Globalisation Theories and Their Effect on Education

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Abstract

Globalisation is a relatively new concept in social sciences, especially in educational research and there is no agreement on its essence. The article presents three stances within globalisation theory – the hyperglobalist , the sceptical and the transformational, which reflect disputes concerning new global trends. The discussion highlights social, economic and political aspects globalization theory deals with. The article focuses on the effects of globalisation over education and the demands it has introduced to the field. Historically education played vital role in the formation of nation states and national identity. However, there is strong support to the assumption that globalisation poses a threat to small nations and ensures the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture over the others. The article argues that globalisation, state and education are closely linked notions and if any of the components lacks, often it is difficult to have a thorough understanding of each of them. And in spite of some stances indicating to the demise of the nation states and the national education systems, the argument is developed that in the global era the role and meaning of each of them have intensified. Though the process of globalisation has brought along policies full of contradictions, the transformationalist stance suggests that positive and balanced approach be employed to react to global changes.

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Introduction

Globalisation is a relatively new concept in social sciences (Delanty, 2000), especially in educational research (Green, 1999), and though it permeates all fields of socio-economic, political and cultural life, there is no agreement about the nature of the phenomenon, and the definitions may vary from person to person depending on their worldview. This article will present three major stances in globalisation theory: the hyperglobalist, the skeptical and the transformational. These approaches to global tendencies will form the framework for the discussion about globalisation and its effects on education. In accordance with the transformationalist view it can be suggested that "we now all live in one world" (Giddens, 1999, p.7) and this interconnectedness can positively, as well as negatively affect political, cultural and socio-economic spheres.

The Advent of Globalisation

Globalisation tendencies have been determined by many factors. Its theory is underpinned by the dichotomy of time and space and how the change of these dimensions affect modern world (Green, 1997). Money, international communication and trade, intercultural relations, environmental issues, and global security and democracy are socio-economic, political and cultural aspects globalisation theory deals with (Held, 2004 (a)). Economic factors are often listed first and as Green (1999, p.56) argues "economic globalisation theory is on the safest ground." Trade and exchange of goods and services between the nations promote 'unified global economy' (Waks, 2006, p.413). However, it is a mistake to assume that only economic issues, though extremely important, determine the nature of globalisation (Giddens, 1999).

Technological development has made transnational connection easily accessible. The transmission of the first message by electric telegraph in the nineteenth century by Samuel Morse gave start to a new world history (Giddens, 1999). Open and easy communication between nations has created grounds for 'cultural homogenization' developing 'a single global society' (Waks, 2006, p.413). This interconnectedness has caused re-norming and re-shaping political agendas of states across the world as they have to respond to 'global politics' (Held, 2004 (b), p.364). Political events do not carry local character any more. Thus, whether

globalisation is a 'cultural paradox' (Sahlberg, 2006, p.262) or a natural phenomenon brought along by modern times, it is underpinned by political, economic, technological and socio-cultural factors (Cheng, 2004; Green, 1997; Green, 1999; Held, 2004 (a); Tikly, 2001; Waks, 2006).

Globalisation, the State and Education

The concepts of globalisation, nation state and education are closely intertwined. As has been mentioned globalisation has brought along total rethinking of political and social structures, economic relations and cultural values. This has been taking place within a context of state transformation. The process needs to be observed carefully in order to promote the correct understanding of globalisation and its effects over the nation states (Waks, 2006).

National education systems played an important role in the formation of modern nation states of Europe (Green, 1997). The history of statehood begins with absolute state when power was possessed by 'elites' at the highest levels of the social structure. The absolute state was replaced by the liberal state "as commoners involved in commerce acquired greater social power" (Waks, 2006, p.409). That is when absolutism yielded its dominance which created grounds for the formation of a new type of a nation state "legitimated by the people or the nation" (Green, 1997, p.131). However, it was in the era of European absolutism when national education systems first came to existence (ibid). The next stage in the state transformation was a shift to liberal-democratic state when market came into play. And finally, the twentieth century witnessed the struggle between welfare and neo-liberal states. The former proved to be expensive and could not provide answers to global challenges. Through neo-liberal policies the states have tried to respond to problems posed by globalisation. "In a world based upon active communication, hard power – power that comes only from the top-down – loses its edge" (Giddens, 1999, p.72). Re-thinking values and re-shaping national consciousness, wider democratization and devolution of power and authority have been recognized as a salvation. However, as Giddens (ibid) states even democracy needs more democratization in modern times.

Though what has been said about state transformation depicts the history of European nation states, the historical role of education systems

of other nations is nonetheless important. However, it is essential to look at the development of European states as later the article will present one of the arguments that globalisation is nothing but the dominance of European culture. Besides, under the conditions of global interconnectedness modern states have developed more and more similar policy agendas where education has been assigned an important role.

What can be said is that globalisation brings along re-shaping and re-thinking of values, re-modernisation of traditions and attitudes. It stages tragicomedy where education has to play the main part. "If the major issue is to change the consciousness of people, then education has heavy burden, because people often become what they are taught that they are" (Papastephanou, 2005, p.548).

Globalisation Theories

The perception of globalisation largely depends on the personal stance and greatly determines how the phenomenon is defined. Waks (2003) develops the argument that commentators can be grouped according to their position for and against globalisation. However, the division is far more complicated as even among the proponents of globalisation there is a variety of opinions in terms of evaluation. Still three main stances can be distinguished theorising globalisation (Held et al., 1999).

The hyperglobalist approach presents the stance in the globalisation theory which claims that the world has entered a 'truly global age' legalising the dominance of 'global capitalism' (Tikly, 2001, p.153). The logic of hyperglobalist stance is underpinned by 'neo-liberal agenda' (Held, 2004 (a), p.4) which views globalisation 'in terms of open market' (Waks, 2003, p.384).

The advent of market principles causes re-interpretation of political, socio-economic and cultural issues, the restructuring of the relationship between the state and an individual, and introduces new values. However, a global market and free trade poses a threat to the national economy and puts an end to the nation state 'as the primary unit of political organisation' (Green, 1997, p.130). 'Liberal progressives' also support the idea of economic liberalization, but admit the fact that it can be a double-edged sword unless special attention is paid to equality issues

(Waks, 2003). The concern about equality is shared by Neo-marxists who see the salvation in 'trans-national alliances of labour and human rights activists' (Waks, 2003, p.385).

This approach to globalisation as Green (1997, p.130) clarifies would allow cultural hybridization through global interaction where there are no cultural distinction or physical borders between the nation states. In terms of education it would mean that the government gave up the control over the education system. However, literature on globalisation and education does not provide any evidence to support the assumption. "As governments lose control over various levers on their national economies and cede absolute sovereignty in foreign affairs and defense, they frequently turn to education and training as two areas where they do still maintain control" (Avis et al., 1996, cited in Green, 1999, p.56).

As it has already been mentioned, education played vital role in the formation of nation states. In spite of hyperglobalist claim, national education systems, along with nation states still retain their value and importance. As evidence shows national education system provides irreplaceable means for survival and building national identity. A vivid example of the claim is the appearance of over 100 nation states throughout the recent decades. After the Second World War in the postcolonial world the national education systems have formed the cornerstone for 'democratic transformation and national liberation from colonialism' (Tikly, 2001, p.153). Building up national identity and statehood is as much as important for former Soviet Republics and they have to rely on their education systems to pursue their goals. Thus, the claim that the state will loosen its control over education, or the nation state itself will become obsolete sounds like a wishful thinking.

The sceptical approach questions the effectiveness of trading blocs and views the issue through historic perspective (Tikly, 2001). Moreover, sceptics do not perceive globalisation as a novelty and do not observe any global changes. The world is just the same. And if the reference of world-wide trade is made, they consider that most of exchange takes place at a regional level rather than global. European Union, the Pacific Rim and other trading blocs can serve as examples (Giddens, 1999). The trade between the nations has centuries' history and in some respect sceptical

stance can have objective grounds.

Sceptics claim that "the logic of global capitalism has led to greater polarization between the "developed" and developing countries" (Tikly, 2001, p.153). Besides, though many of globalisation theories refer to the demise of the nation-state, sceptical stance argues that, paradoxically, globalisation extends the role of the state to confront modern dilemmas (ibid).

In terms of education, sceptics doubt that any meaningful globalisation has taken place. Though through policy borrowing national education systems tend to resemble each other, the argument lacks solid ground that national education systems do not exist any more, or the nation states gave up control over them.

Through globalisation theory there has been an attempt to re-conceptualise the role of the state in terms of education provision. "The new role has been described as involving a 'new orthodoxy' aimed at making nations more competitive within global economy" (Tikly, 2001, p.162). The idea is that taking into account the specificity of the context of 'new orthodoxy' will enable nation states to find their original approaches to global challenges. The process can be described as the shift from Keynesian welfare-state to post-welfare, neo-liberal state (Waks, 2006).

Neo-liberal discourse determined that many western states developed similar approach to education. Decentralisation of education became the main strategy to solve accumulated problems. By devolving the authority to the local bodies, the state sought to meet equality and quality demands. Besides, decisions taken closer to the context where they are to be realized can prove to be more effective and efficient (Welsh and McGinn, 1999).

Elements of neo-liberal educational policy are increased accountability, competition and standardisation (Clair and Belzer, 2007). Devolving authority to sub-national and local level gave start to the argument, mentioned earlier, that the nation state has lost its control over education. On the other hand, accountability issues keep educational authorities under the central state control. Competition is expected to increase quality of teaching and learning and will result in more diversification so that the issues of social exclusion are resolved and

consumer demands are satisfied. It is assumed that standardisation process will ensure high quality and enhance access to education. However, it can be argued that "the push towards standardisation can potentially reduce diversification" (ibid, p.484), and again equality will come under concern.

The transformational approach represents intermediary, more balanced stance towards globalisation. They do agree with the hyperglobalists about an intensification of 'global interconnectedness' and recognize the all-pervasive nature of globalisation process (Tikly, 2001). However, they doubt the novelty of the phenomenon and view it as 'an historically contingent process replete with contradictions' (Tikly, 2001, p.154). On the one hand it promotes economic, cultural and political integration, and on the other hand it causes stratification distancing 'First World' from 'Third World' (Taylor et al., 1997, p.62). Some nations, states and communities get full advantage by being part of the global world, whereas others become more and more disadvantaged.

Transformationalists explain the contradictions of globalisation by the inconsistency of 'global division of labour' in terms of centre-periphery relationship (Tikly, 2001, p.154). More and more individuals from transition or developing nations are represented in the 'core' of the global economy, whereas there is an increase in number of disadvantaged in the periphery of industrial states (Hoogvelt, 1997, cited in Tikly, 2001).

How transformational stance affects education can vividly be seen in its effort to address the issues of social stratification within the society as well as at international level (Tikly, 2001).

Policy borrowing and lending has become a common practice through global communication and interconnectedness between the nations. Globalisation "unifies national education policies by integrating them with the broader global trends" (Sahlberg, 2006, p.262). Commonality of the problems in the education systems determined the similarity of approaches and strategies.

One of the reasons for policy borrowing can be a political one. "Borrowing does not occur because reforms from elsewhere are better, but because the very act of borrowing has a salutary effect on domestic policy conflict" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006, p.471). The domestic conflict can be caused by change in political forces, changes in the government, or external

shock. The latter can be exemplified by the case of Germany, where PISA study showed that the achievement of German students was bellow-average and the fact gave rise to public scandal (ibid).

There can be one more, and perhaps mostly wide-spread reason for policy borrowing. It was already mentioned that globalisation causes stratification between developed and developing nations. Very often many transition countries depend on external aid and this creates the ground for policy borrowing without contestation of the reform initiative and policy agenda as to the compatibility to the local context. And in most cases, through the involvement of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, education policies are influenced by 'research and development in Anglo-Saxon countries' (Sahlberg, 2006, p.263). The efficiency and compatibility of the recommended policies can be judged according to the studies of the era of the Cold War Period, and the judgement can be generalized. "Regardless of circumstances, British and American experts almost always favoured the introduction of a decentralised system of educational administration, whereas Soviet and German Democratic Republic expert always recommended the introduction of polytechnical education in the countries they advised" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006, p.675).

The transformationalist stance shows a realistic approach to globalisation. It does not try to oppose the existence of global trends, but rather tries to face the dilemmas it poses. Thus It would be more practical if pragmatic approach is adopted as to how individual cultures and nations react to it. Cheng (2004) provides interesting theories how local and global can interact. His idea of viewing globalisation theory in terms of DNA provides an interesting approach to the global and local dilemma. "This theory places emphasis on identifying and transplanting the better key elements from the global knowledge to replace the existing weaker local components in local development" (ibid, p.13).

And Still What Is Globalisation?

The definition given bellow will summarise what has been said so far in this article about globalisation and will provide the framework for further reflection.

"Globalisation = the process whereby market exchange
relationships and multimedia telecommunications capabilities

spread from the core of economically and technologically developed nations to other regions of the world, facilitating the flow of goods, services, and people across national borders, this process being stimulated by, while in turn reinforcing, an image of the world as a unified whole and humanity, despite its cultural diversity and continuing differentiation, as a single global society, while also generating resistance and violent opposition from those excluded from this imagined global society." (Waks, 2006, p.414)

Thus, as the definition shows globalisation is about communication between the nations, cultures, different social, economic and political structures. Accordingly, it requires "reconfiguration of state, market and society and the reorganization of their roles, responsibilities and relations" (Rhoten, 2000, p.593).

The first emphasis in the definition is put on exchange of goods and services facilitated by technological development which made the trade relations easier and efficient through electronic money and trans-national communication (Giddens, 1999). The benefits are easy to see. What can be argued here is the fact that there are many countries and regions the world over which are not included in this digital world due to the lack of technological development. Besides, the promoted competition between the firms established in different nations creates 'the world of winners and losers' (Giddens, 1999).

In terms of education, technological aspect of globalisation can have positive effect on teaching and learning process. However, there is an assumption that it can also present a threat by making a teaching profession obsolete. But it can be argued that it should not prevent the development of interactive learning software as people will still "have to learn how to learn" (Green, 1997).

Cultural aspect is nonetheless disputable. Globalisation is frequently referred to as Westernisation and Americanisation (Giddens, 1999; Papastephanou, 2005; Sahlberg, 2006; Tikly, 2001). However, in some sense the argument rests on solid ground. Thus globalisation is defined as the dominance of single culture, namely Anglo-Saxon, over other cultures the world over and there is 'a lack of analogous influence of

non-western cultures on the western ones' (Papastephanou, 2005, p.541). This again raises the issue of compatibility of the borrowed western educational policy with the non-western context or vice versa.

Tikly (2001) extends the argument presenting the view that contemporary globalisation has brought crucial changes in the sense that while previous centuries witnessed various hegemonies of western states, modern world is solely influenced by the United States. Giddens (1999, p.15) partly agrees with the statement admitting that "many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalisation are American – Coca-Cola, McDonald's, CNN, IBM".

In terms of political effect of globalisation, it is often argued that the process does not presuppose the shift of power only from national to trans-national level. As Giddens (1999, p.13) claims, "globalisation not only pulls upwards, but also pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy". This has been ensured through neo-liberal policies gaining more and more popularity since 1980s and resulting in deregulation and devolution of power and authority from national to sub-national levels (Harvey, 2005). However, there are contradictions within neoliberal policy initiatives. Through the rhetoric of accountability, choice, competition and standardisation educational values are often ignored. Unfortunately it often creates grounds for social selection and social stratification (Ball, 2003).

In many theories of globalisation global and local are not viewed as opposing notions, but rather indispensible elements of globalisation. The interdependence of these two elements is often described as 'glocalisation' (Papastephanou, 2005). Bauman (1998, cited in Papastephanou, 2005, p.541) defines the process as the "world-wide redistribution of sovereignty, power, and freedom to act, which divides the world into the tourists of the planet and the vagabonds of regions, i.e. those that 'inhabit the globe' and others that are "chained to place'."

Conclusion

The discussion showed that globalisation is a difficult concept to perceive. There is a variety of attitudes and each of them is an attempt to define the phenomenon within its own framework. Globalisation is based on notions of time and space and a shift in the dimensions cause re-interpretation and re-structuring of the reality around us. It is essential to

distinguish between three stances within globalisation theory: the hyperglobalist, the sceptical and the transformational. Complete understanding of these approaches will work towards thorough realization of global trends. The article argues that national education systems have not wasted their historic role. On the contrary, in the era of global interconnectedness sustaining statehood and national identity has become more vulnerable and education has to play a special part. Thus focus should be made on the effects of globalisation over education. Globalisation, state and education are closely linked notions and if any of the components lacks, often it is difficult to have a thorough understanding of each of them. Accordingly, it is essential to realize that though the process of globalisation has brought along policies full of contradictions, the transformationalist approach suggests that positive and balanced approach be employed to react to global changes, which means consolidating local and global as they are indispensible elements of globalisation.

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