

Research Reports

The Impact of the Asian Development Bank on Educational Policy Formation in Kazakhstan

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This study explores the impact of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on educational policy-making in Kazakhstan. Since 1995 the ADB has become a leading development agency in Kazakhstan's post-socialist transformation, providing educational sector support and \$65 million in loans for educational restructuring. My study is a part of a doctoral dissertation that examines the discourses and practices of two funding organizations in Kazakhstan, the ADB and Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, with a focus on the policy implications of providing external assistance to the country's education sector.

Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's educational system has faced the challenges of redefining its curriculum, organization, and how it governs schools (DeYoung and Suzhikova 1997). At the same time, the country's public expenditure on education as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) declined by more than half — from 6.8% in 1990 to 2.9% of a much smaller GDP in 1994 (ADB 2002b: 5). In this transition period, development agencies have become essential to providing funding for educational reform. For example, in 1998-1999, Kazakhstan's education sector received \$36.6 million in grants and \$27.5 million in loans (ADB 2002a: 19). Although external agencies have become an important source of funding and educational innovation in Kazakhstan, their role in the country's educational development has received scant scholarly attention.

Many developing countries depend on external agencies for assistance in areas ranging from overall educational policy and planning to major reform efforts at various levels of education (Spaulding 1981). Yet, research on the role and impact of external assistance in the educational development of recipient countries has not been proportionate to the magnitude and importance of educational aid in

the developing world. There is a need to understand the effect of development assistance on education decision-making and agenda-setting in recipient countries (Samoff 1999), given the multiple pathways through which agencies influence educational policy formation in the process of giving aid. Past aid modalities that have received extensive criticisms include the attitudinal domain in agency-recipient relationship. In particular, agencies' tend to construe policy dialogue as persuasion (McGinn 1997), display insufficient regard for recipients' formulation of priorities, and devalue local knowledge. In general, policy dialogue is deemed successful when it moves in the direction already favored by the recipients (Cassen 1996), yet, as Samoff maintained, in the aid process "there may be a great deal of talking, but there seems to be a lot less listening, and very little hearing" (Samoff 1999: 264). Other criticisms of the aid process include development agencies' educational policy frameworks that ignore context-bound conditions and histories (Torres 2002), recommendations that are constrained by insufficient empirical support (Dore 1994), excessive generalization from the data, and a use of a limited model of "education" (McGinn 1997; Samoff 1999). Samoff (1999) asserted that agency-generated priorities restrict policy dialogue, engendering recipient countries' dependence on external analytical constructs. Such criticisms point to an incongruence between development agencies' stated objectives and their practices, as well as agencies' limited organizational learning from past mistakes (Cahn 1993; Forss et al. 1999; Samoff 1999, 2004; Tilak 2002).

Given these critiques, development agencies have become increasingly concerned about "how they make use of their own existing knowledge and how they learn to develop better policies and practices" (King and McGrath 2004: 29). In their

discussion of knowledge-based aid, McGrath and King (2004) contend that a new aid paradigm is emerging. This paradigm has engendered a shift in agency discourse about knowledge management and learning, and a return to language on partnership, ownership, and capacity-building in recipient countries. Given the past power asymmetries and emerging aid modalities, this study enhances our understanding of development rhetoric and reality in an emerging region of development cooperation.

The study was guided by Argyris and Schon's (1974) theoretical framework of organizational learning, according to which espoused theories (discourses) and theories-in-use (actions) within organizations are analyzed for the purposes of organizational change and improved professional practice. Incongruence between discourse and practices potentially leads to a professional practice that produces unintended outcomes and repeated mistakes, or to the continued existence of inadequate theoretical perspectives in organizations. In the context of development agencies, failure of aid-funded projects has often been attributed to this discrepancy between agencies' stated development objectives and their actual practices (Cahn 1993; Hurst 1981).

The study draws on document analysis and interviews with the ADB's staff and Kazakhstan's education ministry officials, conducted in Kazakhstan using the country's two official languages (Kazakh and Russian), as well as in English. Data collection and analysis for this study were conducted in two stages. The initial data collection and analysis took place between 1998 and 2000, during which time I interviewed more than 20 individuals involved in the ADB's educational lending in Kazakhstan. The second stage of data collection occurred in 2003, when the ADB's first official evaluations of its educational lending in Kazakhstan were completed. Document analysis examined the official documents of the ADB and Ministry of Education (MOE), such as agency mission reports and memos, minutes of meetings, correspondence, the education sector study, as well as the Government of Kazakhstan's decrees, guidelines, and policies pertaining to education. Kazakhstan's national educational policies were examined to gauge the extent to which they were similar to policies identified in the ADB's education sector analysis. According to McNeely (1995: 485), an "examination of national educational policies in relation to those of international organizations can help clarify this relationship between state

educational principles and the international system." Interviews were conducted with senior education officials and former Ministers of Education, local project personnel, local and international consultants, department heads at MOE, heads of national training and research institutes, and staff at the Ministry of Finance's unit on foreign aid coordination. Further, I conducted over 20 additional interviews with Kazakhstan's education professionals involved in development work with other agencies (e.g., Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan) to gauge local conceptions of aid and educational development. ADB officials interviewed for this study were permanently based in the ADB headquarters in Manila, Philippines and visited Kazakhstan on business trips for the Bank.

Although the present inquiry was qualitative and exploratory, some parameters were set to begin the inquiry. Semi-structured interviews that lasted between 40 and 90 minutes focused on how ADB officials and the recipients constructed the notions of development, reform, external assistance, and education. In particular, I attempted to understand the ADB's and aid recipients' educational policy frameworks, including discourses about the nature of educational process and educational change; the role of knowledge, learning, achievement, and schooling in society; values deemed important in the school system (e.g., equity, choice, local vs. central governance); the role of different actors (teachers, students, administrators, and the central government) in the educational process, and the role of foreign aid to education. Further, the interviews were aimed at understanding how the ADB staff construed the aid process, including the extent and nature of recipient involvement in the ADB-funded projects and the ADB's perceptions about the local knowledge (e.g., their understanding of aid recipients' formulation of educational priorities).

My access to actual agency-recipient negotiations and interactions was limited, as such negotiations rarely took place at the time of data collection. The analysis, therefore, was based on official and personal accounts of what took place, an approach that has some limitations. For example, it is difficult to identify accurately an organization's theories-in-use (assumptions that underlie agency practices) unless the individuals whose theories-in-use are examined are involved in the analysis through a deliberate self-reflection with the help of instruments intended to identify those theories-in-use. Thus, the validity of the theories-in-use I identified is more suspect than it would have been if

observations of agency-recipient negotiations and interactions had been possible. As a standard validity check in analyzing the data, I looked for negative cases and counterarguments that would refute my conclusions. Further, as study participants representing Kazakhstan requested that the tape-recorder be turned off, personal accounts quoted in the study are largely a reconstruction of notes taken during or after the interviews.

Results and Analysis

After analyzing the interview data and official documents, I examined the ADB's official evaluations of its educational lending and technical assistance in Kazakhstan, including evaluation of its technical assistance grants (ADB 2002a) and the first education loan to Kazakhstan (ADB 2002b). The objective was to assess whether and how the ADB's conceptions regarding development cooperation and circumstances, as well as issues raised during the initial data collection, had changed, given the cumulative, delayed nature of learning.

The study findings suggest that new aid modalities have not replaced traditional notions of knowledge transfer in the context of the ADB's educational lending to Kazakhstan. Educational policy dialogue in Kazakhstan was constrained by a sector study commissioned by the Asian Development Bank and conducted by UNESCO consultants with little local participation. Agency-driven sector studies do little to develop national capacity, yet continue to entrench recipients' dependence on external knowledge. Samoff (1999: 251) asserted that education sector studies, which development agencies commission to "inform, rationalize, and justify their assistance programs," are rarely based on systematic research, often represent a snapshot of the education system, and are fraught with risks of methodological limitations which are rarely addressed in these documents.

The ADB promoted an educational policy framework in Kazakhstan that resonates with educational agendas of other development agencies such as the World Bank. In its educational policies, the ADB emphasized an economic analysis of education and quantitative methods of measuring the success of a policy, the central role of basic versus higher education in economic growth, privatization in education, sector-wide educational financing, and use of a top-down model of educational change, with insufficient attention to the local context. Further,

the ADB viewed policy dialogue as persuasion, and the Bank officials influenced policy discussions through cautions, predictions, recommendations, and empirical evidence from other countries' educational experiences, despite the ADB's assertions that its main objective was to "support the government's reform agenda" (ADB 2002a: 3). These findings are consistent with King and McGrath's (2004: 30) contention that a tension exists between the new language of knowledge in agencies and "a sense that old asymmetries of power remain largely in place."

An examination of development agencies' operations in developing countries remains imperative, as identifying, analyzing, and correcting discrepancies between goals and outcomes (Hurst 1981) are but a normal part of development. Such analysis is also a step towards "a genuine repositioning of power balance between Northern agencies and Southern partners" (King and McGrath 2004: 197).

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Georgian Connections of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911

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The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) quickly transformed itself from a domestic phenomenon into a symbol of the universal struggle of all peoples for freedom and justice. Internationalists from different countries arrived in Tabriz and Rasht to give everything, even going so far as to sacrifice their lives, for the victory of constitutionalist ideas — just as if they were fighting for their own motherland and their own rights. In 1910 Tria (Vlasa Mgeladze), a well-known Georgian revolutionary and participant in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, reported on the activities of the Caucasian internationalists operating in Iran, that the Persians, Georgians, Armenians, and Jews fought together under the same revolutionary flag (Tria 1911: 332).

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution has left its indelible trace in the history of political organizations and the development of political life of

neighboring Transcaucasia. It found genuine support in both political and popular thought in Georgia and attracted Georgian society's lively and enduring attention. The Tbilisi and Batumi Social Democrat Committees, closely following the development of the Constitutional movement in Iran, became active participants in the movement from the beginning of the resistance in Tabriz. The first large group of Georgian internationalists arrived in Tabriz soon after Tabriz became a new center of organized constitutional resistance (Chipashvili 1983: 9). Their numbers grew gradually, and they soon constituted one of the most effective and important military corps among the revolutionary forces.

The subject of my current research project is the Georgian facet of Caucasian participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Present-day researchers as well as contemporaries have recognized Caucasian ties to the Iranian