THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EDUCATION REFORMS IN PERU 1995-2020

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**THE STUDY**

**Aim:** Understand the political dynamics behind the establishment and development of the learning policy agenda in Peru (1995-2020)

**Questions:**

- **When** was the learning agenda established, and **how was it sustained over time**?
- **How has this agenda been understood** and what policy **priorities** it has it translated into?
- How has the **movement towards key aims** taken place?
- How have such **aims changed** over time?
- What **role have different political actors played** in shaping, supporting and contesting the learning agenda?

**Focus:** curriculum, teaching and assessment policies

**Methodology:** qualitative design based on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and documentary analysis to map policy developments and political dynamics
APPROACH

• RISE PET studies:
  - Understanding reforms through the lens of political settlements, how they shape different countries’ commitment to certain courses of action and the institutional arrangements they give rise to (Levy 2014)
  - Considering the role of key stakeholders (institutional, partisan, individual) in shaping agendas and settlements

• The political economy of reform in weak states:
  - While in the Global South ‘formal institutions are not uniformly weak’ there are vast differences in the enforcement and stability of rules that make settlements and binding agreements possible
  - Institutions and rules should be treated as a variable, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption. (Levitsky)
    
    [O’Donnell spoke about “the un-rule of law in Latin America” - we could speak more broadly of the un-rule of rules]

  - How to understand the political economy of learning reforms in unstable contexts with weak states and institutions that may hinder the formation of settlements?
THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

• Broad dominant informal ‘neoliberal’ regime: focus on macro-economic stability; primary export-led growth; averse to regulation, redistribution/state spending and institutional reform

• Institutional weakness limits binding agreements, settlements, and the formation of policy agendas in education and beyond

• We live in a kind of “colloidal Republic” in which the state ‘is like an emulsion that never reaches solidity’, a country in a state of constant but ‘moderate anarchy’, ‘a state of disorder that is only controlled at times’. (Cotler / McEvoy 2021)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOVERNMENTS AND MINISTERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forced stability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>President: Fujimori / 4 ministers</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High instability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidents: Paniagua, Toledo / 5 Ministers</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td><strong>Relative stability</strong></td>
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<td>President: García / 2 Ministers</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td><strong>Extreme instability</strong></td>
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<td>President: Humala / 2 Ministers</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>Presidents 4 / 8 Ministers</td>
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- 20 Education Ministers in 25 years (23 in 26 years if we continue to 2022)

- 6 presidents charged with corruption: one under life imprisonment (Fujimori); one awaiting extradition; one who took his own life as prosecutors entered his home to arrest him; one under house arrest; two facing trial under restricted liberties; + current president under investigation
MAIN POLICY ORIENTATIONS

• 1990s – Increasingly authoritarian and corrupt regime. Structural adjustment reforms. Strong influence of international agencies in education. Beginning of a proto-technocracia and learning policy agenda. Strong emphasis on transforming classroom practice; policy focus on remedial teacher training, curriculum reform, infrastructure and assessment.

• 2000-6 – Return to democracy + marked break with policies of prior period. Focus on governance reforms (decentralization, participatory decision-making). Awareness of need for teacher career reform but with little advancement. Evidence of educational crisis through PISA results.

• 2006-11 – Learning agenda re-established. Renewed presence of international agencies (WB). Key shift towards learning as test results agenda. Partial teacher career reform.

• 2011-16 – Comprehensive reforms: meritocratic teaching career, governance, curriculum. Emphasis on pedagogic practice as well as test results. Large-scale programmes to bring about pedagogic change and implement curriculum.

• 2016-today – Extreme instability and progressive dismantling of reforms through influence of specific interests (teacher unions, conservative parents, private education investors)
### SOME OUTCOMES OF THE PERIOD

#### POSITIVE

- Marked improvement in progression indicators (completion, repetition, overage); and enrollments in secondary and early years
- Marked improvement in national and international test results (especially from 2009) in context of enrollment expansion
  - But starting from a very low position (one of the lowest in LAC)
- Learning at the center of reforms and educators’ minds
- Meritocratic teaching career
- Consolidated national curriculum
- Established learning assessment system that serves to align policies towards clear goal

#### CONCERNING

- Persistence and deepening of inequalities: urban/rural but especially socio-economic segregation
- High learning poverty (around 50% of 10-year-olds cannot comprehend a simple text - 70% post-covid)
- Poor classroom practice: narrow and shallow curriculum; poor opportunities for complex and critical thinking, reflection, interaction – epistemic injustice
- Hollowing out of curriculum content through focus on ill-defined and implemented notions of ‘competencies’ and learner-centered pedagogies
- Partial teacher reform: meritocracy but without consistent pre or in-service training and supervision; continuous changes in strategies for supporting teaching improvement
- Reductionist equation of learning with test results may work against focus on important changes in school practice
Reforms, especially teachers and curriculum, have followed a very discontinuous path: agendas are set at one point, abandoned, and later taken on again but in a different form, patched together, often losing crucial elements.

More than political contestation, agendas have been affected by broader political instability, institutional weakness and, increasingly, corruption – not specific to education reforms.

There has been a positive movement from a highly idiosyncratic/personalistic model of policy making – where individual ministers/officials redefined policies and priorities at whim – to more technocratic, rationalistic, model of policy making.

Reforms have been sustained through the action of technocrats and with much influence/aid/support from external actors – international agencies, local researchers and think tanks – and tied together through instruments such as results-based budgeting (associated with testing).

Although this has brought positive changes, is has led to a kind of reductionist ‘technocratic settlement’ around the idea that learning and quality are simply equivalent to improved test results in a couple of curricular areas.
Technocracies often talk to themselves, but can be dismissive of other views and interests - e.g. those of educational specialists and teachers demanding more coherent pre and in service teacher training, or other costly programs to bring about change.

They often pay little attention to the political settlements that may be necessary for more long-lasting reforms (e.g. the views and interests of teachers).

The golden era of technocratic policy making seems to have ended in 2020, when Congress managed to oust then education minister Jaime Saavedra, beginning the progressive dismantling of teaching, curriculum and other policies.

Progress has been made in what can be described as first order reforms, oriented to improving service delivery, but not in second order reforms seeking more profound changes in pedagogy, school practice and organization – in ‘the ‘craft’ involved in the interpersonal activity of teaching and learning’ (Hossain & Hickey, 2019, p. 10).
GOING FORWARD

• Education reforms need to be linked to broader/more fundamental institutional reforms to help sustain them
• Strategies for generating binding agreements and settlements in weak/unstable political contexts
  • Public debate, communication, openness to existing institutions such as the National Council for Education
• Going beyond simple/reductionist/technocratic focus on learning as results
  • Greater focus on the ‘craft’ and aims of learning, on changing the pedagogical core, beyond basic skills – which requires resources.