



## The Oxford Handbook of Education and Globalization

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### FRONT MATTER

## Preface

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## The Globalization-Education Nexus: Social Theory and Comparative Politics

This Handbook deals with education and globalization. Building on two disciplinary approaches, social theory and comparative politics, it aims to contribute to the conceptual clarification and empirical discussion of how the processes of globalization and education interact. Bringing the two notions together in the analysis is far from evident. The categories commonly mobilized to think about education have long been associated with the notion of the nation state, but by themselves are insufficient for an understanding of how globalization plays out in this particular field. The historical development of school education is indeed closely linked to state building (Tilly, 1990). It operated as a symbol and an institution for the rejection of premodern hierarchies and the construction of what many have learned to understand as “national societies” and democratic political systems. The ordinary meaning of notions such as “state” and “society” tend to remain shaped by this historical and institutional process: Countries are conceived of as societies and political systems; societies as governed by states; and states as the ultimate locus of public authority governing complex “political conflicts” (Schattschneider, 1975) and policymaking arenas dealing with the needs and problems of their citizens. Each national “society” is assumed to develop a bundle of domains (law, economy, education, etc.) and to (re)produce its own culture, its own language(s), and its own traditions. Comparative politics deals with interactions within political systems and focuses specifically on internal political structures, actors, and processes. It analyzes these interactions empirically by describing and explaining their variation across national, regional and local political systems. The notions of sovereignty and the state are at the heart of comparative politics as a discipline (Caramani, 2020).

In contrast, some social scientists have criticized this mode of description and analysis for its “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2000), that is, the well-anchored assumption that the nation state is the natural social and political unit of the modern world. Social theory responded to the critique. Some scholars started speaking of

p. xii “world society” (Luhmann, 1997; Meyer et al., 1997) while others argued for dropping ↪ the concept of society altogether (Urry, 2000). The notion of the sovereign nation state capable of governing autonomously the key domains of society came to be regarded as insufficiently sophisticated and in need of refinement by some scholars in international relations. Notions that had long been treated as equivalents have increasingly been distinguished: not only “nation state” and “society” but also “nation state,” “political authority,” and even “sovereignty.” Both social theory and comparative politics, the two key disciplines mobilized respectively in Part I and Part II of this Handbook, have grappled with these theoretical challenges in their own way. It could be argued that social theory concerned itself with the concept of society and its postnationalistic reconceptualization, while comparative politics rather focused on developing a more complex view on political authority and sovereignty by acknowledging new emerging policy arenas and self-organizing governance processes at work at multiple levels beyond and within the nation state (Hooghe & Marks, 2020). Nowadays, most scholars in the field of comparative politics support the idea that fundamental transformations in the form of governance have taken place and take diverging paths in different countries.

The critique of methodological nationalism proved particularly relevant for those scholars of social theory who, following Durkheim or Parsons, for example, still considered society as a normatively integrated national unit. Several social theorists have now broken away from this assumption. No one will deny that the economy constitutes a central domain of society, nor that it has become a global process, which states struggle to regulate. In the domains of education and education policy as well, it is not difficult to see that a number of structural and semantic evolutions have spread globally and tend to diffuse themselves across states. As historians and neoinstitutionalists had already shown in the 1970s, the expansion of (national) education itself is a global process: Within a few decades, education systems grew all over the world; all nations, rich or poor, from the north or the south, democratic or authoritarian, have somehow put in place an educational system. The observation of wide differences in the success, or even the shape, of such attempts and in the way school education is organized in different national or local contexts does not make it less of a global process. The opposite could actually be argued: Differences themselves can come to light and be observed only thanks to their being part of a global phenomenon. Through processes that remain debated (cultural isomorphism, capitalism, functional differentiation), education imposed itself upon all states across the globe. Observations of this kind have led social theory to dissociate the concept of society from the notion of the nation. A number of theories have been developed to describe a global society evolving across borders. Part I of this Handbook is dedicated to presenting, discussing, and comparing three such theories of globalization and their implications for our understanding of education and education policy.

p. xiii In contrast, the state as an actor and institution (Skocpol, 2013) is at the very heart of comparative politics. Comparative politics concerns itself with discussing complexities and variations across countries, in order to illuminate the persistence of political contestation and analyze the impact of global norms and ideas on local institutions and national education systems. Providing an account of the many ways in which the field of comparative politics has evolved in the last few decades is beyond what is possible in the ↪ context of this brief preface. One key development consisted in elaborating a more complex, less unified, and “transformationalist” view of the state by acknowledging the fragmentation and distribution of its functions among distinct instances and levels (Caramani, 2020; Held et al. 1999). Multilevel governance is a key concept intended to describe and analyze this distribution of functions across various arenas. Decentralization, especially of education, and federalization redistributed power and resources between levels of government and empowered territorially based actors (Gibson, 2004). Comparative historical analysis and historical institutionalism show how domestic conflicts shape the institutional framework within which globalized public policy reforms are then produced. These theoretical advances proved particularly useful in the field of education, where resources (law, money) often stay tightly coupled to the national level, while policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation have become increasingly distributed among both international organizations and subnational and local decision-makers (Almond et al., 2004). This means that similar policies are adopted and implemented in diverse ways across countries and even within countries. Many

chapters in Part II of this Handbook gravitate around this global constellation, whether they focus on global reforms and the ideas put forward by international organizations (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], World Bank, European Union), on evaluation processes (like Program for International Student Assessment [PISA], Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS], university rankings, etc.), or examine the ways in which nation states or local actors adopt, implement, or resist global ideas and reforms. Several chapters elaborate on the multilevel governance approach that presupposes a high level of variations across countries and regions of the world as far as the effects of globalization are concerned. Other chapters interrogate the globalization–education nexus from a perspective of international political economy.

## Structure of the Book

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The Handbook is divided into two main Parts that reflect two distinct disciplinary approaches to the relation between globalization and education: social theory and comparative politics. Together, these two approaches seek to provide a comprehensive overview of how globalization and education interact to result in distinct and varying outcomes across world regions.

Part I presents, discusses, and compares three major attempts to theorize the process of globalization and its relation to education: the neoinstitutionalist theorization of world culture (with John Meyer as an emblematic, though not unique, figure); the materialist and domination perspectives (well represented by Wallerstein's world system theory); and Luhmann's theory of world society. While highlighting their specific merits, key differences, and shared findings, we pay attention in particular to how each of these three branches of social theory accounts for the emergence, evolution, and problematic consequences of the globalization of education. The theoretical efforts involved in Part I of the Handbook are also intended to help gain some analytical distance from the often-emotional topic of globalization.

Section I draws on globalization understood as a cultural process (change) emphasizing culturally embedded ideational factors. Education and human activity more generally are considered as highly embedded in collective cultural patterns. In this paradigm, the dominant theory is the neoinstitutional approach typically associated with the theoretical work of John Meyer and his colleagues, as situated within new institutionalism in sociology, which defines modernity and globalization as a cultural rationalization relying on isomorphic processes. However, subsequent strands of research have developed that draw on anthropological studies of school and learning. These studies explore cultural variations in educational norms and practices, and employ distinctive theoretical constructs but draw heavily on research about cultural dynamics at the local, national, and global levels. This section also incorporates the contributions of historical new institutionalism, field theories, and new-institutionalist policy studies as a way to highlight the theoretical plurality involved in this field of study and to bring forth conceptions of globalization insisting on cultural complexity and fragmentation. Such a view of cultural globalization as plural, fragmented, and conflictual is also presented in the recent developments of the world culture theory looking at problematic consequences of globalization resulting from the crisis of the modern project of rationalization and the spread of illiberal contestations of the modern cultural order.

Section II builds on world system theory even if some of its chapters do not refer explicitly to Wallerstein's seminal work. What brings them together is the structuralist perspective they bring to the study of globalization in education, their focus on power relations and discursive and material domination, and their interest in democratic struggle and resistance in globalizing capitalist economies. They include post-Marxism and post-Fordism, Foucauldian socio-historical approaches to forms of power in modernity and late modernity, the Bourdieusian theory of social fields, and the political economy of education in advanced capitalist societies. This section looks in particular at how theories forged in the "structural" context of the

nation state and its core institutions (representative democracy, capitalist economy, Fordist organization of work, and the knowledge regime of science) may be extended to capture the reconfiguration of education's structural embeddedness and its distributional effects and to renew the critical perspective on education and inequalities.

Section III focuses on sociological systems theory. Systems theory has a long interdisciplinary history. Its early developments in sociology, most notably with the work of Talcott Parsons, could not avoid the trap of methodological nationalism and have been widely criticized for their functionalist orientation. In the context of this Handbook, we therefore choose to focus on the most recent developments of sociological systems theory and its most important figure, Niklas Luhmann. Breaking away from the two pitfalls of methodological nationalism and functionalism, Luhmann's sociology develops a theory of world society that contrasts with neoinstitutionalist and structuralist approaches: It does not start with culture, or with power, but rather with functional differentiation. Moreover, in sharp contrast with most existing approaches of functional differentiation (Durkheim's division of labor; Weber's spheres; Parsons' systems, Bourdieu's fields, etc.), Luhmann considers modern society as a genuine heterarchy of coevolving, hardly coordinated, global systems. Education appears as a global function system next to others, endlessly dealing with its turbulent and changing environment.

Part II of the Handbook analyzes the political and institutional factors that shape the adoption of global reforms at the national and local level of governance, emphasizing the role of different contexts in shaping policy outcomes. The chapters engage with the existing debates of globalization mainly in the field of public policy and comparative politics by analyzing contemporary education reforms in a multilevel governance perspective. They explore the social, political, and economic implications of globalization for national systems of education, their organizations, and institutions. Global education policies promoted by international actors and organizations are filtered through local contexts that mediate global processes within countries, regions, and local communities. In Part II, we focus on advancing our understanding of the complex system of economic and political relationships between the local and the global (Almond et al., 2004) that have direct and indirect implications for the policy and politics of education. Education is a policy field dominated by a constant struggle for resources, and power among actors, which creates the institutional framework within which globalized public policy is designed and implemented locally. We therefore need to simultaneously capture national developments and globalized education policies and norms.

Section IV contributes to mapping the historical development of international organizations onto the field of education. Many organizations, such as the OECD, have become leading advocates of education accountability worldwide, and others have been key actors in the development of the educational rights of children in Africa. The scope of their actions varies, such as their focus, which ranges from economic and evidence-based programs to more holistic and humanistic ones. The chapters interrogate the role of international organizations in setting the policy agenda, and how they are capable of informing education reforms worldwide. They also show the limitations of such process of shaping local agendas, by emphasizing variations in national and local responses.

Section V analyzes the national policy responses to reform agendas set by global actors. The institutions of the nation state are analyzed in order to understand how global policy convergence masks a high degree of differentiation of educational systems and processes at subnational levels of government. The nation state and domestic politics has been the predominant framework for analyzing education policy developments until recently. Does the concept of globalization undermine the analytical power of the state in education? This section focuses on the contemporary challenges to the relationship between education and domestic systems of policy advice and networks. How is the role of the state changing in the globalized policy community of education? Central to the chapters is an analysis of how globalization has transformed existing state power and institutions dealing with education. Instead of taking a benign view of the relationship between the global and

the national, the chapters shed light on the complexity of the challenges posed to education by global scripts and ideologies, and their variations across countries.

p. xvi Section VI zooms in on one specific dimension of globalization: the massification of education. The overall question is: Does convergence in conceptions of equality among secondary pupils, and more generally, of education policy globally eliminate national and local political contestation? The chapters investigate empirically with original data this question in a comparative perspective, with a special focus on secondary schooling and the reforms of massification and extension of access to secondary pupils. It emerges that no single model of access to mass education existed and that education inequality remains a highly diversified and contested notion and policy across countries. This section draws upon case studies mainly from European countries.

In Section VII, the focus shifts on the case of higher education policy, which is the most globalized of the education sectors. Although the chapters show that there has not been a fundamental destabilization of the nation state form, and that there is no reduction in the role of the state, normative globalization and cultural theories hold very strongly in this field of higher education reforms. We look not only at Europe but also at other emerging countries such as China and India which have been exposed to the influence of normative ideas.

In the final section, Section VIII, the book looks at the huge variations of the effects of globalized education policies in the Global South, with a focus on Latin America. Despite assertions that education policies are increasingly converging in a globalized world, Latin American countries vary widely in the resources they devote to education and the development of human capital, and in how global education policies are adopted and implemented. In addition, there is also important variation *within* countries in educational investment and policies. As in other developing regions, in Latin America the implications of globalization and integration into the world economy are diverse and mediated by local actors, structures, and processes.

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