

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)

GOVERNMENTS AND MINISTERS

1995	2000	2006	2011	2016
Forced stability	High instability	Relative stability	Relative stability	Extreme instability
President: Fujimori / 4 ministers	Presidents: Paniagua, Toledo / 5 Ministers	President: García / 2 Ministers	President: Humala / 2 Ministers	Presidents 4 / 8 Ministers

- 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-technocracy 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 10year 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

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REFORMS

- 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, it 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.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REFORMS

- **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.