



Education Policymaking in Serbia – What Grade Does it Get from Teachers, Counselors and Principals?

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Contribution

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Numerous educational reforms have been initiated in Serbia since the political changes in 2000. Their success has been debated, with stakeholders generally harboring negative feelings and opinions on the ways these reforms were undertaken (Vujačić et al., 2011), indicating that there may be more systematic problems with education policymaking, rather than with the content of reforms themselves. The aim of this study is to thoroughly examine the process of education policymaking in Serbia in order to provide policymakers and stakeholders in education with recommendations on how to minimize pitfalls and increase chances for success in future educational endeavors.

We framed the study in several ways. First, we wanted to utilize the education policy cycle heuristic (Anderson, 2003; Haddad, 1994; Porter, 1995; Smith and Larimer, 2009) to analyze formation, implementation and evaluation of three major education policies in Serbia: professional development of teachers, induction of school development plans, and inclusive education. Examining three reforms simultaneously would provide us with the possibility of identifying major characteristics, patterns and trends in Serbian policymaking itself, somewhat controlling for the specificities of any particular reform. Second, we wanted to pay attention to the educational change literature (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2004), which complement the technical education policy cycle heuristic. This would allow us to interpret our findings through the complex and nuanced contexts in which educational reforms play out. Third, having in mind the impact of the “street-level bureaucrats” on education policies (Lipsky, 1971), as well as the notion that a large part of education policymaking is a co-

constructed process between reformers and local implementers (Datnow et al., 1998), we wanted to examine education policymaking in Serbia from the eyes of teachers, counselors and principals. Their judgment of the positive and negative aspects of education policymaking would offer invaluable feedback to the education system on what processes need to be changed to ultimately improve the effectiveness and sustainability of education reforms.

Our specific research questions are the following:

- (1) What specific aspects of education policymaking, i.e., of education policy formation, implementation, and evaluation, as well as of the context in which reforms play out, are perceived as problematic or beneficial by teachers, principals and counselors in each of the three major educational reforms in Serbia?
- (2) What are, if any, main features, patterns and trends in Serbian education policymaking that emerge across all three reforms, regardless of reform content?
- (3) Do perceptions of these features differ across different stakeholders and different educational contexts (teacher vs. principal vs. counselor, rural vs. urban, size of school, working experience, etc)?
- (4) What are the most prominent suggestions for improvement of the process of education policymaking in Serbia?

Method

A master questionnaire was constructed by searching relevant theoretical educational policy and change literature for major indicators of (un)successful policymaking and operationalizing them. Master questionnaire wording was slightly adapted to each of the three sub-samples in our study (teachers, counselors and principals) and to each of the three reforms. The questionnaire was piloted for clarity and comprehension on a small sample (around 20) of participants. About a third of each sub-sample will respond to the questionnaire related to professional development of teachers, a third to the questionnaire related to creation of school development plan, and a third to the questionnaire related to inclusive education.

The data is currently being collected from a nationally representative sample of schools from Serbia that had previously been selected by TIMSS 2011 for participation in that study. The sample consists of all 1st grade (ISCED 1) and 5th grade (ISCED 2) teachers, as well as all counselors and principals, from 150 TIMSS schools. It is estimated that around 1,000 individuals will respond to the questionnaires.

Collected data will be analyzed using quantitative methodology, including, but not limited to, descriptive statistics and inferential multivariate statistical analysis.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that this research will identify the most problematic and most well-executed aspects of education policymaking in Serbia as seen through the eyes of major implementers of education policies – teachers, counselors, and principals. It is anticipated that our study will discover common features and patterns in education policymaking in Serbia that are of systematic nature, unrelated to content of reforms. This will inform future formation, implementation and evaluation of educational reforms in Serbia. Better policymaking would mean that educational reforms would have a greater chance of being effective and sustainable, which would improve a variety of educational outcomes of Serbian children.

This study is additionally relevant for other countries in the region, as it provides them with general instrument to analyze their own education policymaking, illuminates ways for the improvement of their own education systems due to the similarities with the Serbian one, and increases still young and emerging body of knowledge in education policy in the region. Finally, betterment of education policymaking in Serbia would indicate that Serbia's aspirations to join European Union go beyond superficial adoption of laws and policies.

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