Western education himself, Paramount Chief Sobhuza II was perhaps justifiably worried that it resulted in graduates who failed to appreciate Swazi institutions and culture and became ill-fitted to their environment (ibid.). However, the greatest resistance to schooling in the colony came from Swazi elders, who were naturally opposed to the weakening of claims to knowledge as obtainable only by age. By pursuing school as a means to employment in towns, youth in both Swaziland and the Congo defied not only their traditional elders but also missionaries and school authorities who intended for graduates to stay on the mission station and support mission plantations and workshops or return to rural villages as proselytizing Christians (Booth 2003, Yates 1971).

In less hierarchical societies, competition between and within kinship groups produced rivalries that drove the rapid spread of village schools, and produced demand for education that was

expressed democratically (Ranger 1965a). During the interwar period in Nyasaland, the Tonga society (as well as other Nyasa groups) began communicating their dissatisfaction with technical training, school fees, and language of instruction via newly-formed welfare societies and trade unions. Civil society groups like the Southern Rhodesian Bantu Voters' Association, founded 1923, lobbied the government to either change voting requirements of English literacy or provide instruction in English in all native schools (Ranger 1965a, p. 70). Also around this time, the Luo-led Young Kavirondo Association in Kenya demanded educational provision that did not require renouncing traditional beliefs (Ranger 1965a).

In more hierarchical societies like those of the Baganda and Kikuyu, demand for education was spurred by competition among elites. The Buganda kingdom in particular had a pre-colonial economic system that was highly competitive and materialist. Unlike the other countries described in this section, and despite its later position as an important focal point of the African independent schools movement, Buganda offered relatively few critiques of its mission schools before the 1920s. Ranger asserts that this is because the Ganda aristocracy controlled or heavily influenced education in the mission schools (1965a).

Competition between missions and governments for boarding school students offered another avenue for pushback against education that didn't align with indigenous purposes. Students organized strikes over curriculum and food at Domboshawa, Tjolotjo, and Inyati in Southern Rhodesia (Summers 1994), Buxton High School and Frere Town divinity school in Mombasa, Kenya (Strayer 1978), and Bo School in Sierra Leone (Corby 1990).

The failure of mission and government schools to meet the demands of indigenous Africans led to the formation of independent school movements in several former British colonies. Swaziland's Queen Regent Labotsibeni convinced the government to open a school in 1908 for Swazis near her royal kraal, which remained the only Swazi-serving government school for a couple of decades. This school featured only African teachers, although all qualified African teachers were themselves products of missionary institutions. The 1909 *Report on Education in Swaziland* includes an account of missionary authorities expressing concern about the "growing movement on the part of the Native in Swaziland to maintain schools on their own account entirely free from European supervision or control" (Dulton, Report on Education in Swaziland, 1909 p. 3-4 in Booth 2003), although the government refused to give financial support to such schools.

Mombasa's Muslim (Swahili and Indian) community negotiated for years to access education free of Christian missionary influence. In 1911, an independent Indian school was established alongside a petition from Mombasa's Indian community against compulsory Christian content and inefficient teaching at Buxton High School (Strayer 1978). Elsewhere in Kenya, the Kikuyu Independent School Association was established following disagreements regarding quality, curriculum, language of instruction, and traditional practices, such as allowing students and teachers to continue traditional practices like female circumcision alongside their Christian faith (Berman 1974). Kikuyu wanted more schools, including secondary schools and schools for

girls—the best Western education possible—and did not believe that this required giving up key tenets of traditional beliefs (Ranger 1965a).

Finally, in Southern Rhodesia, starting in about 1930, Africans began establishing their own independent schools which were open to a wide range of ages and led by “unauthorized native preachers” (Summers 1994). The Department of Native Development’s own protocols for shutting down unauthorized schools stymied their efforts to do so for some time, as this required first making contact with the school’s missionary superintendent and independent schools lacked these.

In each of these cases, a sizable exodus of students from mission and government schools prompted significant debates—if not actual policy changes—regarding language and curricular policies in order to stem the losses (Strayer 1978). It is important to note that some of the examples of pressure for educational changes described here were “essentially bids for privileged access to educational opportunity; others were essentially protests against the success of such bids” (Ranger 1965, p. 84). This stands in contradistinction to the efforts of Korea and Japan, who infused their education policy adaptation efforts with a strong national identity, although there are parallels to African countries in the years just before and after independence.

While these pushback efforts ultimately amounted to an incomplete and comparatively unsuccessful resistance, we note that their effects persist to the current day. Analysis by Ricart-Huguet (2021) demonstrates that regional political inequality (as measured by the home region of post-colonial cabinet ministers over the past half-century) within African countries colonized by the French and British can be explained by colonial-era provision of education rather than other proxies of development like infrastructure or health. While proximity to pre-colonial trading posts influenced the location of early colonial infrastructure, including schools (Wantchekon et al. 2015), the geographic spread of schools became increasingly haphazard as the colonial era progressed. This was due to the combination of “an ill-defined colonial investment strategy, a decentralized colonial state, the diverse backgrounds and preferences of colonial administrators (some civilians, other military men), combined with their inability to choose the district where they wished to serve, and the sometimes unplanned location of missions” (Ricart-Huguet 2021, p. 11).

As was readily perceived by the resisters described above, the Africans who entered civil service and legislative councils were afforded further opportunities to build relevant political, bureaucratic, and management skills. Over 75% of the first generation of African post-independence ministers in former British and French colonies had served as civil servants or members of legislative councils in the preceding era (Ricart-Huguet 2021). Aside from a flurry of efforts in British colonies in the final months preceding independence, administrators held little to no concern for balancing the composition of civil servants across different regions. Thus, districts with greater educational investments a century ago boast higher levels of education, development, and political representation today.

These effects are more pronounced in civilian (rather than military) governments and were tempered somewhat by post-independence expansion of educational access (discussed in section 4 above, educational access expanded very quickly starting in about 1970), as well as the democratizing wave that occurred across the continent in the 1990s. Although colonial education investments were decided largely by European outsiders rather than indigenous African colonial subjects (Ricart-Huguet 2021), constituencies that made successful pushes for literary educational provision in the colonial language were rewarded with outsized influence over policy that has persisted in the post-independence era.

In sum, what indigenous critics were demanding of colonial education amounted to nothing less than “modernization under African control” (Ranger 1965a, p. 68). This control was of course not possible under colonial rule, as the desired control would have been predicated on the freedom to select from the full complement of Western educational offerings and to adapt extensively to varied and dynamic contexts, as well as the power to decide for themselves the purpose of education and its relevance for their lives and futures. Thus, what might have been a promising start to a tradition of “good” policy borrowing was stymied by colonial policies and practices. In this instance, “good” policy borrowing would have meant something like that of Japan and Korea: more egalitarian, more practical and relevant (rather than overly theoretical, belle-lettriste, or focused on the Bible). But also “good” in terms of the policy borrowing framework developed in section 2: contested and considered by those whom it affected in alignment with a deeply felt national purpose as opposed to a shallow purpose imposed (or copied in order to qualify for loans or legitimacy from the global community) externally.

5.2 Post-independence stances on fundamental importance of education in Africa

At independence, Pan-African leaders made powerful emotional appeals to education as a necessity for nation-building. Note that here we focus on the centrality of education in early emotional appeals by independence leaders, rather than how central it truly ended up being with regard to policy, funding allocation, and in practice, as this varied by country. In this section and the next we outline how this framing of education changed over time from its role “for the good of the nation” to more technocratic conceptualizations which cast education as instrumental toward other economic or health goals.

Ghana

A few months after Ghana gained independence, Kwame Nkrumah addressed the parliament as Prime Minister, breaking down his policy vision for Ghana. Education, in this vision, would be a driving force for the nascent country, describing “our desire to maintain the momentum of our educational program, of our desire to improve our social services, and to increase the possibilities of employment.”⁴⁸ His government’s considerable investment in education was justified inasmuch it ensured “our children of today should be the well-educated and responsible

⁴⁸ <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/amed/amedsd/2008700222/2008700222.pdf> (page 6, par 6 & 7)

citizens of tomorrow,”⁴⁹ explicitly linking the equitable provision of quality education to the nation-building project as a whole.

Ghana introduced fee-free compulsory primary and middle school education in 1960 and prioritized investment in teacher training and support to ensure the quality of educational provision (Akyeampong, 2010; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). Although framed in relatively bureaucratic language, the Education Act of 1961, known as the Accelerated Development Plan for Education, outlined a plan for universal primary education that reflected Nkrumah’s understanding of basic education and literacy as a requirement for the social and economic transformation outlined in his vision.

Tanzania

Across the continent, and in addition to his entrenched socialist viewpoints, which included a commitment to complete resource control by the state, Tanzania’s President Julius Nyerere also believed there was a need for a different type of post-colonial education from that introduced by the colonialists: “The education provided by the colonial government . . . was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial State” (Nyerere, 1968). Nkrumah and Nyerere were educators who had been deeply concerned with education provision at scale, but they were only able to affect changes after independence (with parallels to Korea’s pent-up educational demand, but seemingly only among leaders) (Marah 1987).

Post-colonial education was to “help men decide for themselves—in cooperation—what development is.”⁵⁰ Rather than inculcating subservience to employers, it was to prepare young Tanzanians to play their part in a broader progress to be “quantified in relation to human well-being, not cars, prestige buildings or other such things, whether privately or publicly owned.”⁵¹ These visions formed Tanzania’s most important education policy document to that point, the Education for Self-Reliance Act, which notes:

“It [education] must encourage the development of a proud, independent, and free citizenry which relies upon itself for its own development, and which knows the advantages and the problems of cooperation. It must ensure that the educated know themselves to be an integral part of the nation and recognize the responsibility to give greater service, the greater the opportunities they have had.”⁵²

Newly-independent Tanzania inherited an elitist education system which provided book knowledge unrelated to the needs of Tanzanian society (Anangisye & Fussy, 2014). Virtually all government educational policy documents since that time describe education as an instrumental

⁴⁹ <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/amed/amedscd/2008700222/2008700222.pdf> (page 6, par 6 & 7)

⁵⁰ <http://dmz-ibe2-vm.unesco.org/sites/default/files/nyereree.pdf> (p. 6)

⁵¹ <https://arjess.org/education-for-self-reliance-nyereres-policy-recommendations-in-the-context-of-tanzania/>

⁵² <http://smu-facweb.smu.ca/~wmills/course317/nyerere.pdf>

tool for national development, geared towards producing “selfless Tanzanians instilled with the spirit of nation-building” (Anangisye & Fussy, 2014, p. 385).

Kenya

In Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta considered quality, equitable education to be part of a package of social services required for day-to-day functioning of the nation and as a means of getting the country out of poverty. Because he considered it a task that was too big for the government to handle alone, he encouraged community self-help schools (known as harambee schools). While direct written quotes from Kenyatta on the topic are scarce, archival recordings of his speeches exist. In a key speech on the importance of education, Kenyatta noted that:

“It is of great importance that every child in our glorious country gets education. And if we do that, our country will get people who will hold authority of our glorious government and other jobs in our republic. Those of you present here, be aware that you have a very important role to educate our children. If we cooperate together with the citizens and the government, we will do a good job to push our country forward.”⁵³

The English translation does not quite get at the collective nature of the “other jobs in our republic,” but the translator noted that the sense of the clip is a collective one, of benefit to the republic. And note that there is, much as we saw in Japan, an onus placed on parents to educate their children. The Manifesto of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the dominant party in the struggle for independence and in control of government after independence, noted in its Manifesto that

“The family is the fundamental unit in both our traditional society and in the Welfare Socialist State we are to build... The first aim of ... education will be to produce good citizens, inspired by a desire to serve their fellow men. The democracy we shall create is more than a set of laws and institutions. It will depend on the understanding participation [this is the exact wording of the original] of all the people in the democratic processes... The next aim will be to set your young people’s feet on a path of instruction which will correspond with the requirements of the new nation and meet their desire for careers... Every citizen lucky enough to possess some education or skill should be prepared to pass on this knowledge to those less fortunate.” (Kenya African National Union 1963, pp. 2, 4, 5).

Similarly, “If it is that you want us to become of consequence and to become the counsellors of our country,” wrote Jomo Kenyatta to the readers of *Muigithania* in 1929, “busy yourselves with education... But do not think that the education I refer to is that which we are given a lick of. No, it is a methodological education to open out a man’s head.”

⁵³ <https://youtu.be/viszRE8Pa5M?t=46>, personally translated by Virginia Mugo on Sept 22, 2022. Date of speech unknown.

Lelei and Weldman describe Kenyatta's educational vision as holding three aims: "as a vehicle to restore African dignity, to recapture the national heritage that had been diminished by the imposition of an alien culture, and to prepare Kenyan society for its place in the modern international community" (Lelei and Weldman 2012, p. 147). These aims sound about as steeped in notions of nation-building as those we saw in Japan and Korea.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the post-independence vision for education was led by Dzingai Mutumbuka, independence leader and Zimbabwe's first Minister of Education (1980-1989). As in Japan and Korea, education was seen as an equalizer as lack of access to education formed one of the primary grievances animating the Zimbabwean independence movement. As far as we can tell, there is no documentation from ZANU (the Zimbabwean liberation front most responsible for independence) movement position papers, or preambles to the first Acts. However, given that Mutumbuka is still alive and active, we were able to interview him. In our interview, Mutumbuka explained that "*First you have to go back and answer the question of why did the black peoples of Zim go to war? We went to war over a set of what we called national grievances, the first of which was being deprived of land... The second national grievance was education, which was seen as an enabler or equalizer. The fact that Africans did not have access to quality education, except that which was provided by missionaries, created a lot of anger. Education was thus one of the most important national grievances.*"⁵⁴

Investment in human resources for education was key, including colleges for teacher training and administration, which included a research arm that explored the colonial education system and ideas for its replacement. He interpreted these research findings through "*a core team of planners who really were my sounding board, and I used them really to analyze problems before I implemented any policy*" (ibid.)

He also acknowledged the importance of public engagement in policy adoption and adaptation, describing "nine months spent in public relations mode, talking with white parents, white teachers, white administrators, black parents, black teachers, black administrators, industrialists." (ibid.) While engaging with a range of stakeholders, he remained able to push back against external policy prescriptions, even those with funding attached, which did not align with Zimbabwe's priorities, describing difficult negotiations with USAID to shift an offer to build 40 secondary schools to building a secondary teacher training college that ultimately trained generations of secondary teachers. This highlights the necessity of inventiveness, the willingness to try something and measure whether it works, which exceeds the value of the attempted reform itself. Another example of creative policy borrowing but in the context of what one could call modernism or positivism was in the context of data: "I had I said that I wanted all of Zim to do the same standardized test, no matter if they were black or white. And this was an important validation of whether the students were achieving the high learning that I was expecting of them. I copied this from Singapore, who was using this same approach at the time.

⁵⁴ Personal communication, 29 March, 2022

External validation of this kind was important because there would always be a white parent who wanted to know whether their child was succeeding or not succeeding. This was considered an independent system of assessment to validate that students were indeed learning and excelling.” (ibid.)

South Africa

More recently, in South Africa, a statement of high purpose regarding the role of education after apartheid, while not literally post-independence, can be found in the preambles to South African Schools Act of 1996 (democracy had arrived with the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994):

“WHEREAS the achievement of democracy in South Africa has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation; and

WHEREAS this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State” (Republic of South Africa 1996, p. 5, italics in the original).

The focus in South Africa has less of a “serve the nation’s greatness” feel than was the case in Japan and Korea, and in some earlier post-colonial situations in Africa, and more of a redress and equality feel closer to Zimbabwe. It is nonetheless cast in terms of national social purpose rather than individual achievement or empowerment, and also places obligations on parents and citizens.

In all this, it is important to note that, as opposed to Tanzania and Ghana, Kenya (to some degree) and Zimbabwe were white colonies that included European settlers, as families, as opposed to colonies of enclave exploitation run largely by single male administrators. This meant that many of the educational administrative systems that the whites insisted on for their own children were relatively functional: accountability was demanded and extended. These were islands of administration, for the white settlers, that were fairly typical of the European countries the settlers came from. Even today, some of the best schools in Kenya or Zimbabwe can trace some of their roots to white settler schools. But more importantly, and to the extent that accountability systems are a public good,⁵⁵ this might help explain why, to this day, Kenya

⁵⁵ In the classical economics sense of constituting a framework of policies and procedures that could be extended at relatively low cost to the total population. That is, governance and management frameworks, per se, are non-rivalrous and non-excludable goods, whereas their implementation clearly may not be. Thus, how safe it is to assume that policies and procedures are truly public goods could be debated, as implementation is hardly cost-free.

and Zimbabwe seem to have education systems that are on average relatively good performers, or contain islands of excellence even within the public sector.⁵⁶ How true this will be for other former white settler but now more democratic societies such as South Africa, may be too early to tell. South Africa on the whole underperforms in a static sense, that is, compared at any given point in time to other countries, and relative to both expenditure on education and GDP per capita (Crouch and Hoadley 2018), but recent evidence (Gustafsson 2020) strongly suggests that quality may be improving.

5.3 Tracing bureaucratization and loss of high purpose

So far we have argued that at least an important part of the educational success of Korea and Japan seems to have been having a high purpose for education, seeing it as key to the existence and development of a strong and equal nation, and that this shows up strongly not only in pronouncements and preambles but also in results as portrayed by statistics. Other factors, such as a highly capable technocracy, have also helped. But that technocracy was in part developed as a response to the need for national development (in part through education), so the lack of technocracy, in situations where this has hampered education, can itself perhaps be traced back to having a weak national purpose for education. In any case our aim in this paper is to focus on the issue of purpose, not all the factors that have helped educational development in these countries. (We will discuss a few other factors that differentiate Korea and Japan from many of today's developing countries in section 6.) Now, in the case of Africa specifically, there seems to have been a reasonable level of high purpose in leaders' visions, yet one finds that educational achievement in learning and especially in equality of learning—that is, educational achievement other than merely increasing access and years (not necessarily grades) of schooling—seems to have been slow to come about. So, what happened?

This section will suggest some tentative hypotheses as to why and how high purpose has been to a significant degree lost from African countries' education systems relative to what one saw in the policy pronouncements of independence leaders in the 1960s (or really up to the 1990s if one considers the cases of Zimbabwe and South Africa), or why it seems to be lacking relative to what we found in Korea and Japan.⁵⁷ Before one documents the causes of a phenomenon, however, it might be right to document whether the phenomenon even exists. We do this by looking for traces of high purpose in a few education sector plans or other declarations. But, also, we, to some degree, simply assume that achieving better results, given how much funding key countries devote to education, and how much help, financial and technical, they get from development agencies, is a sign of lack of focus and the sorts of drivenness that come from having a high purpose front and center. Having relatively stagnant completion rates for decades,

⁵⁶ Some of these insights derived from Mackiatiani et al. (2016) and Lelei and Weidman (2012) and personal communication with Moses Oketch, University College London, on 27 September 2022. See also Crouch and Hoadley (2018).

⁵⁷ We focus on Africa just to make the analysis more tractable, but we suspect that the same holds for other regions or countries, such as some in Latin America or Asia (perhaps India in contradistinction to China?) where the leadership does not accord education the same existential value accorded to it by Korea and Japan.

at levels below 75%, and having other stagnant indicators such as extremely low learning achievement, we assume, betrays a lack of intense motivation. Implicit in this assumption is that the lack of achievement of somewhat better results is not caused by either a deep lack of technical know-how, since at least a few other countries in the region and further afield have achieved so much more while starting from similar levels, or financial capital, given reasonable levels of spending.

To the degree that high purpose has been lost, what may have been the causes? One could hypothesize two sources: internal issues or contradictions within the countries themselves, and the influence of development agencies.

Countries

As shown above, political leaders were ambitious and visionary in how they described the role of education in national development. We have tried to see whether the legal/bureaucratic system responded in kind, by looking for preambles or justificatory language in formal white papers, policies, and acts of parliament. We studied Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe. We have reported on South Africa and its emphasis on equity and redress, above. Other than that, we found some evidence of dedication to high purpose only in Kenya's National Development Plan 1964-1970.⁵⁸ Is it any coincidence that South Africa indeed made huge progress on equality (albeit mostly on input equality though there is some evidence of recent progress on learning) and that Kenya is an outlier in Africa in terms of learning outcomes? Perhaps. But a caveat should be raised: the usual caution that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." A second is that these countries already valued the commitments they verbalize, and that the laws reflect only a grassroots valuing of educational progress as essential for families (and hence for national development). But it is hard to know what is endogenous and what is exogenous, especially given Jomo Kenyatta's articulation of the value of education and the family as the joint pillars of development (see [Kenyatta quotations](#) above).

We also wondered whether part of the bureaucratization and loss of high purpose, and the tendency to adopt a very standardized "donor-driven" approach (as opposed to a response to the high vision of the leaders), which we believe we see after independence, might not be due to the fact that the sorts of models and alternatives that arose from contestation of the colonial citizens with the colonial power had been largely wiped out by the colonial power prior to independence, so that there were few practicable, working models on which the post-independence could have built. It was hard to find hard evidence on this, but we found strong hints.

In Kenya, despite the diversion of colonial government funding for education to the war effort during the Second World War, the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) and Kikuyu Karinga Education Association (KKEA) schools expanded their enrolment in the 1940s, while growing more confident, independent, and political. During this time Jomo Kenyatta became the

⁵⁸ <https://repository.kippra.or.ke/handle/123456789/2997>

headmaster at Kenya Teachers College, the teacher training school for KISA and KKEA schools. Government efforts to centralize school provision postwar were rejected by independence schools, as efforts were undertaken without including them in consultations (Natsoulas 1998). Enrolments continued to grow, from newly enrolled students as well as students whose families moved them from mission schools. At this time, independent schools were still supported by government grants (Adebola 1981). Yet the Kenyan government believed that the anti-colonial guerrilla Mau Mau movement was controlling independent schools and using them to recruit for independence movement (Natsoulas 1998). A police investigation of the Mau Mau early in 1952 sealed the fate of the independent schools; when the government declared a state of emergency later that year, both KISA and KKEA schools were closed. (Stanfield, 2005). Following the closure of independent schools, flyers were posted to the doors of mission schools to tell families to stay away; in the uprising that followed, teachers at mission schools were killed and injured, and schools were looted and destroyed. While those attending the closed independent schools were not likely to have been actively fomenting unrest prior to the school closures, the state of emergency and forced school closures brought these sentiments into the mainstream, culminating in the Mau Mau Uprising (Adebola 1981)

In Tanzania, the colonial promise of educational attainment as a means to escape subsistence farming life first to government jobs, then to later higher wages in cities and towns was by independence not a reality for most graduates by the 1950s. The hope of and demand for education for social mobility, however, remained. Nyerere's Education for Self Empowerment policy worked against the grain of this demand in its efforts to teach "basic skills, national values, and the importance of staying on the farm" (Berman 1977), which didn't jibe with the specific (and frankly, not very socialist) return on investment desired by students and their parents.

In most African countries just prior to independence, there was a rapid expansion of primary provision, increases in expenditure on higher education, a slower expansion of secondary, and inadequate improvement of teacher training. Education planning was not generally integrated into economic planning, and there was not much effort to reshape education systems or modify curriculum away from colonial templates (at least in most places). Teachers, with their requisite educational qualifications, were often pulled into political work (committees, elected or nominated representatives, political org leaders, MPs, local authority political machinery). This resulted in much absenteeism from teaching duties, and the more politically active teachers left the profession entirely for public service. A flip side is that many of the leaders were indeed educators, so that education visions were strong in their overall visions for the countries. So this tendency may have, oddly, produced a gap between the visionary statements and the ability to implement. Policies lowering barriers to entry for new teachers had negative effects on teaching quality, which dampened demand for education from families. Political independence also resulted in devolved, decentralized education budgets, dramatically increasing education expenditures by local governments who lacked the capacity to sustain these expenditures (Lewis 1961).

Donors or development agencies

We select the World Bank and UNESCO as, arguably, the most intellectually influential agencies on a broad basis in the education sector. Some other agencies, such as UNICEF or UNHCR, may have spent more money over time, or spend more money today, in the field, than UNESCO, and/or have a more intense (often projectized) presence on the ground. But they are not called upon, and have not claimed upon themselves, with broadly granted (de facto or de jure) legitimacy, the role of intellectual leadership in the sector. Others, such as USAID or FCDO (former DFID), have shown valid, legitimated leadership in narrower areas, such as USAID with foundational learning outcomes and FCDO with girls' education, but neither has the broad intellectual de facto leadership, or the leadership mandate, of UNESCO or the World Bank. The claim here is that neither the World Bank nor UNESCO has successfully worked with the countries to help them see education as a truly central factor in national development, in the development of the nation, as Korea and Japan did for themselves (without formal outside help in the case of Japan, and with help from the USA as to means in the case of Korea, but with the nation itself in charge as to national purpose). But the reasons they have not done so vastly differ from UNESCO to the World Bank.

In what follows, we are arguing for the non-existence of something. As even beginning researchers know, this is not easy. And in an area as fuzzy and empirical as policy and institutional history, one cannot proceed by stating, and proving, an impossibility theorem. In a sense, a more tedious process is needed: enumerating what does exist (or has existed in this case), and then showing that the thing in question is not in the list. This is what we do.

Also note that we made an explicit choice in this review of the track record of these institutions: we focused on a sort of exegetical analysis of the institutions' own documents, or those of close observers or insiders. The reason for this is simple: most critics will tend to criticize what is being done, or if they criticize what is not being done, there is always the possibility that they may be wrong, or overly focused on one thing that the author thinks ought to be done but is not being done (as opposed to a comprehensive list of what is not being done). Therefore, it seemed to us that detecting omissions in critiques of what is not being done is harder than detecting an unfounded critique that the agencies are doing something that they ought *not* to be doing. It was also a matter of simple economy. A specific search in Google Scholar for "critique of 'the world bank'" (not just "world bank") turned up 361,000 hits. Adding "education" to the search terms increases hits to 682,000, still a huge number. Thus, it is a huge literature to review, even if one sticks only to the most prominent books and papers in this literature. Furthermore, most critiques fall along what one might call the traditional ideological left-right axis, whereas an analysis of these institutions' roles in placing education as part of the national question would seem to us to fall outside of this axis. (Though it could be approached along the axis, if one wanted to.)

In general, however, it is worth noting that most of the critiques, either from the left or the right, tend to center on a broader version of our thesis in this paper. That broader version of the critique would hold that development agencies working in education tend to stay away from

institutional factors or political economic factors, or simply assume that the state is politically functional and focused, from a governance point of view, and that, therefore also assume that their task is largely a technocratic or financial one of providing policy options and technical advice, or even loans (usually paired with policy choices and technical advice) to fill knowledge or savings gaps. These gaps could be remediated through technical advice such as making the right technical policy choices (e.g., the mix of inputs, such as not enough textbook supply relative to teacher supply), or providing knowledge (e.g., of how one sets up a school construction system that can produce schools at a reasonable cost), or capital in the form of loans or grants (e.g., the savings gap, dating all the way back to the earliest development thinking such as that of Chenery and Bruno (1964)). In subsequent decades critics of the World Bank (and more broadly the “development industry”), such as Ferguson (1990), Klitgaard (1991) with great humor and anthropological depth, Easterly (2006), Burnside and Dollar (1997), have noted various issues with the World Bank’s work (and the aid industry in general). A pithy (though perhaps unfairly sweeping) way to summarize this literature would be to quote from Burnside and Dollar: “Aid has a positive impact on growth in developing countries with good fiscal and trade policies. Aid appears not to affect policies systematically either for good or for ill. Any tendency for aid to reward good policies has been overwhelmed by donors’ pursuit of their own strategic interests [*for which read: the need to lend, or influence politics, or get along with the governments in question*]” (cover page). Note that these critiques are generic: they do not apply only to education. But they do apply to sectoral issues or micro issues (such as poverty reduction) more than to the Bank’s role in macro issues. Other critiques approach the issue from a more humanist perspective. A strong example is Klees, Samoff, and Stromquist (2012), a tome whose contributors are a who’s who of more academic Bank critics.⁵⁹ The thrust of the volume is a summary in the Preface: “[The authors] have pointed out the narrow economic and utilitarian goals set for education, the limited and misleading input-output and cost-benefit analyses employed, the inadequate knowledge base on which decisions are made, the failure to take into account the context as well as the voices of the intended beneficiaries of proposed reforms of education systems, and the general neglect of teachers and the conditions that would enhance their work” (p. vii). These critiques often also claim that the World Bank imposes views and choices on the borrowing countries. It would be simplistic to say that the two different points of view are those of economists versus educators. True, there are no educators in the first group, but there are some economists in the second group, albeit with fewer conventional credentials than those in the first group. Nor would it be correct to say that this is along a right-left axis, though it is the case that what to the first group are “good policies” (e.g., policies of fiscal restraint such as structural adjustment) might be, to the second group, the source of many of the problems they see in the Bank (since countries’ financial authorities often cut social spending, when fiscal pressure is applied by the Bank or the IMF, even when it is not required by these institutions). Yet, in fact both groups coincide in one absolutely key respect, namely that the issues are largely not technocratic ones. Scholarly critiques of UNESCO are less common in the literature: a search in Google Scholar results in maybe half as many hits. They often focus on critiques of specific aspects of UNESCO’s programs, such as adult literacy, or its approach to culture (the C in UNESCO). Or they focus on institutional inefficiency.

⁵⁹ Steiner-Khamsi, Nordtveit, Kamat, Klees, de Siqueira, Ginsburg, Soudien, Samoff, Verger, Bonal, Samoff, Stromquist, Vally, Spreen, Robertson, Hickling-Hudson.

In the end, both sides of the World Bank critics, and critics of UNESCO coincide in that they do really seem to address the agencies' inability (or reluctance) to address the role of education in the national question. This motivates our own analysis of actual Bank and UNESCO planning documents, or the views of insiders, as a source of evidence.

UNESCO

UNESCO's influence and preoccupations seem to have gone through several phases, in a complex manner: complex in the sense that the phases have not been simple and sequential but overlapping, and also in the sense that they seem, at least to us as observers, to be dialectical reactions to each other rather than a simple linear evolution.

Philosophical phase: late 1940s. A first phase immediately after the Second World War (roughly 1946 to 1949) consisted mostly of high-level, rather heady, noble, intellectually attractive, and fairly rigorous philosophizing about the mission of UNESCO, and also consisted of direct injunctions to the world about how to use education, and the very process of discoursing on education, to help avoid the horrors of the just-finished war (and previous wars). The philosophizing included discussions on UNESCO's role in a process or rebuilding a less war-like world. In essence, UNESCO was a peace-promoting organization, not really an educational organization as we have come to think of it in the past few decades. The leadership of UNESCO in those days was highly intellectual rather than managerial, bureaucratic, or action-oriented. The first Director General was Julian Huxley, of the famous family of British intellectual fighters and scientific popularizers (Singh 2022). The phase was highly idealistic in the sense of giving a great deal of importance to ideas—or beliefs—as a driver of either peace or war, as in the famous foundational statement of UNESCO's constitution (the very first clause) that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”⁶⁰ Not to be overly cynical and not to interpret overly simplistically, but if one considers that ideas might simply disguise raw material interests, such as Germany's ideas about *lebensraum* as a justification of land grabs in Poland and Ukraine, and Japan's land grabs in Asia, then the focus on “the minds of men” seems a bit too convenient in how it plays into the game-plan of an institution that may have been predisposed by its leadership to be all about ideas. Many historians, on the contrary, perhaps more soberly and realistically, see the “land question” as the (or at least a leading) key motivator of both the First and Second World Wars. It is hard to think of land, and the grabbing of land, as a mere idea (Snyder 2010, Baranowski 2011).⁶¹ Be all that as it may be, the victors in the War, or those on the side of the victors (such as the Philippines), did not really want to discuss nation-building or the role that education could play in nation-building, as nation-building could easily be conflated with nationalism, and nationalism definitely had a terrible flavor after the War.

⁶⁰ <https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-265>.

⁶¹ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensraum>.

Diplomatic aspects. But even this process, while not providing a lot of practical guidance to educational delivery per se, had signal successes. For instance, dialoguing around UNESCO's mission within Japan itself, through Japanese civil associations dedicated to that purpose, played into the fact that UNESCO was the single most important conduit into re-integrating Japan into the comity of nations as a member of UNESCO, albeit over the strong opposition of Australia, China, and the Philippines and, interestingly, with the strong backing of the United States and especially the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) (whose education lead was American), the victors' organization overseeing the first years of the peace in Japan.

Fundamental education phase: 1950s. Almost immediately following this phase, and overlapping initially, came the phase of "fundamental education," that was decidedly a-theoretical, and in which UNESCO seems to have said "never mind planning and defining things, let's just act." The phase might have been a reaction—direct field empiricism—against the more theoretical or high-level first phase. It took the form of a huge variety of field interventions, using a plethora of inputs and methodologies, where education was to play a role in community-level development at the local level (note: most decidedly not *national*, and not particularly in coordination with Ministries). Thus, after nearly 10 years of *already* offering fundamental education as its main intervention (in the education area—meriting its own Division within UNESCO), in 1956 UNESCO ran a 10-day experts' meeting to "clarify and redefine as necessary, the concept of community development and related concepts such as fundamental education and agricultural extension..." (UNESCO 1956). This was a fairly high-level meeting, opened by the Director General. One of the sub-groups was charged with thinking about the definition of fundamental education (after nearly 10 years of implementation). It came to this conclusion: "The discussion opened up with an exchange of views on *whether* a definition should be worked out at once for fundamental education or whether this should be left till later... The formulation of a definition of fundamental education was deferred" (UNESCO 1956, p. 3). The meeting likely was needed because as UNESCO geared up its implementation, confusion had prevailed. The confused or vague nature of fundamental education can be seen in what is perhaps the most succinct evaluative summary of the impact of fundamental education: "UNESCO should envision education in its widest sense. Education involves instruction in all areas 'which contribute to the development of well-rounded, responsible members of society'... What exactly was meant by 'fundamental education? From the outset a certain embarrassment and confusion was apparent... Therefore UNESCO's vision was broad... and included health education, domestic and vocational skills, knowledge and understanding of the human environment, ... and the development of qualities to fit men to live in the modern world, such as personal judgment and initiative, freedom from fear and superstition, sympathy and understanding..." (Boel 2016, pp. 153 and 154). In the end, this seems to have generated frustration among actual implementers. In colorful language, for example, a field worker had complained in writing to the Paris-based coordinator of the program: "We are busy all the time on activities we know are somewhat helpful. We could... write reports about them as most people do, making the brightest side shine a little. Too many are content with this, with the results (*sic*) that the real issues are not faced at all, and the work is superficial... We have the feeling that people are working blindfolded. And worse, they don't realize it. How can they when almost anyone's *opinion* is as good as another's, no one really knows the *facts*. They all think

they know, especially those who fly over villages in an airplane...” (Boel 2016, p. 163. Emphasis in the original). The program of fundamental education was finally closed in 1958 even though it had been the flagship education program, and it was replaced by nothing concrete (Boel 2016, p. 153). As a summary of this phase, note that the program was, also, not at all focused on the national level, much less on education’s role in national development. It is unclear whether the basic reasons for the lack of attention to the national were the same as in the previous phase, namely an aversion to national issues, or whether it was just thought that working at the community level was simply the most practical way to show activism after the more philosophical phase earlier on.

Policy successes during the 1950s. Lest one appear to be conveying only somewhat bland results, one has to note that concurrent with the fundamental education effort, UNESCO continued with its successful attempts to work at higher levels. UNESCO’s focus was not, still, on national issues, or on education for nation-building as a high purpose, but on subject matter issues that could generate equality, peace, and understanding. Reading the history of these efforts, it is difficult to escape the impression that some of UNESCO’s best minds, combining depth of vision and wisdom with managerial executive ability, must have been dedicated to these efforts, as opposed to education planning or delivery as we think of it these days. The efforts sometimes started out less efficiently than they may have, but seem to have quickly learnt. Some examples are:

- a. Efforts to disseminate scientific facts on racial equality as a way to combat racism around the world. These efforts were not uncontroversial: racist conservatives of various stripes reacted negatively, e.g., in South Africa and in the Los Angeles School District in the USA (reminiscent of more modern controversies around race in school districts in the US). But such reactions in fact suggest that UNESCO was hitting the mark, and this was acknowledged by leading civil rights activists in the US, such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson (Duedahl 2016, p. 16) and in the US Supreme Court decisions on the unconstitutionality of banning inter-racial marriages (Duedahl 2016, p. 13).
- b. Efforts to improve textbooks to reduce negative views of other nations, more successful in some cases than in others (Dussel and Ydesen 2016, Kulnazarova 2016).

Education planning phase: 1960s. After the variety and relative chaos of the fundamental education approach in the 1950s, UNESCO started, at least in Africa, using a fairly standardized education sector planning template, and focusing on national planning and systems work as a main vector into schooling. This was signaled by the start of the creation of the International Institute for Educational Planning in 1962 (UNESCO 1962). All this took place in the heyday of national economic and social planning which had been popularized by the Soviet Five-Year plans, and their imitations in many economies as diverse as India (1951), Japan (1956), and South Korea (1961). The educational plans were supposed to be linked to national economic and social plans. The Institute was to train member states’ officials in educational planning of

the type which became familiar in subsequent decades: forecast the need for “manpower,” use forecasts of population, use targets of rates of enrollment from that population to forecast the numbers of students and hence the needed classrooms, teachers, and books, and then use that to drive the need for inputs and budget. Manuals were developed on how to do this, and also how to calculate how efficiently this was all being done, in terms of repetition and dropout rates (Thonstad 1981). At the same time, Ministries, especially in Africa, stated their need for planning assistance, in particular at a major conference in Addis Ababa in 1961 where a similar methodology was supposed to be used to forecast needs and budgets in every country at the Conference, and also drive the need for foreign assistance to fill the gap between needs and local availability (UNESCO 1961). All this planning activity was fundamentally of a bureaucratic and quantitative nature. Planning manuals and planning activity did not really stress how education, if properly and intensely developed, could be a key part of nation-building. In the end, though, these plans did not have much impact because implementation was typically weak, and for the same reasons that grand planning in general had proven to be not particularly useful. By the 1970s and 1980s, as the weaknesses of classical economic planning were made evident by reality (e.g., in the material stagnation in Soviet-style economies and planning and systems), interest in quantitative approaches declined (but did not disappear because it is not entirely useless in the right circumstances). In this phase, while there was no shying away from the national, the approach was mostly quantitative and bureaucratic rather than inspirational or deep with regard to the role of education in national development.

Expert assistance phase: 1960s onward. During this planning-oriented phase, a common modus operandi for UNESCO, which was copied by other multilateral and bilateral development agencies, was to send teams of experts, some on a long-term basis, some on a short-term basis, to assist in integrated processes of system development. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, UNESCO sent a team of no fewer than 22 experts in the fields of general (Ministry) services, primary and secondary education, technical and special education, teacher training, pedagogy and pedagogical planning, and so on, led by an experienced ex minister of education of Haiti (Dikay 2016). The experience of Congo is particularly telling in that a lot of effort was deployed in trying to work in a jurisdiction that still had trouble thinking of itself as a nation or seeing education as key to its development as a nation. Thus, and in great contradistinction to how Korea and Japan dealt with foreign advice, “... post-colonialism was something new to the UNESCO representatives, and Maurice Dartigue [the lead expert] expressed his worries about to what degree he could interfere in political affairs, when it sometimes seemed necessary in order to effectively revive the education system... In fact, some of the Congolese also from time to time expressed a similar opinion of the work being done by UNESCO, and the minister of education at one point told a representative of the organization: ‘Your experts give advice to use and good advice, but I would rather that they took decisions...’” (Dikay 2016, p. 177). To this day, development agencies working with this expert-mission assistance modality (and other modalities that are aimed at system change) struggle with the idea of having the countries be “in the driver’s seat” when the country does not seem to be able to *effectively* get into the driver’s seat, partly perhaps because they do not cherish the

bureaucratic process involved in donor coordination.⁶² So, in this kind of work, not only was UNESCO not really interacting with a nation clearly in charge of itself, but the theme of getting education right as a key, maybe the key, in developing a nation with a clear sense of its own nationhood, was not part of the agenda. Perhaps it cannot ever be, in which case the implications for agencies are humbling and complex. We touch upon that in the Conclusions to this paper.⁶³

Philosophical guidance phase: 1970 onward. Concurrent with the expert-mission approach or phase was the phase of the large philosophical guidance reports, specifically and with special significance, the Faure (1971) and Delors (1996) reports (UNESCO 1972 and UNESCO 1996). We focus on the Faure report as it would seem to have had potentially more impact, as the period from 1970 onwards is when African education started to take off and international agencies became most active. Both of these reports see education largely as a matter of individual rights, or of the contributions of individuals to material and social progress, but not in terms of fostering the social cohesion necessary for nationhood or sovereignty. It is difficult to “prove a negative,” of course, though not “impossible” as the popular saying has it. The report has a deep appreciation for the sociology, economics, and history of education, from which one may infer something about the role of education in the development of nations, but it does not explicitly analyze this role. The report even acknowledges that colonialism has undermined national sovereignty precisely through the education system: “In exercising sovereignty over a large part of the world until recent times, Europe, with its political and economic power, set its seal on educational institutions in the developing countries. And just as the political and economic effects of colonialism are still strongly felt today, so most educational systems in American, African and Asian countries mirror the legacy of a one-time motherland or of some other outside hegemony, whether or not they meet those nations’ present needs” (UNESCO

⁶² Asserting one’s sovereignty is sometimes done somewhat subversively. One of the authors of this paper has heard a Deputy Minister or Minister express to him the need to go around the donors’ collectivity as they are too slow, “gang up” on the Ministry, and only want to do what was agreed in a plan that too often reflects a lowest-common-denominator agreement between donors (and possibly the country). While creating mutual accountability between Ministries and donors for implementing things that were agreed, donor coordination committees can also be a way to keep out donors who might be more innovative than those already on the ground and do not hold “least common denominator” views on educational improvement.

⁶³ It may be interesting to note that UNESCO did assist countries that seem to have been seriously interested in education as a national project. Obichere (1976) refers to the nationalist orientation of Mali’s 1962 educational reforms that shifted the content taught in history, geography, and natural sciences from French and European interests to Malian and African interests (ex: West African flora and fauna, rather than learning about the biology of plants of the French Alps). Socialist in nature, these reforms resulted in the creation of the National Pedagogic Institute (NPI) which was in charge of textbook revision and production, examinations, library development, educational research, and technical services among other things. “Mali has restructured its educational philosophy and its educational system for the purpose of national development and patriotism” (p. 67), which he contrasts against that of Ivory Coast, which was (as stated by Planning Minister Mohamed Diawara) simply “the production of a consumer society” (p. 67). Despite staffing support from UNESCO, France, and the United States working alongside Malian staff, NPI struggled to fulfill its sweeping mandate due to staffing and equipment issues—something that (at least from a financing perspective) the United States ensured was not a risk in Korea. This suggests that simply having a national project is not enough. Skills are also necessary, and the development agencies may have had interests other than supporting a nationalist agenda with skills-building projects.

1972, pp. 11-12). Yet the document is relatively short on what practical steps can be taken to remedy this, other than to reclaim aspects of the curriculum: the use of education as an enterprise to pursue national sovereignty or national purpose is something the report is relatively shy about, as, perhaps (one can only speculate as to motivation) this is somewhat in disagreement with the humanistic, and yet technocratic, ethos of the report and of UNESCO more generally.

Thus, when it comes to specific recommendations (Faure 1971, pp. 181-223)—either general recommendations for education systems or for international assistance to countries—none of these include high-level policy work to help countries see how education can play a big role in the development of the nation. The recommendations are mostly about individuals and their rights.⁶⁴ The report is more sociologically deep than similar World Bank reports (see below), but no less oriented at individuals and at helping individuals self-actualize in society or become productive than at achieving a national purpose. Moreover, when it comes to assistance to countries, the report recommends a fairly standard process of diagnosis, sponsoring innovation and research on pedagogy and pedagogical management, system administration, and improvement of finance systems (p. 223 and following, p. 249). Assistance is mostly seen in the traditional forms of supplementing local finances and expertise, not in terms of motivation (pp 236 and following), though the calls for improvement in the forms of assistance are innovative and ahead of their time (e.g., a call for relying less on projectized modes of assistance—perhaps an implicit critique of the earlier fundamental education phase of UNESCO and of what many donors were doing at the time) (p. 249).

Big goals phase: 1990 onwards. Since 1990 or so, we have what one might call the phase of UNESCO-sponsored concrete, numerical, big goals, coming along in this order: the Jomtien declaration (UNESCO 1990), Dakar framework for action (World Education Forum 2000), the Millennium Development Goals (2000),⁶⁵ and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015, United Nations 2016). These are characterized by an emphasis on a quantitative expression of individual rights, consistent with previous or concurrent “big” UNESCO reports and of course the initial Declaration of Human Rights, with increasingly specific numerical goals. It would take a long time to carry out an analysis of all of these and how they differ. Perhaps the most foundational is the Jomtien declaration (UNESCO 1990). This declaration is premised on the

⁶⁴ There are too many principle-based recommendations listed to cover them all (21 recommendations over 40 pages) but quoting a few can give a flavor: “We propose lifelong education as the master concept...,” (Faure 1972, p. 182), “Educational institutions and means must be multiplied...,” (p. 183), “Each person should be able to choose his path more freely, in a more flexible framework...,” (p. 186), “Artificial or outmoded barriers between different educational disciplines, courses, and levels... should be abolished...” (p. 189), “Rigid distinctions between different types of teaching... must be dropped...” (p. 195). And so on. These seem, perhaps, most appropriate to advanced countries where the benefits of a system of mass education that is, indeed, tightly structured, have already been reaped. In poorer countries with barely-defined nationhood and where the most basic structures of educational administration are not working properly, these recommendations seem, at least in retrospect, perhaps desirable (though even this is debatable) but certainly wildly out of reach, though one could always propose that developing nations could leapfrog the more structured stages—pending a conclusive research and debate on the merits of such leapfrogging, as this is not self-evident.

⁶⁵ <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>.

right to education as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO 1990 declaration, p. 1), and the facts that “education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation... Knowing that education is an indispensable key to, though not a sufficient condition for, personal and social improvement...” (UNESCO 1990 declaration, p. 2). However, the focus is on individual rights and how individuals can contribute to society: “Every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities... The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society...” (UNESCO 1990 declaration, p. 3).⁶⁶ When it comes to actions, again, the focus is on technocratic planning: setting targets, assessing gaps between current situation and targets, planning for how to close the gaps, securing finances, setting an appropriate policy environment, etc., in short, the standard list of bureaucratic planning steps as proposed by international organizations (UNESCO 1990 framework, pp. 5-10). “International support could include training and institutional development in data collection, analysis and research, technological innovation, and educational methodologies” (UNESCO 1990 framework, p. 16). The strongly implicit assumption is that motivation, and essential purpose, are there already or are ensured by national commitments to rights and targets, so that, it would seem, no work is needed from countries, or assistance from the international organizations, in securing this purposefulness.

In summary, UNESCO’s activities and approaches mostly take purpose as a given, and work on what to do with such purpose or, in some cases, specifically stay away from the role of education in national development, given UNESCO’s early clear mission to help the world eschew the nationalism that led to the Second World War. The question of how one can have a high and driving national purpose without encouraging a pernicious or extreme form of nationalism was thus never explicitly engaged, as far as we can tell.

World Bank

The World Bank’s track record on these issues is easier to discern and communicate than UNESCO’s because the World Bank’s policies seem to have been more self-documented. Phases and changes are usually announced by a single, relatively clear policy document. (Though implementation is far more overlapping and varied between policy documents than a naïve reading of the documents would suggest.) Furthermore, the evolution of the Bank’s policies is better documented in the literature in various papers that take the whole sweep of the Bank’s history, or at least the part of it that would have had time to impact the trends we analyze in this paper, into account (e.g. Heyneman 2003, Edwards and Storen 2017, Mundy and Verger

⁶⁶ One thing to be noted about the Jomtien declaration is how much it focused on learning. This is aside from the issues of the role of education in national development with which this paper is concerned, but it must be mentioned that in this respect the MDGs and SDGs, but especially the MDGs, which came years later, in some sense go backwards, in that they were not as unambiguous about the fact that mere access is not enough. The MDGs in particular essentially ignored learning and had only a vague reference to “quality.” The Jomtien declaration states that expanded educational opportunity will translate into meaningful development only if “people actually learn as a result of those opportunities...” (UNESCO 1990, declaration, p. 5).

2015, Jones 1997). In what follows we will rely on that literature and on the language in World Bank's own planning and policy documents (World Bank 1971, World Bank 1995, World Bank 1999, World Bank 2011, World Bank 2018). On the basis of this reading, the following observations characterize the World Bank's activities in the education sector, with a selective emphasis on activities and positions that help us test our hypothesis. Note that in this review we eschew the issues that conventionally exercise Bank observers (and the Bank itself): the shifts of emphasis between levels of education, lending modality (projectized versus policy-based), openness to civil society, adoption of the "neoliberal" agenda, and so on. We are interested in how the Bank justifies investing education (for itself and for the client countries), how it approaches (or not) the role of education in national development, and whether its actions imply working at a high level on the issue of the centrality of education in a national project. We also note what the Bank sees as the next-to-proximal causes of the problems the Bank is trying to address, as they may signal (mostly not) or can be inferred to link to the lack of sense of priority we claim is important. We refer to the traditional concerns about modalities and sub-sectors, which are of so much interest to other Bank observers, only to the extent they are "signature" to the central issue we are concerned with.

Despite changes in fashion, the World Bank started as, and still is, primarily a Bank, a lending institution. In that sense, it has to be concerned about getting paid back. Working too philosophically, and worrying about essential issues such as getting leaders to realize the importance of education for nation-building and prioritizing education because building a strong nation is being prioritized, may be too far removed from the nitty-gritty of developing actual, physical projects on the ground (in project mode) or negotiating detailed conditionalities (in policy mode). Whether a mortgage loan is used to finance a home for a family or a "mere" house will only weakly affect the probability of the lender being paid back. But if the client builds a very weird house, the lender may not get paid back as easily. Thus the concern with whether the sector is efficient or not, serves the labor market or not, etc., overrides the concern over what it is all for, or whether it is important to agree on what it is all for. Even a concern with equity could be seen as instrumentalist in this sense. Furthermore, countries, as just noted, are often referred to as "clients," and in economics and business, clients are agents in a manner very different from how Japan and Korea acted, as principals, when they went out to get assistance: Japan and Korea were no one's "clients."

Given the Bank's original interest in projects and infrastructure, even within education (school and college infrastructure), or in education for relatively narrow purposes of supplying sectors with trained manpower, worrying too much about "what it is all for" might have been seen as an operational distraction. Many, if not most, of the early Bank employees working in the education sector, initially, were actually architects and construction specialists.

Throughout the years, to the degree that education is seen as useful or important, the emphasis has been on its contribution to economic growth, the improvement of social indicators such as infant mortality, or the reduction of poverty: these have typically been assessed from the point of view of individual welfare, and the total welfare tends to be seen as the aggregate of individual welfare, not as a sort of collective welfare that inheres in the nation, in the sense of the Lant

Pritchett quotation at the front of this paper. In only one paper by a Bank official (Heyneman 2003), and by the Bank itself (World Bank 1999) were we able to find the proposition that Bank work in education could be partly about social cohesion. But note that this, while approaching it, is not quite the same thing as highlighting the importance of educational development as part of a collective national project. Heyneman (2003, p. 330) notes that social cohesion and ethnic strife were, in the 1990s, of increasing concern in client countries and among public intellectuals in the world. He hopefully notes that “If there is a next stage in the Bank’s analytic work, it will likely focus on the degree to which one might distinguish between a school or a school system which is doing a ‘good job’ of contributing to social cohesion from others which are not.” The 1999 Strategy Paper itself restricts itself to noting that education could help with social cohesion (or even implies that it automatically does, with the implication that one then does not need to worry too much about it), but does not say anything about how curricula could help with this—nothing is operationalized.⁶⁷ But even this relatively timid focus did seem to gain ground, as far as we can tell from exploring subsequent Bank strategy papers. The next World Bank strategy (World Bank 2011) makes no mention of social cohesion, unity, ethnic strife, etc., at all, much less anything as broad as the development of the nation.

A sense of the Bank’s narrative to others and to itself can be formed by looking at two Bank strategy documents that fairly neatly bracket the period under consideration for the (developing) countries in this study, roughly 1971 to 2011, a period of 40 years. The key messages and actions proposed in those two periods, and, importantly, their justification in terms of what education means for a country, are presented side by side in the [table 3](#) below. Note that the materials are presented in a tabular way only for visual convenience. There are no “hard” rows in [table 3](#) as the material is not meant to be read only in a very loosely row-wise manner.

⁶⁷ The guidance is restricted to asking, among a list of 15 other “checklist” questions: “Is adequate attention being paid to linking education with the rest of the country’s development? Consider links with the world of work and links with social development and cohesion, including the passing on of culture, traditions and values. And consider teacher service reform in the wider context of civil service reform” (World Bank 1999, p. 41). What “linking with” means is not clear. One supposes it means making sufficient mention, in project or policy documents, of the fact that education can be justified in how it helps with cohesion. Nor does the paper suggest what one does if there is not sufficient linking. In other words, this is the sort of obligatory passing mention of something X, typical of institutions being pressured by someone internal or external, who must be curtsied to, to “make sure you mention X.” We have all been there.

Table 3. Narrative examples from World Bank’s policy documents

Education Sector Working Paper (1974)	Learning for All: Investing in People’s Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development (2011)
<p>Pages 10-11: For much of the developing world during these two decades, the transcendent event was the achievement of independence. There followed the slow process of nation building which, in many cases, sought to recast the diversity of ethnic, religious and cultural traditions into a new national formulation. And since political independence is more easily achieved than economic or cultural reconstruction, the practices and institutions chosen to replace the existing diversities were frequently those previously established by the colonial powers.</p> <p>The changes in the political scene of developing countries were expected to be accompanied by a modernization process yielding a general and dramatic rise in the standards of living of the populations concerned. In many cases, the difficulties of transforming traditional society into a modern one were underestimated. In already independent countries, similar great expectations were awakened. The idea of "catching up with rich countries" exerted a pre-eminent influence on the thinking of the leadership in the developing countries.</p> <p>To a certain extent, that idea prevented the leadership from elaborating original and viable models of society for their countries. Perhaps nowhere was this demonstration effect more pervasive and successful in dampening local initiatives to adapt to the socioeconomic realities than in the sphere of education.</p> <p>Pages 14-15: An analysis of the issues facing the less developed countries can be made within a broad perspective, taking into consideration the major objectives of education policies and the critical factors determining the development and functioning of education systems. In this framework the focal points of discussion will be: (1) formation of skills [meaning for specific sectors of the economy, inspired by manpower planning ideas], (2) participation, (3) equity, (4) efficiency;</p>	<p>Pages 11-12: Education’s Role in Development People are the real wealth of nations (UNDP 2010) and education enables them to live healthier, happier, and more productive lives. There is broad agreement, backed by research findings, that education enhances people’s ability to make informed decisions, be better parents, sustain a livelihood, adopt new technologies, cope with shocks, and be responsible citizens and effective stewards of the natural environment. Given that global economic growth remains sluggish despite signs of recovery from the recent economic crisis, the shortage of the “right” skills in the workforce has taken on a new urgency across the world.</p> <p>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognizes a child’s right to an education—a worldwide acknowledgment that depriving a child of the opportunity to basic skills is tantamount to depriving that child of the chance to have a satisfying life. Through the actions described in this strategy, the World Bank Group commits to removing barriers to access to quality education so that the right to education may be upheld for all children and youth.</p> <p>Education improves the quality of people’s lives in ways that transcend benefits to the individual and the family by contributing to economic prosperity and reducing poverty and deprivation. Countries with low levels of education remain in a trap of technological stagnation, low growth, and low demand for education.</p> <p>Page 25: The new strategy focuses on learning for a simple reason: growth, development, and poverty reduction depend on the knowledge and skills that people acquire, not just the number of years that they sit in a classroom. At the individual level, while a diploma may open doors to employment, it is a worker’s skills that determine his or her productivity and ability to adapt to new technologies and opportunities. Knowledge and skills, including those that are learned in the classroom,</p>

and (5) planning.

Pages 57-58:

Having outlined the major objectives for the Bank's education lending and having defined the position the Bank would normally take on specific questions, three crucial sets of questions concerning the viability of these proposals arise:

(a) Will developing countries be *willing to accept* the general and specific policies suggested in this paper? What might the Bank do to encourage their receptiveness?

(b) What are the risks inherent in these policies? Will countries have sufficient managerial capabilities to carry them out?

...

Change will normally begin through a comprehensive study of the sector as a whole which assesses broadly the degree to which the Country's total learning system responds to its developmental objectives and needs. Such an assessment must perforce include a fresh look at accepted developmental objectives and an updating of the estimates of those needs.

help improve a person's ability to have a healthy and educated family and engage in civic life. And as noted above, at the societal level, recent research shows that the level of skills in a workforce—as measured by performance on international student assessments such as PISA and TIMSS—predicts economic growth rates far better than do average schooling levels... The “for all” part of the strategy's goal is crucial. Major challenges in access remain...

Pages 31-32:

Priorities of the New Education Strategy

The Bank's priorities in education over the next decade will be, first, to strengthen the capacity of education systems to achieve learning goals and, second, to contribute to building a high-quality global knowledge base on education systems. The new education strategy affirms the Bank's commitment to education through operational, financial, and technical assistance that help its partner countries achieve national development goals by making their education systems more effective.

...

Strengthening an education system so that it efficiently delivers better learning outcomes requires a number of interrelated actions. First, the mechanisms that connect the various parts of the system (specifically, its governance, management, financing rules, and incentive mechanisms) should support clear and aligned functions, authority, and relationships of accountability within the system... Second, the effectiveness of these mechanisms in producing learning and skills outcomes should be measured and monitored at all levels... In this regard, information and communication technology (ICT) can play an important role in improving the management and accountability of the system by, for example, allowing better—and more timely—monitoring of the various dimensions of a national education system and lowering the cost of implementing student learning assessments.

Page 54:

The strategy set out in this paper is a framework [only]... How it will apply to a particular country will depend on the specific education needs of that country and its economic and political capacity for reform...

The 1974 document is unintentionally transparent. Having noted the lack of leadership involvement (or space and possibilities given the many constraints) in finding original, local, and realistic solutions, it then sets out a set of solutions and asks, but does not answer, whether the countries would be willing to accept and manage them. In the 30 or so pages intervening between the basic outline of the problem in pages 10-12 and the questions in page 57, there are a great many policy recommendations that a) are presumably not yet vetted with countries (no evidence is given that they have been), b) arise from the Bank's own technocratic analysis as far as one can tell (no evidence otherwise is given), and c) are very hard to implement, would require a deep sense of purpose and will to implement. An approach is then given in page 58 that could *in principle* answer the questions in page 57, but the approach suggested is largely to carry out a technocratic exercise (admittedly a participatory one—but a technocratic approach nonetheless). But it may be that everything should have hinged on a) the process *not* being a mere technocratic exercise, but one of deep policy engagement around will and purpose, and b) to the degree that the technocratic aspects are important (and they are), the sincerity of the analysis of these aspects as to both technical implementation capacity and the political will to deploy and use that capacity, including controlling clientelism, corruption, getting the most creative technocrats, principals, and teachers selected into the Ministries at all levels, on merit, increasing transparency and accountability, etc. But, as has often been noted in the literature and in this paper, questioning these issues too much gets in the way of placing loans and, even if the purpose is policy support rather than placing loans, could result in the Bank being perceived as unpleasant, thus limiting the level of the dialogue. As far as anyone can tell, this fundamental contradiction has not yet been creatively solved, perhaps because the only way to solve that contradiction is to achieve a hard focus, which tends to be politically undesirable and, by making oneself unpleasant if one insists too much, makes it difficult to be a lender.

Some 45 years later, the 1974 document still approaches the problem as mostly a technocratic one. The justification for education is still mostly in terms of human capital or productivity, not in terms of a national project. Equity and equality receive attention as *desirata* in and of themselves. The turn towards understanding the issues through a systems and information perspective is new relative to 1974, and technically completely correct, but it still elides the simple fact that implementing a good system takes a massive amount of effort, commitment, and purpose. Not every actor relishes being measured (especially if the "measurement" is through thick indicators that are hard to game) and held to account for delivery to the other actors in the system through the various feedback channels that define the system as a true system. And, while the mechanics of engineering such a system is largely a technical task, its implementation is not, and, even the act of engineering itself is complex and creative enough as to require a big act of will, purpose, and power. Furthermore, much evidence suggests that designing systems from blueprint does not work: the best systems are those designed adaptively and iteratively, through careful observation of variation and a gradual codification of good practice. Allowing these processes, and the technocrats who lead them, the freedom, space, and time, while at the same time demanding accountability for progress, itself requires purpose and will from the policy makers or the political leaders. As Honig (2022) has argued, exacting compliance through thin mechanisms, in these situations, is not nearly as effective as

relying on the sorts of more profound accountability that arises out of joined-up and intensely-shared and intensely felt purpose. Now, the paper does acknowledge, as noted in our quotation, the factor of political “capacity for reform.” But the paper is then silent on how one assesses that, how one affects it, what one does if it is not there, etc.

To seek further evidence on whether development agencies are focusing on education’s value to national development, we evaluated the national plans submitted to, or adopted by, the Global Partnership for Education, through a documentary search on this agency’s website. The results were mixed. We evaluated the plans for Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and Tanzania. Only one plan, Ethiopia’s, seems to recognize the value of education in deep terms. The language is fairly inspirational:

“In Ethiopia, education is conceived as a life to be lived and a means of preparing young people for future life. It is an instrument for cultivating the individual in a holistic way, including moral, cognitive, social, spiritual, physical, psychological, and vocational attributes. It is also understood as a public good based on indigenous and global knowledge, which serves as a means for social harmony and development. Moreover, it is recognized as an instrument... to transform the country into a respectable member of the world...

Schools, TVET institutions, universities and other learning centres play important roles in shaping and enabling students from different backgrounds, religions, and ethnic backgrounds to interact, understand, accept, and embrace differences in order to foster unity. This creates a set of shared experiences and aspirations for building national unity.”⁶⁸

This is not surprising as Ethiopia has had a sort of “national renewal” since independence (which was, if anything, perhaps strengthened after the downfall of the Soviet-backed Derg in 1991) and is known to have a relatively nationalist ethos (which, as we have seen with events with Eritrea and the Tigray region, has militaristic overtones—to highlight a downside of nationalist approaches). It is also the case that Ethiopia, more than most countries assisted by development agencies, has made some of the fastest progress in history, at least in terms of raw access to schooling. Again as in the cases of Kenya and South Africa above, whether this is a mere coincidence, or is abetted by a focus on education as a source of national development and national pride, is too difficult to analyze causally, at least in this paper.

In no case do we find evidence of the development agency in question working with countries’ Ministries of Education on the role of education in national development at the level of the countries’ top leadership.

The impression that emerges is that the technocracies failed to respond to the independence leaders’ visionary statements issued right before or after independence.

⁶⁸ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GOW2lu_TKHR2KS6U4uovbh0F3GVFCQPr, p. 28.

In short, for different reasons, neither UNESCO nor the World Bank (nor other agencies such as bilateral agencies—which we have not had the space to deal with) made a focused effort to work with national authorities on the centrality of education for a project of building the nation, or even of national development somewhat more instrumentally. In the case of UNESCO, perhaps this was because of its focus on individual rights, on the role of education in individual development (related to individual rights), and the fact that UNESCO might have rightly shied away from notions that could even hint of nationalism given the revulsion against the nationalism that led to the Second World War and given that UNESCO was seen as central to the post-War peace. In the case of the Bank, the reason may have been its focus on education as instrumentally facilitating other indicators such as economic growth and better social outcomes, rather than on the value of education itself in defining a national project. The Bank's tendency to view education, especially initially, as something projectizable through technocratic means (which UNESCO also did, especially in the fundamental education phase in the 1950s), as something that agents (clients) did with loans, may also have worked against a deeper engagement with authorities on education's role in national development.

None of the above is an implicit argument that either the Bank or, more improbably, UNESCO, should have had measurable indicators around how education contributes to national development, or should have invested a lot of financial resources to fund analytical work on this issue. It is not a matter of money or even amount of attention: it is a matter of the quality of attention, or minding country seriousness as a condition of engagement.⁶⁹ On the contrary, analytically focusing on issues of whether children are enrolled, whether they are learning, whether there is equity in inputs and learning outcomes, how to provide technical support to school building, book production, and teacher training, etc., and then investing resources in getting those things done, are all the right things to have done and are, in fact, what Japan and Korea actually did. But the key difference is that they did it well because they deeply cared, and they deeply cared because they saw it as fundamental to the nation. Thus, what our analysis *does* suggest, is that, to the degree that countries can seem lackadaisical in the zeal and depth with which they pursue such education inputs and outputs, it may be because they simply do not accord education the importance that countries such as Korea and Japan did, and therefore they do not commit the qualitative national focus and effort to lead the sector that countries who leaped ahead did. It is also to suggest that taking seriously whether countries take education seriously, might have been (still would be) a good idea, and that policy dialogue, including using historical case studies such as those in this paper, with the top leadership of a country, in and out of government, around this topic, might have been fruitful, and could still be.

⁶⁹ Which admittedly is hard to do if the country is a client, or if one has a meliorist approach to improving the human condition (or fighting poverty), but that's to some degree the whole point.

6. Policies and practices: borrowable how?

This paper has argued, in part, that educational development is not mostly a matter of finding technocratic solutions. It has argued, in particular, that the “policy borrowing” of technocratic solutions across countries (and specially across the high-income/low-income divide), and even more especially the piecemeal borrowing of this or that policy or this or that approach without due consideration to their fit into the national culture and context, is something one needs to be particularly cautious about. So it is with some trepidation that we suggest what might be borrowable from the Japanese and Korean experiences.

Perhaps the one thing that can indeed be borrowed is the very process that Japan and Korea undertook in deciding what to borrow from the West; that is, *how* they borrowed. Applying the framework developed in section 2 below, in tabular format, we make note of how these countries borrowed, with the implicit recommendation that borrowing as carefully as Japan and Korea did is itself the most borrowable idea. But, inevitably, readers may be curious as to the specific policies Japan and Korea carried out, at a more technocratic level. Thus, with the trepidation noted, we list some of these ideas in this section.

6.1 How the borrowing happened

The following matrix uses the checklist developed in Section 2 to document the process followed by Japan and Korea. The “data” for the matrix come from Section 4.

Table 4. Policy borrowing in Japan and Korea assessed against the paper’s policy borrowing framework

<i>Substantive issues</i>	
Is there evidence that the country from which the education policies are being borrowed is successful in education (defined however is relevant) and also that those policies were in fact substantially responsible for the country’s educational success, and that that success is not due to third factors?	Yes, at the time. Japan borrowed from countries that were widely seen around the world as being educationally successful, such as the USA, Prussia, and France. Korea was influenced by the USA which, in the 1950s, still had a basic education system, especially at the secondary level, that was well regarded globally. As to the second point, whether Japan and Korea considered whether policies followed by those countries were specifically responsible for their success, is less clear. It seems that, at least during some periods, some policies (such as the district-based decentralized nature of education in the USA) were borrowed in a manner that was typical of isomorphic mimicry—such borrowing did not always go well or last long or, if it went well, was not clearly responsible for the borrower’s success in education.
How tied are the policies being borrowed to the historical sociology	To some degree, and with the exceptions noted above. But the policies were highly contested, for good or for ill, precisely for

<p>and politics of the originating country (e.g., the USA's land-grant university system being rooted in its independent 19th C. family farm system, or Germany's vocational-technical education being rooted in its guild system for hundreds of years)?</p>	<p>that reason. As we saw in Section 4, the more humanistic, progressive, and democratic aspects of US reforms and actions in the late and early 20th centuries were viewed with suspicion in Japan, were borrowed only partially, and were reversed and re-reversed several times over the 15 decades after the Meiji restoration.</p>
<p>Is the borrowing motivation deeply in line with goals of improving the borrowing system or is the motivation relatively more superficial, having to do with being seen to be in fashion, or meeting a bureaucratic checklist or an electoral political promise that is not deeply felt?</p>	<p>This aspect is clear and is perhaps the main theme of this paper. Both Japan and Korea were deeply motivated to improve education, since they saw it as key (perhaps <i>the</i> key), to national survival or even national greatness. And this resulted in progress. That educational progress then might have resulted, in the case of Japan, in undergirding militarism and imperialism, is another matter and has to do more with the content of education than with the value placed upon it, as can be seen in the case of Korea and in the case of Japan itself in the second half of the 20th century.</p>
<p>How much questioning and adaptation can be done, or has been done? In particular, have constraints to implementation been analyzed carefully by involving the implementers on the ground? We note that adaptation, aside from its substantive value, can be useful because the very process of adaptation can "sell" the idea internally so that it does not come as a surprise to the officials who would implement it.</p>	<p>This was a hallmark of Japan's and Korea's borrowing and happened at all levels. At a bureaucratic level there was planned and systematic engagement from officials. At the level of civil society, at least in Japan but to some degree also in Korea, associations, clubs, journals, and academia all joined in on vigorous debates not only on what ideas and policies to borrow, but on how to adapt them and make them consistent with the culture and context of the borrowers.</p>
<p>Is the borrowing done as a form of cargo cult copying, in Cowen's terminology (Cowen 2000), or "isomorphic mimicry" (Pritchett 2011), in the sense that adoption of the surfaces of the practice is not deepened into having the structures and drive and deep purpose of real reform as well as recognizing the need for adaptation, and noting that recognizing that need is a first signal that the borrowing is sincere rather than shallow.</p>	<p>The various cells above make the point that the borrowing was not at all superficial but highly adapted, contested, and very much in keeping with the goal of developing the nation.</p>

<i>Salesmanship or policy marketing issues</i>	
Whose impulse drove the borrowing: the borrowers, the “lender,” or a third-party such as an aid agency or consultants?	In the case of Japan in the 19th century, the impulse was totally endogenous to Japan as at the time development agencies, international NGOs and other features of the current development landscape, did not even exist. In the case of Korea there was formalized help from USAID. But, as noted, this help always underwent a process of contestation and adaptation, as mentioned in the case-in-point discussion of Florida State University and KEDI in section 4. UNESCO played a role in Japan’s reconstruction after the Second World War, as noted in the heading in section 5.3 that applies to UNESCO.
Do the policy lender or lender-based consultants have an agenda to export the model for enhancement of national reputation, or even from a consultancy-sales incentive?	Certainly not in the case of Japan in the 19th century. To a minor degree in the case of Korea and Japan after the Second World War. All bureaucracies, official or not, do engage in some degree of self-promotion. Thus, UNESCO in Japan was concerned that helping Japan re-enter the community of nations was, in a sense, good for UNESCO itself. But much of it was wholly spontaneous and largely demand-side, as in the creation of dozens of local UNESCO clubs in Japan in the 1950s (see section 5.3 on UNESCO’s role in post-war Japan). USAID and Florida State University probably self-promoted to a small degree in Korea in the 1950s. But these cases of donor agency, NGO, or academic self-promotion were very low-key compared to current practices in the development world, whereas even NGOs, and certainly official agencies, have marketing and growth strategies and bureaucratic departments fully devoted to “sales,” self-promotion, and growth.

6.2 Policies enacted in Japan and Korea

As noted elsewhere in the paper, simple-minded borrowing of policies and practices is not to be recommended. A significant part of the thrust of the paper is to document how carefully Korea and Japan went about borrowing policies and practices. And this makes sense. It is now almost a cliché, or perhaps it is an actual cliché, to state that context is key. Yet, it is possible to take that reasoning too far. A little *reductio ad absurdum* would suggest that it is just as much of a mistake to not borrow at all, as to borrow injudiciously or inappropriately: after all, how far does the logic of not borrowing, or questioning the external validity of experiences, go? Should provinces within a country not borrow or generalize from each other? Districts within provinces? Schools? Teachers? Clearly, at an (anarchic?) extreme, where every single element of a society is a *sui generis* universe, policy and even science become impossible.⁷⁰ So, with some

⁷⁰ Lest it be thought that we are erecting a “straw man” argument here, note that the notion of the uniqueness of every single school is quite widespread. A Google search for “every school is unique” turns up 128,000 results. In Google Scholar, to narrow things down, there are many dozens of (presumably)

trepidation, we list some of the lessons we believe emerge from Korea and Japan's experience, in particular in the few decades after their reforms. We list the policies in an order that very approximately reflects their importance in explaining Japan and Korea's success. To make sure we are being cautious, and at the risk of repetitiousness to the point of tedium, we list the lesson about policy borrowing first. So, the list below is not a catechism of things countries ought to do, by a long shot, but merely a list of things that suggest themselves as worth considering. In fact, the points below vary even between Korea and Japan, as some are more notable in one of the two countries and are not always necessarily present in both. For all these reasons we use the past tense: to emphasize that this is what these two countries *did*, not that they are things other countries should do.

1. Policies borrowed from other countries were contested, adapted, internalized, often rejected for a while or rejected entirely. But, precisely because of that process, when adopted, the practices were adopted with care and with "ownership" and tended to be implementable.
2. Education was seen as absolutely central to the development of the nation in a broad and deep sense, not just in terms of its contribution to other "development indicators" (such as GDP or infant mortality), or as a right, or even as a commitment to numerical enrollment and learning goals. While it may have been seen partially as all of these things, it was also a nearly religious commitment of the state to citizens, and of citizens to the state. This *mutual* obligation or social contract seems absent in most developing countries today and in most of the advice or policy suggestions given by development agencies.
3. There was an intense commitment to equality of inputs but, perhaps more importantly, to equality of learning outcomes. While to some extent this resulted in sameness and homogeneity (and to *some* degree *was* implemented as sameness and homogeneity), the real driver was equality, and the belief that every child can (and must!) learn.
4. Classes are orderly, but not rigid (at least not 100% of the time—they are rigid when they need to be—see [footnote 38](#)). There is a great deal of time-on-task both within the day and throughout the year. Teachers visit parents. There is almost no absenteeism. Rather than stifling creativity, this abundance of time, while allowing students to master the foundations well and quickly and with some prescriptiveness where it is useful, leaves more time for variety and creativity in other areas that demand it. Thus, unlike the tradeoff that exists in the popular mind, and even in development agency and NGO advice, some degree of sameness, discipline, and homogeneity worked hand in hand with creativity and variety, e.g., in tapping children's own problem-solving strategies as an aid to instruction. It almost, but not quite, goes without saying that this requires superb teachers and ample and varied teaching and learning materials.
5. As a means of making equality real, planning and financing processes insisted and employed quality assurance (scaffolding and prescriptiveness, though with flexibility of

scholarly papers that use that exact phrase. Clearly at some level this is almost definitionally true for schools, for countries, indeed for any ontologically-determinate category of objects. But clearly, also, schools and education systems share many features that make some degree of generalization possible and perhaps necessary.

lessons, inspectorate, etc.) to ensure that the lower levels of education (including the foundational phase of primary) were delivered with high quality, nearly 100% completion (almost no repetition or dropouts, at least in primary and lower secondary), and equally to all, before the next levels were opened up too widely. The flow-through to higher levels was not totally reduced, just carefully planned and controlled, based on what had been achieved in the lower levels and what the economy needed. And when the higher levels were opened up, they were opened up for many (though on a tight meritocratic basis, which can be stressful for students), with a concern for equality in the context of meritocracy. This is nearly the precise opposite of what is happening in most low-income countries today, where inequality, low quality assurance, weak planning, all in a non-meritocratic context, are fairly common.

6. The system provided scaffolding and prescriptiveness to support teachers but also provided freedom to experiment, as long as results were obtained. The practices that made it through experiential sieves (often experimented with by the teachers themselves, and relatively spontaneously at that) were then typically generalized. Often this happened to some degree from the bottom up, through teachers' circles and networks, professional associations, unions, etc.
7. The system was willing not only to tolerate, but to work with, features that today seem to be regarded as a problem in many development agencies and NGOs, such as large class sizes, double-shifting, and strong delivery obligations on teachers to children but also children to teachers, and both to the nation. While to some degree these were a make-do during early stages in Korea and Japan, for reasons of financial necessity or efficiency, to some degree they were also turned into virtues, such as exploiting large class sizes to have children teach and learn from each other, and to help teachers see the variety of learning styles in any classroom.
8. Teachers' unions were not weak (though this depended to some degree on time and varied through the decades), and made themselves heard, but they were also deeply informed about, and involved in, the substantive aspects of education such as curriculum and teaching methods, not just in collective bargaining over bread-and-butter issues. Unions were militant ideologically, not just (or maybe not even mainly) about pay and working conditions.
9. Partly as a result of (and as a cause of) the above, teachers were secure, well-trained, supported, and paid well, and they were willing to be held accountable through subtle, varied, but strong forms of pressure that also include support, not just accountability. Variety of forms of accountability, such as broadly to the nation, to parents and communities, and to the profession and the bureaucracy, seem to all have worked together so that no one source of accountability had to do all the work in an unsubtle and simplistic manner.
10. There was creative interaction with private schooling and education, as opposed to either outright rejection or naïve enthusiasm. The attitude seems to have been one of practicality and expediency rather than a matter of ideological positions pro or con. It has to be noted that this did result in more inequality than if provision had been entirely public. For instance, cram schools and other similar outlets such as totally private education, while they provided a sort of escape valve from sameness and homogeneity,

may also have contributed to some inequality.⁷¹ (Though as Section [1](#) notes, the total achieved equality in learning outcomes was, in the end and despite this privateness, quite remarkable.)

⁷¹ Though to some extent to say “if provision had been entirely public” is a silly counter-factual as, if provision had been entirely public, most likely social pressure to admit more differentiation *within* the public sector would have been strong and hard to resist. To carry on with the escape valve analogy, when escape valves do not exist, pressure can build dangerously in the system’s boilers.

7. Korea (KOICA) and Japan (JICA) education programs in Africa

In this section we focus on the degree to which Korea's and Japan's education programs in one region of the developing world, Africa, align more or less with Korea's and Japan's own historical experience (regardless of whether such alignment is based on self-reflection about one's own history, or a re-discovery of what matters based on field experience). The reasons to analyze these two agencies should be more or less obvious given the paper's focus on what lessons one could learn from Japan and Korea's own transformations. These are relatively important development agencies in education, Japan being the 4th largest bilateral donor and Korea the 18th largest.⁷² These agencies' programs in education have also been around for several decades (Japan since the 1950s, Korea since the 1960s, though probably earnest programs developed later), so there would have been time to reflect.

Table 5 OECD, Japan, and Korea patterns in overseas education assistance

OECD, Japan, and Korea: ODA versus own-spending ⁷³				
	Own spending		Overseas Development Assistance	
	Education expenditure / Total expenditure	Primary / Total Education	Education expenditure / Total expenditure	Primary / Total Education
OECD	10%	35%	7%	27%
Japan	7%	38%	3%	12%
Korea	12%	39%	11%	15%

First, it is worthwhile to establish how much priority Japan and Korea give to development assistance to education (in all developing countries, not just Africa), relative to the large role education played (and still plays) in their development and how much priority they give it in their own budgets and relative to other countries. [Table 5](#) presents basic statistics on these issues and makes two things clear. First, OECD countries on average spend 7% on education as a share of their total ODA but 10% as a share of their spending in their own countries; Japan spends only 3% of its ODA in education, but 7% on its own country, and Korea spends about

⁷² <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/aid-tables>.

⁷³ See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/b35a14e5-en.pdf?expires=1645979350&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=09211B62D9C1399BE819AD298C72709F>, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/b35a14e5-en.pdf?expires=1645979350&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=09211B62D9C1399BE819AD298C72709F>, <https://www.compareyourcountry.org/snaps/education-at-a-glance-2021/en/2857/2018> and <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=3:9,4:1,5:4,2:1,7:1&q=3:51,3,4,9,13,16,G2+4:1+5:4+2:1+7:1+1:2,3,4,5,6,58,7,8,9,10,11,59,60,12,13,14,61,15,16,17,18,62,19,63,75,20,21,22,23,24,36,G2+6:2015,2016,2017,2018,2019,2020>.

the same on ODA as on themselves. Second, more interestingly and more dramatically, Japan and Korea hugely under-spend on primary education ODA relative to how much they spend on their own primary education, and relative to the same difference for all OECD. Primary education is prioritized $\frac{2}{3}$ less in ODA than at home.

Now we turn to specific analysis of programs, by country.

It is important to note that because we are trying to use written evidence, and written evidence is produced with quite a lag, some of our conclusions may be somewhat outdated. On the other hand, agencies should ideally be producing and sharing evidence, and strategies, in a more updated fashion than they seem to. Updates of strategies and lessons learned from the recent past are hard to find.⁷⁴

7.1 Korea

First, it is important to note that it seems very hard to find more than just a scattering of detailed documentation (just project descriptions) or evaluations of KOICA education projects, at least online. We were limited by our linguistic ability: we are unable to read Korean, and machine translation of PDF documents from the Korean is an imprecise art. We also were unable to refer to hard copy documents and were limited by circumstances to carry out only online searches. Also, most development agencies' positions change over time, and we are limited to using existing policy documents. Given those limitations, we report on what we found, relative to the factors that seem to make a difference.

In this section we refer to general perceptions and guidance from the perspective of the home office, and then refer to country-specific examples and cases.

7.1.1. Korea “central” or home office perceptions/policies

We start with central or home office perspectives and policies.

The basic aid strategy document, predicated to apply to the period 2016-2020, makes no mention of learning outcomes as indicators, in either average terms or in terms of equity. Key indicators are only about inputs or outputs, not outcomes. In what appears to be the key multi-sectoral strategy document for KOICA, “KOICA’s Mid-term Sectoral Strategy 2016-2020”⁷⁵ (a dated document, seemingly not superseded by a more current one), there is mention of learning outcomes as one of the three parts of the Mission (p. 9), but the indicators used for “basic learning competencies and teacher capacity building” (p. 11) are: 1) “Number of students who completed the education program”, 2) “Number of education materials distributed”, and 3) “Number of teachers who completed the training program.” Indicators for the equity aspects and

⁷⁴ It may be telling that JICA’s two main brochures highlighting their education programs in Africa are titled exactly the same, and have the same “look and feel,” such as the same color scheme and fonts, though they are separated by 9 years (JICA 2010 and JICA 2019).

⁷⁵ <http://67.199.83.28/doc/10.pdf>.

TVET parts of the Mission also do not use outcomes, though the TVET Mission proposes a precursor of outcomes (whether there *is* outcomes measurement) as an area of work (though this does not appear much borne out in reality). This is all somewhat inconsistent with how KOICA presents its own case for education ODA in these terms: “Korea represents a success story of how developing competent human resources can be translated into a driving force behind national development. Along with this success, a strong emphasis on education pushed Korea to international prominence in education” (p. 9). In addition, “Overall, KOICA needs to pursue results-oriented and evidence-based development cooperation by strengthening the framework of key indicators to validate and verify the performance of its education programs” (p. 10). This overall commitment and the basis for ODA in Korea’s own development is highly consistent with Korea’s own history and internal policies, as narrated above, but it is not consistent with the indicators chosen for their ODA programs, and the sub-sectoral emphasis of KOICA on TVET. Overall, much of the focus is on vocational issues, and, within basic education, infrastructure and outputs. There is little about learning and accomplishment in terms of actual proposed indicators.

In a more recent (2020) document entitled “Detailed Document on KOICA’s Country Plan”⁷⁶ we counted 12 education projects in Africa, mostly in vocational and technical education. Based only on the documentation in that document, out of 12:

- 1 was non-classifiable as to sub-sector but vaguely referred to education (Ghana)
- 2 were only vaguely classifiable but were oriented at youth rather than children (DR Congo and Rwanda)
- 5 appear to be purely vocational (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, and Mozambique), and
- 4 seemed to have both basic education and vocational aspects (Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda).

The document does not mention indicators used for performance tracking. What is significant is that no projects, that we could tell, were focused entirely on basic education or children. As we will see below this lack of emphasis on basic education is broadly consistent with what we could find in an analysis of country-by-country documents below: also relatively little emphasis on basic education (certainly not in keeping with basic learning being one out of three missions as per the KOICA 2016-2020 Multi-Sectoral Strategy).

A study by the Korean Educational Development Institute, titled “A study on the development of a performance evaluation model for educational development cooperation projects in Korea” (Kim 2013),⁷⁷ which preceded KOICA’s 2016-2020 strategy by several years, provides guidance that in general seems somewhat out of line with Korea’s own experience with “what worked” for Korea. In some ways, naturally, this can be seen as a good thing, as Korea’s own preoccupation with achievement and results in its own system could be seen, if transferred, as a

⁷⁶ http://www.koica.go.kr/sites/koica_en/download/9_Detailed_Document.pdf.

⁷⁷ <https://www.kedi.re.kr/eng/kedi/bbs/B0000006/view.do?nttld=2321&menuNo=200014&pageIndex=21>

bit insensitive to modern concepts of foreign aid, such as participatory co-design. Above all, the document does not provide much guidance on the “meta” aspect of how or why Korea could choose the type of projects it would engage in (e.g., basic education versus vocational-technical, and, if basic, with an emphasis on inputs and results versus inputs and process). Guidance on evaluation should not, of course, necessarily pick sub-sectors, but one would think that the guidance ought to suggest how to at least *approach* knowledge about which sub-sectors would be most valuable for Korea to invest in. Furthermore, the recommendations seem in general a bit pessimistic on the possibility of actually judging outcomes and using that as a guide to future action,⁷⁸ when the international literature, by that time, was increasingly clear on proximate determinants of learning outcomes, particularly in the foundational grades and skills (a literature of which JICA took advantage—see below). How this relative vagueness with regard to outcomes explains (either as a direct influence or as denoting a general frame of mind in Korean foreign aid) the orientation to inputs in KOICA’s programs is hard to say.

KOICA’s own public-facing evaluation information is consistent with a focus on vocational-technical education, with a little (but only *a little*) focus on measurement of outcomes, or even relatively close precursors of outcomes. In the section of the KOICA website where one is allowed to search for evaluations, only one on education can be found.⁷⁹ The most recent overall report on evaluations is from 2017.⁸⁰ Here, we find 11 evaluations, with none in basic education, two in vocational-technical education. Only one of the latter two is an impact evaluation based on outcomes or even really discusses outcomes or close precursors of outcomes. The only impact measured was in health. In the evaluation of ICT-in-education interventions, there is an implicit recognition of the need, in the future (in the future as of 2017), to focus more on outcomes: “In the area of ‘IT capacity building,’ we have presented plans to design performance indicators to precisely verify educational effectiveness” (p. 21). In the evaluation of a cooperation with a vocational college, there is a concern noted with the fact that though an aim of the project was to improve the connection between the college’s outputs and the economic needs of the environment around the college (as in “establish a customer-centered educational system tailored to the needs of industrial worksites”, p. 44), this was not emphasized or tracked: “There was no industry-academia cooperation between Korea-Vietnam College of Technology in Bac Giang Province, Vietnam and local business and professional

⁷⁸ In the cited document, statements such as the following abound: “In the case of development cooperation projects in the education sector, it is difficult to evaluate performance compared to other business fields” (p. 146), “In the case of education ODA projects, it is often difficult to measure the intended results in a short period of time after the implementation of the project...” (p. 174). Thus, when it comes to recommendations on how to evaluate teacher training projects (p. 195 and following) many process and project management criteria are suggested, such as “The teacher training project is well managed,” and “Has the budget been set according to the teacher training project plan?” (p. 195). There is no emphasis on whether the content of the training will actually help children learn more. While such ambition would be inappropriate as a true outcome (certainly for pre-service training), concern for whether the design is based on evidence as to what helps children learn better would be appropriate. The only concern with educational quality was whether in the trainees’ perceptions quality would improve (“Did the teacher training project contribute to improving the quality of education in the recipient country?,” to be ascertained by “Interviews with students”) (p. 196).

⁷⁹ <http://www.koica.go.kr/search/mirsearchE.jsp>.

⁸⁰ http://www.koica.go.kr/koica_en/3495/subview.do.

associations regarding the standards for professional education and the enhancement of project impact, which led to a loss of opportunities to work together with graduates entering the job market and job creation in the community” (p. 44). In short, there seems to be increasing recognition of the need to monitor at least the proximate determinants of outcomes, but it is clear that as of 2017 this was not being achieved.

All of the above is based on publicly available, searchable information. It is possible that one could come to the opposite conclusions based on internal information, but this seems very unlikely.

7.1.2. KOICA country cases

To get further detail and also much more current information, we had to go to individual country project profiles and evaluations, at least those that we could find online. We attempted to focus on the four (last dot point in paragraph 2 in the previous section) that somewhat refer to basic education. But unfortunately two of them, Kenya and Nigeria, did not have the same systematic documentation as Uganda and Tanzania). So we will use Tanzania, Uganda, and Ghana (the latter being sufficiently general).

One particular commonality among the three countries’ studies is that a focus on education is predicated on the role that education played in Korea’s development, yet the assistance does not really do many of the things that Korea did do (nor as, noted in [Table 5](#), does Korea devote to basic education in its foreign aid as large a proportion of its budget as it devotes to basic education at home), nor does it always use a country’s own interest in education as a way to prioritize.

[Table 6](#) below shows three country cases along with some notes on what the assistance consisted of.

Table 6. Country cases for KOICA education assistance

Country	Notes
Uganda	<p>The Uganda activity is described as “Basic education and vocational training to foster youth talent”.⁸¹ The main actions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “a. Technical and vocational training centers including its construction and equipment supply. b. A technical and vocational education system including structural reform and curriculum development in close partnership with the Ugandan government and other donors. c. Capacity building for the TVET sector including dispatch of TVET experts, invitational training, and administrative staff training.

⁸¹ [https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS\(eng\)/UGA.pdf](https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS(eng)/UGA.pdf)

Country	Notes
	<p>d. Training of technical professionals through vocational training based on industrial demand for skilled labor including partnership with local business for internship and on-hand training.</p> <p>e. Basic education focusing on capacity building of teachers and quality of education.” (p. 8).</p> <p>As it appears, one out of five actions pertain to basic education.</p> <p>Elsewhere, actions are listed as:</p> <p>“Support for adequate educational environment Curriculum development Capacity building of teachers” (p. 10).</p> <p>The only indicators listed are whether the project has been implemented.</p> <p>We could find only two education projects in Uganda. One was a project supporting one specific vocational training institute, the Ntinda Vocational Training Institute project. It appears to be, or have been, wholly an infrastructure and inputs project.⁸² Another similar project in more regions has been announced recently.⁸³ Thus, in Uganda, though the country activities are described as including basic education, we could not find evidence of basic education activities, and those oriented at vocational education seem to have little focus on outcomes or evidence-based close precursors of outcomes.</p>
Tanzania	<p>The Tanzania activity is described as “Basic education and vocational training to foster youth talent”.⁸⁴ The main actions are:</p> <p>“Support secondary education and vocational education, focusing on educational environment and quality of education Support education opportunities for girls and women” (p. 3).</p> <p>Korea’s strength in supporting Tanzania is described as “The Republic of Korea has achieved successful industrialization in a very short period of time by enhancing vocational education in agriculture and mechanical engineering. Also, Korea has established a universal basic education system on a stable foundation” (p. 10). The following are listed as KOICA’s priorities for Tanzania:</p>

⁸² The only information we could find on it was in the Institute’s website (<https://www.ntindavti.ac.ug/about/>), the press (<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1339132/south-korea-build-sh11bn-vocational-institute>), and a scholarly paper (<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jssd/article/download/159414/148976>). All are described in terms of inputs, and none describe any outcomes or a focus on what inputs are proposed based on evidence as to likelihood of outcomes.

⁸³ The only information found was on KOICA/Uganda’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KOICA.Uganda>.

⁸⁴ [https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS\(eng\)/TZA.pdf](https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS(eng)/TZA.pdf)

Country	Notes
	<p>“Improved secondary educational environment Strengthened capacities of vocational training teachers Improved girls’ education, health and right to work Strengthened interlinkages between areas through public private cooperation” (p. 13).</p> <p>Thus, to the extent that secondary education is included in “basic”, only the first of the listed indicators would seem to pertain to basic directly, and only through an improved “educational environment.” (It is not made clear what this means.)</p> <p>In Tanzania, we found the “Empowering adolescent girls and young women through education” project. The activity did have outcome goals, but these were relatively distal and may be hard to attribute.⁸⁵ It was unclear what indicators will be used or what the theory of change between inputs, proximate determinants or precursors, and outcomes is posited to be. The project did receive one of the more specific evaluations among the KOICA-funded projects discussed here, and the results were at best indifferent, offer indifferent evidence, and point to weaknesses in the input-process-outcomes theory of change: “A learning needs assessment has been conducted by the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) for Outcome 1 in preparation of an increased access to literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school adolescent girls and young women. But no other baseline or scoping studies are known that should have captured the needs of partners and beneficiaries before implementation. An Operational Strategy was developed to accelerate project delivery and remains undated, subject to consultations with key stakeholders and partners” (p. 9), “All UN partners are found to not fully use the potential of regular internal monitoring, and monitoring is not as strong as it should be. Field visits are not sufficiently often undertaken. This relates to both individual agency visits and joint missions. This is remarkable because there is sufficient funding available for monitoring... Outcomes would be enhanced if the Joint Programme would be less thinly spread and would cover fewer regions and thematic areas and develop more focus. Significant lessons learned also remain undocumented” (p. 12).⁸⁶ The assertion in the evaluation that girls and young women are benefitting must be taken at face value as no evidence is adduced, though some anecdotal evidence is presented.⁸⁷</p> <p>In Tanzania better (pre- and post-, comparison group) evidence of impact is provided through a fairly simple intervention on solar lighting for education, that raised attendance and time on task. Those are very proximal drivers of learning. As in the Ghana “Unlocking Literacy” project below, it is oddly difficult to find official reportage of, and learning from, this apparent success. We found only references on the web itself (mostly from the Korean start-up developing the approach, Yolk), but not in the usual donor project sites, and one in KOICA’s Tanzania Facebook page. One would think, both from an evaluation and an education point of view, that KOICA would be more assiduous in learning about these</p>

⁸⁵ <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/daressalaam/koica-tanzania>, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-and-gender-equality/unfpa-unwomen-programme>.

⁸⁶ <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unfpa-unwomen-programme-mid-term-evaluation-report-tanzania.pdf>.

⁸⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/node/327951>.

Country	Notes
	<p>results, and sharing, as it is seldom that input-based interventions, especially simple ones, have an impact on rather good precursors of learning.⁸⁸</p>
Ghana	<p>The Ghana activity is described in “The Republic of Korea’s Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for the Republic of Ghana 2016-2020”⁸⁹ as focusing on:</p> <p>“Quality of basic education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Korea will support the Ghanaian government’s effort to improve quality of basic STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and literacy rate to enhance academic performance. - Strengthening the TVET program to meet industrial labor market demand - Korea will continue to implement and introduce TVET programs to create better employment opportunities. The experience gained from the “Ghana Accra Technical Training Center Capacity Building Project (2010-2012/USD 2 mil)” will be promoted for the further engagement in the Ghanaian context. - Korea will also provide support to introduce competency-based training (CBT), ICT-based training, and other competitive vocational training programs with close ties to key educational policies of the Government of Ghana. - Commitment to supporting education for special target groups such as vulnerable groups including people with disabilities is necessary to promote universal basic education, improve the adult literacy rate, realize gender equality in education, and contribute to the achievement of Ghana’s educational goals that are linked with the SDGs” (p. 10). <p>The Ghana program seems to be the most consistent with a focus on the basics together with TVET, areas in which Korea’s own experience suggests excellence.</p> <p>The proposed achievements are:</p> <p>“Improved quality and environment of basic education Increased educational opportunities for women and people with disabilities Strengthened TVET linked to industrial labor market demand” (p. 14).</p> <p>Despite the fact that the 2016-2020 country plans did not include a focus on the “nitty gritty” of primary education, KOICA did invest, in Ghana, in the “Unlock Literacy Project.” The project was quite successful and it included, as a relative rarity, a comparison group, a before-and-after comparison, and the results were quite impressive: after two years, 65% of the project participant children could read with comprehension, as opposed to only 40% in the comparison group. The project even won the 2021 UNESCO-Japan prize on Education for Sustainable Development. Given that the project was so successful, and also so reflective of Korea’s own focus on the basics especially during its “take-off” period, one would expect to find more evidence of learning from the project, and more dissemination of results, from KOICA itself, other than announcements in the KOICA Facebook page. Instead most of the evidence comes through the implementing NGO or the Ghanaian press.</p>

⁸⁸ <https://p4gpartnerships.org/pioneering-green-partnerships/all-p4g-partnerships/solar-cow-4-impact>, <https://www.afrik21.africa/en/tanzania-yolk-wants-to-electrify-nearly-100-households-through-its-solar-cow-proje/>, <https://m.facebook.com/koica.tanzania/photos/a.174954619226389/3619979471390536/?type=3>.

⁸⁹ [https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS\(eng\)/GHA.pdf](https://www.odakorea.go.kr/contentFile/CPS(eng)/GHA.pdf)

Country	Notes
	Also in Ghana, and more consistent with a focus on activities and inputs rather than outcomes, was the “Promotion of Girls’ Competency in Mathematics and Science with Gender-Responsive Pedagogy.” This is a new project so one would not expect to find evidence of impact, but despite searching for it, we could find no evidence-based design to improve actual learning outcomes or a focus on measuring outcomes, but this could well be because the only project descriptions we could find were in the press or in KOICA’s Facebook page, and these were naturally not extensive.
Others	<p>Though Mozambique was not listed in KOICA’s 2016-2020 Plan (reference above) as having basic education projects, we found two, depending on how one counts. From the descriptions it is hard to say how much the efforts focus on outcomes or track them.</p> <p>In Nigeria (which was mentioned in the 2016-2020 Plan for having planned basic education activity) there is a relatively new and very large project in the use of multimedia in basic education. The descriptions are too thin to support a reading of a theory of change leading to outcomes, but the global evidence on the impact of multimedia on learning is thin indeed. But the note in the referenced website that “the project is aimed at improving the importation of multimedia tools in teaching and learning in the classroom” is perhaps more revelatory than it intends.</p>

For a joint summary of the Korea and Japan cases, see Section [7.3](#).

7.2 Japan

7.2.1. Japan central or home office perceptions/policies

We briefly analyze or describe JICA’s most current central office position on education ODA in two ways. First, by looking at the actual position papers, and then by studying the implicit position in the fact that a certain type of approach called “School for All” has become a sort of de facto flagship approach, on the ground.

The JICA position papers on education are “JICA’s Position Paper on SDGs: Goal 4”⁹⁰ and “JICA Position Paper in Education Cooperation.”⁹¹ The papers have the following characteristics relevant to our analysis of the consistency of JICA and KOICA’s work with Japan and Korea’s own historical education development experience:

1. The number 1 priority is given to “Quality of Learning” (JICA 2015, p. 1, 2 and JICA 206, p. 3). Secondarily, but immediately, attention is given to disparities or inequalities. Interestingly, and somewhat differently from the KOICA approach, disparities are taken to mean not just inequalities in supplies, inputs, and enrollment ratios, but specifically in terms of learning outcomes. The focus on outcomes is reflected in JICA’s position that

⁹⁰ https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/education/c8h0vm0000am7dbv-att/position_paper.pdf

⁹¹ https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/education/c8h0vm0000am7dbv-att/position_paper_02.pdf

“JICA will further strengthen the linkage between policy and practice by feeding outcomes acquired through our project implementation into education policies and plans” (JICA 2015, p 6).

2. The strategy explicitly bases or justifies Japan’s role in education ODA in terms of the successes it has had, much as this paper has argued it ought to: “Japan amassed extensive experience in... both comprehensive and gradual educational development especially since the start of the modernization process in the Meiji era.” (JICA 2016, p. 1.) The position papers emphasize “core” education processes, and lists inputs and buildings last in a long list of interests. This is significantly different from the way KOICA presents its position. The areas are: curriculum, pre- and in-service teacher training, promotion of mutual learning among teachers, support for development of textbooks, improvement of school-based management, strengthening of educational administration, and only then, construction of education facilities (JICA 2015, p. 3 and JICA 2016, pp. 8 and 9).
3. The paper emphasizes a clear institutional learning cycle that seems very much based on our reading (in this paper) of how Japan approaches its own education: “This approach enables us to provide comprehensive solutions with consistent interventions throughout (1) curriculum, (2) textbooks and teaching and learning materials, (3) lessons and (4) assessment, so that the Learning Cycle is strengthened” (JICA 2015, p. 8). As we will see below, there is some evidence that the more cooperative and mutual aspects of a teaching and learning approach may have been modified somewhat via a more directed one, perhaps based on lessons learned through the years.
4. The documents do not show what sorts of indicators will be used to track success. One assumes that the emphasis on learning would require indicators *other* than those given in JICA 2015 (text box attachment) in the papers to show previous success, as those represent classical inputs or outputs, but not outcomes (e.g., building schools, training teachers).

A secondary (secondary but also intermediate between central, home-office policy and the ground-level country cases discussed below) approach to ascertaining JICA’s “central” or home office approach is what one could call a “revealed policy” approach (playing on economists’ notion of revealed preference) by studying approaches that JICA has generalized.

School for All. The “School for All” approach of JICA. The justification for taking this “revealed policy” approach is that, of course, it is better to see what agencies actually *do* rather than what they say, especially if what they do is in some sense better, or more interesting, than what they say in their policies. Also, the written policies of JICA are a bit distant in time, so it may be better to ascertain the *implicit* policy in what JICA has been *doing* even over a more recent period. A second justification is that the size, and the growth of this program, makes it reasonable to think of it as a sort of *de facto* “flagship” approach of JICA.

“School for All” has the following characteristics (just for emphasis and intelligibility, we have chosen the ones that make our point, and added our own interpretation, without omitting any aspects that might argue *against* our point):⁹²

1. Size: as a single project (or a family of projects) it represents some 40% of the children helped by JICA in the relevant time period. It also represents 40% of the projects (which suggests that, in terms of size, “School for All” projects were of average size). It has operated in 10 countries at different times.⁹³
2. The project has clearly used a sort of “problem-driven iterative adaptation” (PDIA) and “Doing Development Differently” approach, as proposed by Pritchett and others (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock 2012, see also the “Doing Development Differently” manifesto).⁹⁴ This is evident in the fact that its components have been honed and improved as it has been implemented, rather than strictly created by blueprint design from the outset. In that sense it would seem to have had the intellectual and programmatic support of key staff in the home office—such learning across efforts is difficult without support of one’s bureaucracy (or at least freedom of professionals from too much bureaucratic interference).
3. Unlike in the past, and perhaps even unlike other current JICA projects, it has been rigorously evaluated in terms of outcomes, these outcomes have had high effect sizes (as high as around 0.5 SDs), and the learning from evaluations seems to be incorporated into new iterations (Maruyama and Kurosaki. 2021, Maruyama, Kageyama, and Kunieda 2022, Maruyama, Igei, and Kurokawa 2021). Some of the learnings that can be gleaned from these rigorous evaluations are:
 - a. It is possible to increase learning very quickly, especially in the foundation grades, with quite structured materials and activities.
 - b. The activities had more impact on the initially less-capable students. Note that this was evaluated in terms of baseline capability regardless of gender or location, since the importance of random and individual random variation (as opposed to attribute-based) seems to be gaining recognition.
 - c. The practices seem scalable, and the communities can participate because they can understand. They do not seem to be overly burdensome in terms of requiring complex interventions (e.g., pedagogical) that communities are often not well equipped for, by historical experience.
 - d. Rigorous approaches that increased access (to significant and well-evaluated degrees) were modeled in Niger using some of the same projects and approaches that were used to increase learning. This is fairly rare. These approaches successfully mobilized the demand side, through community awareness and support, rather than cash transfers or fee structures, or simply supply-side school construction. To deal simultaneously with access and learning

⁹² Some insights here derived from “Ensuring quality education for all through community-wide collaboration: Experience with JICA ‘School for All’ Program.” Powerpoint presentation by Nobuhiro Kunieda on 6 April 2022, but with our added interpretation. Any errors of interpretation are the authors’.

⁹³ Personal communication, Kunieda Nubihuro, JICA Senior Advisor, 6 April 2022.

⁹⁴ <https://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/>.

is something that has tended to elude both national governments and the international agencies, so models that can do both seem especially innovative and interesting. Clues as to why this program has been able to help with both access and learning are contained in the discussion of a “Foundational Model” for education development through community-wide collaboration (Kunieda et al. 2020) in these terms: “... the three major components that make up the Foundational Model: (i) conducting secret ballot elections to enable the community to elect its SMC members democratically; (ii) developing a school action plan with community involvement; and (iii) establishing a sustainable monitoring and advisory structure to support SMCs” (p. 89).

4. While, in a typical manner, the program has emphasized consultation and mutual learning, the reality seems to be that there has been added, incrementally, a foundational approach that mixes “teaching at the right level” and “structured pedagogy.” This seems more in line with Japan’s own experience in its own history, even if the inspiration has come from modern empirical evidence regarding experiences such as with the Indian NGO Pratham. This more structured approach, however, does not appear to have been imposed in a cookie-cutter fashion but adapted and learned anew in each case. As opposed to other implementations of structured pedagogy, it would seem that the consultation and community ownership might make the program more sustainable and replicable. The process whereby a more structured way evolved is described by JICA in detail and is worth quoting: “When the project first began, the SMCs contributed to the improvement of the children’s learning environment by ‘everyone’ working together on educational activities such as building straw-roofed classrooms and purchasing textbooks and stationery. Also, because the quality and quantity of learning in class were not sufficient, the SMCs in various communities began to implement remedial classes. In an effort to support children’s learning, adults in the community provided support by confirming the attendance of children and checking the answers to practice questions. In order to increase the effectiveness of the remedial classes that began in various communities, JICA recommended the introduction of a proficiency-based teaching method that matches the level of understanding of each student. In Madagascar, a three-month remedial math class in 2019 resulted in an average improvement of 20 percentage points in test results for about 170,000 students.”⁹⁵ This structured approach was Pratham’s “Teaching at the Right Level.” But in Niger, earlier, structured, sequential, well-planned workbooks that could lead to children self-learning had been tried, also with good results (around 0.37 SDs) (Maruyama and Kurosaki 2021). Interestingly, at least in Madagascar, the evaluations showed longitudinal impact on completion of primary school (or at least dropout reduction), a variable of great interest.
5. The approach embodies and gives meaning to the “cycle” approach with the JICA policy of 2015 promised and, probably, was already learning from to some degree, since the program pre-dates the policy to some extent. This represents a perhaps optimal mix between policy design and experimentation/iteration.

⁹⁵ https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/field/2021/20210601_01.html.

Other “revealed policy” evidence is from other projects that are somewhat central (even if they originated in only one country, they spread to others, presumably under supervision of the home office, thus constituting a sort of “revealed policy”). We pick two examples to show that these are either directly rooted in Japan’s own history (but, in one case, perhaps misses the deepest learning possible from Japan’s own history) or, as in the case of Learning for All above, seem to somewhat discover, in the developing countries, a need for the same sorts of things Japan learnt in its own history.

Lesson Study. Lesson study is a Japanese practice that originated in the Meiji restoration. Its essence is a grassroots or bottom-up approach to teachers observing, and reflecting on, each other’s lessons, in order to improve them. The process is well-structured, even though it evolved organically and is bottom-up and grassroots based. A responsive culture within the official, national level systems eventually turned the insights from lesson study in general, and from the study of lessons, into a core part of teacher training in Japan. Lesson study has spread throughout the world, partly under JICA programs (Watanabe 2002, Watanabe 2018, JICA 2015, JICA 2019).⁹⁶ Though this form of Japanese (and JICA specifically) influence (or direct assistance in the case of JICA) may well be the most deeply rooted in Japan’s own experience, it does not seem to spread particularly well. In some sense, perhaps it ignores the deepest lesson from the research in this paper, namely the need for innovation to be itself deeply rooted in the country that is innovating, or to be adapted very carefully. As is the case in the non-spread of the USA’s land-grant university system, or the Germanic vocational education system (discussed in Section [1.2](#)), it may be that the lesson study process, or key aspects of it, are too uniquely Japanese. For instance, Duez (2018) documents three cases of attempted adaptation to The Philippines, Malawi, and Uganda. Reporting on quantitative psychological analysis, she notes that teachers in The Philippines seem more hierarchically-oriented towards their bureaucracy, less horizontally-oriented towards their own colleagues, and are less future-oriented (p. 70). (Of course, there is always the question of what is cause and what is effect. As is the case of Japanese education in general, what one could posit as inherent cultural traits, may actually be traits that are partially manufactured by the education system. Teachers in the Philippines may have the orientation they do because the system has built that into them. Nonetheless, this is hard to change fast.) In Uganda and Malawi, teachers implemented the method in a manner we have described elsewhere as “isomorphic mimicry: “in all of the lessons observed in both Uganda and Malawi the instructor attempted to follow the plan exactly, often ignoring student needs. In the post-lesson discussion, one teacher was even praised for ‘using his authoritative approach to push the lesson to the end’” (p. 71). Researching lesson study in Java, Indonesia, Kusanagi (2014) concludes: “Lesson study developed organically in Japan over a period of 140 years, whereas in Indonesia, lesson study was introduced as a top-down initiative... the approaches to teaching and professional development are influenced by sociocultural factors that are embedded in the teachers’ lives, which are often beyond the scope of professional development programs. The differences in responsibilities of teachers, the nature of collegiality, and the pedagogic strategies of mathematics teachers are discussed in

⁹⁶ See also Watanabe’s commentary here:

order to illustrate the engagement and challenges of lesson study in an Indonesian school” (p. 1). All this is an interesting contrast to the case of Learning for All, described above, which seems to have been rooted in an iterative and adaptive JICA analysis of what is needed in the field, based on results of initial experimentation and spread to other sites only afterwards, which is, oddly, more consistent with Japan’s own process of adaptation. It is important to note, with regard to JICA’s use of lesson study, that it does focus on the basics and on teaching and learning, unlike JICA’s own earlier focus (and to some degree KOICA’s recent focus) on infrastructure or commodity transfers. (Though note that school construction is alive and well or at least has been alive and well, and is something JICA (2019) still highlights as one of five examples of its work.)

SMASSE-WECSA (Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education - Western, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa). This approach started as a JICA program in Kenya in 1998 in response to the usual problem of insufficient teacher capacity in the teaching of Mathematics (JICA 2010). By 2008 the program had been replicated to 30 countries and had trained some 90,000 teachers (*ibid.*) and 270,000 by 2018 (JICA 2019). This seems to have been less of a top-down initiative than the lesson study approach described above. Matachi and Kosaka (2017) state that “This approach was developed not from theory-based discussions, but from the analysis of actual challenges that mathematics and science teachers in Kenya were faced with” (p. 36). Nonetheless, the structure and approach are somewhat influenced by at least the general approach of lesson study (or more generally the approach to teacher-based lesson planning), as JICA (2019) note. The approach is learner-centered and relies on a cycle of “Activity,” “Students,” “Experiments,” and “Improvisation.” PDSI is an abbreviation of “Plan (planning a lesson),” “Do (carrying out the planned activities),” “See (assessing students’ understanding and evaluating the lesson),” and “Improve (improving the lesson based on the evaluation)” (Matachi and Kosaka 2017, p. 36). The program had some significant output successes: in-service teacher training systems were established (or the approach was embraced by existing systems), lesson delivery was observed to have been improved and students’ participation in lessons improved. There is some evidence of sustainability. On the other hand, methods are not often implemented as intended, and students’ thinking processes do not seem to have improved (Matachi & Kosaka 2017). Learning outcomes results are not clear (unlike the Learning for All program discussed above) (Kiige and Atina 2016; Iliyasu, Muhammed and Yau 2022; Gachachi, Kimani, and Ngaruiya 2014) though some studies do show a positive correlation between the approach and student results. The reasons for these problems were largely due to structural constraints in the context that have not always been thoroughly taken into account in policy borrowing, such as that the curriculum is overloaded (as is well-known), and teachers therefore do not have enough time to implement lessons carefully. Methods are incorporated ritualistically (isomorphic mimicry—a familiar feature of problems in implementation of learner-centered education in developing countries): for instance, group work seems to be assumed to somewhat magically lead to results, but if the students are not ready for the group’s work, it tends not to work. Importantly, learners lack the foundational skills, which undermines further learning either in a traditional or more modern approach to teaching—a problem that Japan and Korea deal with early on, and which is a key characteristic of those countries’ systems, as we have noted repeatedly in this paper.

7.2.2. JICA country cases

We now turn to a few examples of JICA country cases. Some of them bear some relation to the central cases noted above.

Table 7. Country cases for JICA education assistance

Country	Project
Ghana	<p>Project for Improving Learning Outcomes through Community Participation for Sustainable School for All (COMPASS).⁹⁷</p> <p>This project seems similar to, or inspired by, the experiences described in Kunieda et al. (2022). Those seem to be very well thought-out and successful.</p> <p>From the project description webpage:</p> <p>“Project Purpose A model to improve learning outcomes at the primary level through collaboration with communities and schools is made available for scale-up.</p> <p>Outputs Participatory school management and information sharing mechanism is improved. Pupil's learning outcomes in numeracy are improved. SMC monitoring system at district and school levels is strengthened. A model is refined in the term of scalability in subsequent regions based on the lessons learned.</p> <p>Project Activities [We take the risk of presenting such an extensive list to show some key features we want to highlight. We have removed some bullet points to save space.] 1.1 Organize a experience sharing seminar for officials at MoE and GES on learning improvement activities based on participatory school management. 1.2 Formulate an implementation framework (procedure and training manuals) for democratic establishment of SMC, SPIP development, resource management and internal monitoring of SMC. 1.3 Organize a trainer's workshop for officials at Regional and District Education Offices (REOs/ DEOs) on democratic establishment of SMC. [These workshops are then extended all the day down to the school level including parents.] 1.7 Organize an education forum at the district level to improve access, quality and governance... 2.1 Formulate an implementation framework (procedures and training manuals) for SMC-supported learning-oriented activities in numeracy. 2.2 Develop teaching and learning materials (TLMs). 2.3 Conduct baseline survey. 2.4 Organize a trainers' workshop for REOs and DEOs officials on learning-oriented activities including remedial activities. [These are extended all the way down to the grassroots level.] 2.6 Conduct end line survey and review the outcomes. 3.1 Formulate an implementation framework... for SMC monitoring at the district level 3.2 Organize a trainers' workshop for DEOs on SMC monitoring (monitoring mechanism, monitoring procedure, tools, and technical advices)</p>

⁹⁷ <https://www.jica.go.jp/project/english/ghana/012/outline/index.html>.

Country	Project
	<p>[Extended all the way down to school level.]</p> <p>4.1 Review lessons learnt at the first target regions.</p> <p>4.2 Organize a workshop for experience-sharing and refreshment of the project model.</p> <p>4.3 Conduct activities for output 1, 2 and 3 in the second region (specified in each output).</p> <p>4.4 Evaluate scalability of... model to improve learning outcomes based on participatory management.</p> <p>4.5 Organize a validation meeting for approving the model to improve learning outcomes at the primary level through collaboration with communities and schools.”</p>
Ghana	<p>Project for Improvement of Access to Basic Education in Deprived Areas⁹⁸</p> <p>Classical school construction project: “The school construction project is using a 605 million Japanese Yen grant (approx. US\$ 6 million) to construct classrooms for Primary and Junior High Schools, teachers’ accommodation, toilet facilities and educational furniture in 33 schools.”</p>
Mozambique	<p>Project for Expansion of New Curriculum in Mozambique⁹⁹</p> <p>From the project description:</p> <p>“MINEDH and JICA agreed on the need for further comprehensive efforts including the improvement of the national curriculum and textbooks, the educational evaluation system and teacher education in order to enhance pupil learning in primary mathematics and natural science. It is against this background that the MINEDH and JICA jointly launched the Project for Expansion of New Curriculum in Mozambique. We will work on the revision of mathematics and science curricula and textbooks and strengthen pre- and in-service teacher training and the educational assessment system, aiming to improve the academic performance of Mozambican pupils.</p> <p>This project is particularly unique among JICA's educational cooperation projects in that it addresses the Comprehensive Approach for Learning Improvement set forth in JICA Position Paper in Education Cooperation (2015) within a single project.”</p> <p>The project is a comprehensive implementation of all key steps in a thorough reform process. Above, in discussing JICA’s Position Paper we noted how the current position paper thoroughly approaches quality improvement through actions that research (and history of Japan) suggest matters. The project focuses on measurement and is aimed at basic education.</p>
Burkina Faso	<p>Support Program for Basic Education Students and Teachers¹⁰⁰</p> <p>This project combines the sorts of approaches to improving learning analyzed above among the central JICA programs and in the case of Ghana. The project also had a construction phase that had to be stopped due to security concerns. UNICEF took over.</p>

⁹⁸ <https://www.jica.go.jp/ghana/english/activities/c8h0vm00004bps0w-att/activity04.pdf>

⁹⁹ <https://www.jica.go.jp/project/english/mozambique/013/outline/index.html>.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.jica.go.jp/burkinafaso/english/activities/education.html>.

As one might have predicted (but it was necessary to check) from the description of the JICA central policies and flagship projects, these country efforts a) include quality-enhancing efforts that line up with Japan's own history (though not, perhaps, its early Meiji history), b) are focused on the basics (specifically primary), c) include a reform-cycle that is logical and consistent, and d) include measurement. In these senses they differ in depth from the KOICA projects. They also include infrastructure, as does KOICA, but to a less emphatic extent. None of these projects emphasizes what is perhaps the key lesson from Japan's history, namely the need to adopt and adapt innovations, to borrow policies and programs, through the lens of a high purpose for education.¹⁰¹ But, then, neither do any other development agencies, as one can judge from the discussions of UNESCO and the World Bank.

7.3 Summary of Korea and Japan education ODA

This brief section draws a bottom line across the cases of Korea and Japan.

From everything we could read, neither agency focuses on helping countries' authorities in understanding the very basis of Korea and Japan's education success, namely making education central to the national project, as opposed to something based on its general impact on other development indicators, or for its own sake. This issue may be mentioned, but in passing. But this is hardly surprising since, as we have seen in the cases of UNESCO and the World Bank discussed above (Section 5.3.), neither do the two most prominent multilateral agencies.

Both agencies spend considerably less on primary education as a share of their education ODA than they spend on it in their own countries as a share of their national education budgets. And Japan spends less on education ODA overall (not just primary) than it does on its own education system as a proportion of its total national budget. So, they seem to prioritize the basics less in their ODA than in their own countries. They also prioritize basic education less than other OECD members. (See [Table 5](#)).

The relative lack of prioritization of the basics is also found in the nature of the programs in the case of KOICA, much less so in the case of JICA. KOICA focuses to a large degree on infrastructure, commodities, and so on, and less on pedagogical processes, policy changes (especially policy changes that would be in line with its own history of policy). Further, there is a paucity of evaluation and, apparently, learning from experience—at least it is hard to find strong evidence of this. This is unlike its own case, where a great deal of research and adaptive innovation is carried out. JICA has a much greater focus on pedagogy and policy processes, and it does so to good, evaluated, effect that is documented in serious research literature. What JICA does overseas is also more in line with Japan's own history. How self-conscious this is, as opposed to simply being adaptive reactions to field results, is not clear. But since Japan's own history is characterized by adaptive reactions to their own results, it may be that this is better

¹⁰¹ Though note that the Mozambique project notes the formal prioritization of education in Mozambique's development plan, even if it seems to "buy" this rather than verify it or engage with it, if it needs boosting.

than if Japan were simply copying its own pedagogical practices. In fact, one of the cases studied, Learning for All, in some sense goes against (or ignores) some of the deeper and more complex pedagogical practices. And the deeper pedagogical practices that JICA has tried to simply export, such as Lesson Study (excellent as this approach is for Japan itself), do not seem to go particularly well.

8. Summary and Conclusions

8.1 Broader lessons

We first want to be clear on what this paper does *not* say or imply. The paper does not disrecommend that countries have abstract or numerical goals or that it is completely impossible to borrow good practices.

We merely say that one needs to come from a position prior to the goals, and then go beyond them: numerical goals are useful signposts, and they focus attention on how far one has come and still has to go, but they are not the real purpose of the journey. And the purpose, in the successful countries studied, was not just to achieve education for its own sake, as a human right, or because of its economic benefits, or even because of its impact on metrics everyone values, such as infant mortality—not if such impact at the national level is the mere aggregation of impact at the individualistic level, as the quote from Lant Pritchett in the front matter suggests. The deepest motivational purpose in the cases studied was education as perhaps *the* key to the development of the nation as a collective enterprise of high achievement, with earned prestige among nations, that defines much else in the lives of its young citizens. In all of this, the role of equality seems to have been paramount.

An issue that has to be faced head on is the legitimacy of emphasizing national development (as opposed to less charged goals such as “human development” or “poverty reduction”), and the role of education in national development. This “elephant in the room,” as the cliché goes, deserves a several-paragraph *excursus* even in this concluding section, given that many in the global education community could see the idea of national development, and of using education as a powerful force for national development, as bordering on nationalism, and nationalism has generally (and rightly) been perceived as a dangerous, or at least a fraught, notion by many in that community. Or it has at the very least been ignored. As we have seen, UNESCO was explicitly (though only partially) created to weaken the sorts of nationalist tendencies and ideologies that gave rise to the Second World War. The World Bank focuses on individuals’ freedom from poverty, on economic growth and other indicators that could seem abstractions, or mere aggregations of individual welfare, relative to a more robust and collective sense of national development (as per Pritchett 2021). Some academics have generally tended to be suspicious: that there could have been a book title such as “Containing Nationalism” (Hechter 2000) should not have been surprising. Political leaders such as Macron in France decry nationalism as erasing moral values (Mylonas and Tudor 2021). Throughout most of the 20th Century, public intellectuals such as Einstein and Tagore called nationalism “humanity’s measles” and “the greatest evil” (Mylonas and Tudor 2021). More recently, nationalism has come to be associated with authoritarian tendencies not only in the West (Trump, Orbán) but in developing countries (Duterte in the Philippines, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Xi Jinping in China, may be examples, though they are probably more authoritarian than nationalist; perhaps Modi in India being more ethno-nationalist than authoritarian, though the latter too), and thus nationalism has perhaps acquired a bad flavor again.

But in the last twenty to thirty years, political scientists have been exploring the notion of nationalism as a force that could enhance liberalism, democracy, and rights. In the 1970s through the 1990s and even later (e.g., Friedman 2005) there was considerable popular high-brow writing, such as by popular New York Times columnist Tom Friedman, decrying (or occasionally blessing) the power of multinational corporations relative to the nation-state (e.g., Friedman 2005). But the nation-state and nationalism, all seem to be alive and well one fifth of the way into the 21st century. Some political scientists have started to assert that, given that nationalism may be here to stay, maybe nationalism can be a force for rights, democracy, and freedom, and against both globalization and “neoliberalism” but then also authoritarianism. That nationalism and the nation state have historically been and remain a huge force, full stop, is hard to argue: The prominent political philosopher Andreas Wimmer (2019) notes that “from 1816 to 2001, nation-states won somewhere between 70 and 90 percent of their wars with empires or dynastic states,” and that “In 1900, roughly 35 percent of the globe’s surface was governed by nation-states; by 1950, it was already 70 percent. Today, only half a dozen dynastic kingdoms and theocracies remain.” But he also notes that nation-states are not peaceful: “Globally, the rise of nationalism has increased the frequency of war: over the last two centuries, the foundation of the first nationalist organization in a country has been associated with an increase in the yearly probability of that country experiencing a full-scale war, from an average of 1.1 percent to an average of 2.5 percent.” Yet, as Mylonas and Tudor (2021) note, today there are 200 nation-states, against 60 a century ago. So the issue remains.

Partly as a result of the above, and in an effort to sort these issues out since the 1990s, attention to the possibility of a liberal or “progressive,” democratic, or rights-oriented nationalism has been proposed, starting with scholars such as Miller (1995), Miller (2000), Tamir (1993) (who is also a politician) and others. Mylonas and Tudor (2021) summarize this literature, touching on the (bi-directionally causal?) relationship between national identity and mass public education. Perhaps *the* key insight from this literature that is relevant for this paper is that (and how) the development of national identity and some form of nationalism might allow for more investment (both in terms of taxes for funding, and social effort) in public goods, as it is easier to invest in public goods if all can identify with, and benefit, from the public good more or less equally and, importantly, in a manner that all perceive as legitimate. Miguel (2004) notes the difference in the provision of public goods, including education, in countries that espouse a more tribalist versus a more nationally-identified state, specifically using Kenya and Tanzania as case studies using natural experimentation. But he notes many other studies showing a similar relationship by such prominent scholars as Alesina (cited elsewhere in this paper). In a paper titled “More for the Poor is Less for the Poor: The Politics of Targeting,” Gelbach and Pritchett (2002) note that targeting public services on the poor may have the unintended political economic consequence that such services may be starved of funding, or starved of quality-enhancing managerial attention and accountability pressure (Pritchett has quipped that “schooling for the poor is poor schooling”). It would seem logical that to the extent that the poor are “not us,” as in not as strongly identified with the nation, such a consequence would be all the harder to avoid.

Aside from drawing attention to the issue, and perhaps more importantly that simply drawing attention to it, authors such as Tudor (2019), Miller (2020), Tamir (2020), and Gustavsson (2020), in a manner perhaps rare for academics, converge fairly clearly on the desirability of such a nationalism, and on a few fairly simple criteria such a nationalism would be characterized by. Not all agree of course. Some have noted that the project of a liberal nationalism is at best unnecessary (Mason 1999), because political (in the sense of identification-with-a-polity) as opposed to national identification may be sufficient, or at worst harmful as the inculcation of a national identity may need to be oppressive and assimilationist (a thesis well summarized but not defended in Mason 1999) or because it may allow a tendency for those who use divisive nationalism (e.g., Trumpism) to be let off the hook too easily (Cohen 2019). In all this it is important to note that it is not just a matter of “too much nationalism is bad, a bit of nationalism is good” (as Jared Diamond, for example, seems to argue [here](#)), or that some nationalisms are healthier in some general ways. The researchers we have cited above go beyond generalities and specify relatively rigorous criteria for a more liberal nationalism that are not too many nor, it would seem, too difficult to meet.

In short, there is a vast literature on nationalism, national identity, the nation state and the relation of all these to national development, public goods, rights, and so on. Some of that literature specifically touches upon education and schooling. But as far as we know, no prominent international agency and, in fact, as we believe we have shown with our discussion of UNESCO and World Bank trends, few in “the educational development community” are engaging the issue head-on, and in fact evasion, purposeful or not, seems to be the rule.¹⁰² Should the role of education in national development, as opposed to simply improving indicators, be emphasized? It is also unclear what the implications of the national question would be for international agencies’ position on actual, specific education policies, such as curricular frameworks, language of instruction (nation-building *lingua franca* or instruction-maximizing mother tongue, and for how long, and when for each?), and teacher placement. As far as we know there has been no serious work leading to some consensus on these things that takes a national development perspective into account, as opposed to only an education perspective. It could be that it is hard enough even when one simply takes an education perspective into account. We do not know. This paper would argue that these issues are at least worthy of a serious engagement. The RISE Programme’s literature on “purpose” could be a useful contribution to a starting point.

To create and implement the notion of shared national fate (“shared suffering” is key to the sense of a nation, according to Renan [1882, p. 11]), but sharing in the goodies may also be useful), Japan and Korea put an enormous emphasis on equality (actual measurable equality), not just a vague sort of equity (more akin to a notion of justice), though equity too. We see this

¹⁰² Note that though official agencies have not touched the issue head on, some scholars have. Shibata (2004) for instance notes that: “Shibata (2004) describes educational reforms like those undertaken in Japan during the Meiji restoration and after the Second World War (as well as those undertaken by Korea following the Korean War) as having a strong nationalist impetus with the ultimate aim of survival, not just militarily but cultural and political as well” (p. 74).

show up in many ways: limited progression up the educational stream until those who might end up staying at the lower level have universal high quality with 100% completion, say; or monitoring the performance of schools (and providing all with as equally good inputs as reasonably possible) so that students all learn at a high minimum level, with the *result* that the differences in test scores between rich and poor, or even more dramatically between the most able students and the least able, are very small. This is partly based on the notion that all children are able to achieve, they simply need the right teaching and support, almost as an article of faith. In short, it is not a matter of saying that goals such as 100% completion (MDGs), or 100% of children reaching at least a given learning standard (SDGs), or the gender parity index being 1 (both), are unimportant: on the contrary, it is about having such goals but, much more importantly, having the goals themselves arise out of the deep *meaning* of the goals, and enacting that meaning as a prior matter of collective will. We do not conceptualize “meaning” in the previous sentence as the things the goal signifies, in a definitional sense, no matter how deep, but, instead, as the moral and affective freight with which the goals are invested as they are created: the goals are created out of the same deep commitment to the ontological thing behind the numbers. Numerical success in metrics is then the rewarding result of deeply wanting all children to learn at a good level, and deeply meaning it *and* investing meaning into it, not a numerical fetish one worships—even if the fetish is useful. In short, the indicators have to be as “thick” as possible, in RISE terminology.

So are there any “best practices” that countries or development agencies can borrow or broker? Our front matter quotation from Michael Woolcock would suggest any borrowing of practices to be wrong-headed. But the quotation is there because there may be some ways to think about the borrowing of practices that are better than others. If everything in development has to be entirely *sui generis*, born out of some deep anthropological pessimism about the possibility of generalizing across human societies (at the extreme: every single village is its own world), none of us would be here, and all we could do would be ethnographic description and never analysis. And everything would have to be re-invented. Re-inventing everything is not the hallmark of successful societies, in the same way as slavishly copying practices (isomorphic mimicry) is also not. So the quotation is there as a warning and a challenge to think, not as an utter prohibition. In section [6](#) we discussed some of the lessons from Korea and Japan in terms of possible borrowability.

Before assessing whether anything is borrowable from Korea and Japan, it is worthwhile noting that we were on the lookout for the usual caveat that “these countries are mostly influenced by Confucianism, they are natural at working hard, they are good at filial and collective duty, and they inherently love learning” so there are no lessons to learn from them: culture is determinative, let’s borrow from cultures more similar to ours (e.g., Finland or, in Africa, Kenya as a bit of a performance outlier). While there may be something to this, our finding strongly suggests instead that many of the features that seem culturally-bound are actually created or reproduced by the schooling system via not only a curriculum but a teaching style that results in those features. In any case, one cannot explain a transformation (a variable), which both Korea and Japan underwent as of a very specific point in time and very quickly, by reference to a constant (culture). And, further, we noted that the style of Confucianism that prevailed is not all

that compatible with the sorts of modern and practical education that Korea and Japan emphasize, and was more compatible with an elitist and belletristic approach that Korea and Japan actively worked against. So, it may be that the notion that because culture is determinative, there is nothing to borrow, may just be a bit of an excuse to justify not doing the hard thinking and hard focusing that Japan and Korea did over decades in many native-led commissions, teacher networks, endogenous journals and magazines, and well-led Ministries of Education but with contestation on deeply *pedagogical* issues (not just bread and butter issues) between and from interest groups including the teachers' unions.

Perhaps the most borrowable practice is the main theme of the paper: purpose, and high purpose at that, is important. If a country does not have it and cannot generate it, the country may be able to develop its education system, but it is likely to happen gradually and as the result of an aggregation of individual desires and actions, and in fits and starts, as happened in the West over perhaps two or three centuries. Since this paper is presumably aimed at actors who work with development agencies or the countries themselves, and put a premium on action, a practical question arises: but how can one help if a country seems to have no purpose? How can one tell whether high purpose is being engaged and used? We would propose that the best indicator is "who is engaged, what sorts of individuals are engaged in defining where the education sector is going, both in terms of their position within the society and the official sector, but also in terms of moral, leadership, and technical reputation." And, fuzzy as the notion may seem, do these good people have real power? A second indicator is, if policies and ideas are being borrowed, how deeply worked over, tested and contested are they for delivering results in similar environments, at reasonable cost, and for cultural fit? Is massive energy being put into incrementally observing practice from the ground up, through natural variation, and *then* codifying it into Ministry policy? Or are policies and practices being considered based on "evidence" from three "gold standard" RCTs? How truly networked and ongoing are the networks and social groups that define these things? A third would be where the energy and drive for engagement with ideas is coming from: is it the donors who are calling all the meetings, really vetting ideas for not being "on plan," writing out the research agenda? A last one would be about whether the process is about what actors can actually *do*, and only secondarily about what their institutional arrangements look like: is the discussion deeply focusing on how to relate action to results and whether such relating can be done in practice, on the ground, by the real actors, rather than on imitating form for the sake of appearance: "we have to have an EMIS," (to be seen as rational), "we need to have investment in inclusive education" (to be seen as kind or at any rate to do the right thing).

8.2 Towards action

Most of the RISE work on "purpose" has meant to *study* purpose; the work has been mostly about explaining the world. (In fact, RISE more broadly, not just in the "purpose" stream of work, has been mostly about studying reform, not about generating it actively.) However, many of us also have an action orientation: we are not all libertarian enough, or maybe not sufficiently at peace with the world, to let things take their course and simply study them. And while we admit that one's attitude towards developing countries, even if one is from and in a developing

country, is well informed by humility because the generation and harnessing of purpose has to be mostly endogenous, we are often called upon by semi-academic colleagues, activists in NGOs, and government officials, to do more than just study.

What actions can one then take specifically with regard to generating and harnessing purposefulness? Perhaps the most useful guide to action is to apply the principles outlined by some of the thinkers who have informed many of us in the RISE Programme, such as Pritchett, Woolcock, and others. The principles of PDIA (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock 2012) and DDD (Doing Development Differently, see manifesto [here](#)) have been suggested even for implementing pilot field projects. But, as Crouch and DeStefano (2017) have suggested, if these principles can be applied to guide even pilot projects, they apply with all the more force, but for the same reasons, to activities that support system reform. That is, reform assistance, including possibly helping countries generate and manage to a high purpose, can follow a set of practical ideas if the implementers are sufficiently adaptive, iterative, and they (especially those who are guests of the countries in question) work with humility.

Not all of the DDD principles apply, as DDD was originally conceptualized for projects (or “initiatives,”—it seems that the writing has fairly concrete things in mind, less abstract than reform). But at least five out of six of them do, copying directly from the Manifesto:

1. Focus on solving local problems that are debated, defined, and refined by local people in an ongoing process.
2. Legitimize at all levels (political, managerial, and social), building ownership and momentum throughout the process to be “locally owned” in reality (not just on paper).
3. Work through local conveners who mobilize all those with a stake in progress (in both formal and informal coalitions and teams) to tackle common problems and introduce relevant change.
4. Blend design and implementation through rapid cycles of planning, action, reflection and revision (drawing on local knowledge, feedback and energy) to foster learning from both success and failure.
5. They manage risks by making “small bets”: pursuing activities with promise and dropping others.

The only principle that does not apply as clearly is to go with concrete, real results on the ground, as the ground-level results of system reforms do take some time. However, having some concrete examples of what can happen, on the ground, via concrete *instantiations* of the principles of a reform, can help. This includes demonstrating, for example, what happens when front line workers are both imbued with purpose (e.g., getting kids learning) and have the practical skills (e.g., teaching skills) to actualize that purpose. (And it is easier to generate purposefulness for change when we know the change is doable.) And those demonstrations can indeed benefit from the 6th principle of DDD.

Concrete ideas can also be found in a RISE sister paper that is central to the notion of purpose. Kaffenberger (2022) suggests three concrete ideas (we are essentially but not completely quoting):

- Conducting or funding learning assessments to spur political and citizen-led attention and pressure to act on learning. Learning assessments and new information on learning outcomes can also empower champions within the system to bring about change...
- Supporting domestic think- and do-tanks. Domestic think tanks and evidence-informed, action-oriented civil society actors have in many cases had an outsized influence on what politicians and others in an education system prioritize and commit to. These entities create domestically relevant research and knowledge, develop and maintain ongoing relationships with government actors, and advocate for reform from within a country.
- Funding programs and scholarships for tomorrow's leaders. Many of the successful examples in Section 4 [of her paper] were driven by the commitment of a small set of leaders or bureaucrats, at various levels of an education system, to learning and quality education. "To support future leaders today, there are promising examples from within and beyond the education sector to learn from" (p. 21).

We would add that in almost every country there are already reformist elements in particular branches of Ministries, even in Ministries that do not seem particularly dynamic. But they may not be the ones that are often offered up by bureaucratic processes as counterparts to donor agencies or foreign semi-academic or academic implementers. Sometimes these reformists are found in what Levy (2022) calls "islands of excellence" even in countries that are fairly chaotic and personalist (a "competitive personalist" political settlement in his wording). Supporting these agents of change can be fruitful.

As a last note, it is important to admit that working in this manner is difficult for large, official, development agencies. Development agencies like to work with plans and what Rondinelli (1983) critically called "blueprints" and identified as a source of failure. In that sense, these agencies can be an obstacle to reform. There are things that those interested in change can do to "de-risk" these sorts of activities for the development agencies. For one thing, reform advice is not that expensive (though it can get a bit expensive—though not as expensive as at-scale field interventions—if it is strongly paired with field-level pilot projects that instantiate what happens when purpose is harnessed). For another, it is possible to do things incrementally and based on stepwise success. This requires flexibility on the part of the implementers who use the agencies' funds. One can also use innovations in the manner in which such agencies contract with implementers (e.g., USAID's "cooperative agreements"). One can hope they are listening, and one can try to keep talking to them.

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