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Why Do Policy Leaders Adopt Global Education Reforms? A Political Analysis of SBM Reform Adoption in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: This paper presents a political analysis of school-based management reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). School-based management (SBM), based on the principle of school autonomy and community participation, is a school governance system introduced in many parts of the world, including post-conflict nations. Such a phenomenon seems to follow the pattern predicted by the theories of institutional isomorphism. According to the institutionalists in comparative education, a country adopts global education reforms so as to enhance nation-building and nation-state legitimacy within the international community (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). However, a closer look at the SBM reform adoption process in BiH reveals that, after legislating the global reform, policy leaders appear to have willfully derailed its implementation. Careful analysis of their legitimacy contexts suggests that BiH leaders may have adopted the internationally-driven reform policy primarily for the purpose of enhancing their precarious domestic legitimacy. Such behavior can be explained by Weiler's (1983; 1990) political utility theory, which has not yet been sufficiently incorporated into the analysis of educational reform transfer. The study posits that policy leaders in reform-borrowing countries still play a crucial role in shaping

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education systems, even in the globalized world that is arguably driving these systems to converge. It is then important for comparative and international education scholars, as well as international donors, to critically assess the intent, practices and behaviors of the political leaders who accept global reforms.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; decentralization; education reform; institutional isomorphism; political utility theory; politics of education; post-conflict nations.

¿Por qué los dirigentes políticos adopten reformas educativas globales? Un análisis político de la adopción "Administración Basada en la Escuela" después del conflicto de Bosnia y Herzegovina.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta un análisis político de la reforma de la Administración Basada en la Escuela, en Bosnia y Herzegovina (ByH). La Administración Basada en la Escuela (*SBM* por sus siglas en inglés), basado en el principio de autonomía de los centros y la participación de la comunidad, es un sistema de gestión escolar introducido en muchas partes del mundo, incluidos países en las áreas de post-conflicto. Este fenómeno parece seguir el patrón predicho por la teoría de isomorfismo institucional. Según los institucionalistas en el campo de la educación comparada, un país adopta las reformas educativas globales con el fin de mejorar la construcción de la nación y la legitimidad del Estado-nación en la comunidad internacional (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, y Ramírez, 1997; Ramírez y Boli, 1987). Sin embargo, una mirada más de cerca el proceso de adopción de la reforma de SBM en Bosnia y Herzegovina revela que, después de legislar la reforma global, los líderes políticos parecen haber descarrilado voluntariamente su aplicación. Un análisis cuidadoso de los contextos de legitimidad sugiere que los líderes de Bosnia y Herzegovina pueden haber adoptado la política de reforma internacional impulsada principalmente con el propósito de mejorar su legitimidad interna precaria. Este comportamiento se explica por la teoría de la utilidad política de Weiler (1983, 1990), que aún no se ha incorporado suficientemente en el análisis de la transferencia de reformas educativas. Este trabajo postula que los líderes políticos de países que adoptan reformas todavía juegan un papel crucial en la formación de los sistemas educativos, incluso en el mundo globalizado que posiblemente esta conduciendo estos sistemas a converger. Es entonces importante que los especialistas en educación comparada e internacional, así como los donantes internacionales, evalúen críticamente las intenciones, prácticas y comportamientos de los líderes políticos que acepten las reformas globales.

Palabras clave: Bosnia y Herzegovina; descentralización; reforma de la educación; isomorfismo institucional; teoría de la utilidad política; política de la educación; países post-conflicto.

Por que os líderes políticos adotam reformas educacionais globais? A análise política da adoção "Administração Baseada na Escola" após o conflito na Bósnia e Herzegovina.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma análise política da reforma da gestão da escola na Bósnia e Herzegovina (BIH). A "Administração Baseada na Escola" (SBM por sua sigla em Inglês), baseada no princípio da autonomia institucional e participação da comunidade, e um sistema de gestão escolar introduzida em muitas partes do mundo, incluindo os países nas áreas de pós -conflito. Esse fenômeno parece seguir o padrão previsto pela teoria do isomorfismo institucional. De acordo com os institucionalistas no campo da educação comparada, um país adota reformas educacionais globais, a fim de melhorar a construção da nação e a legitimidade do Estado-nação na comunidade internacional (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, e Ramirez, 1997 , Ramirez e Boli, 1987). No entanto, um olhar mais atento ao processo de aprovação da reforma SBM na Bósnia e Herzegovina, revela que depois de legislar reforma abrangente, os líderes políticos parecem ter descarrilado voluntariamente a sua aplicação. Uma análise cuidadosa dos contextos de legitimidade sugere que os líderes da Bósnia-Herzegovina podem ter adotado a reforma política internacional impulsionado principalmente com o objetivo de melhorar a sua precária legitimidade doméstica. Isto é explicado pela teoria da utilidade política de Weiler (1983, 1990), que não tem sido suficientemente incorporadas na análise da transferência de reformas educacionais. Este artigo argumenta que os líderes políticos dos países que adotam reformas continuam a desempenhar um papel crucial na formação de sistemas de ensino, mesmo em um mundo globalizado, que está impulsionando a convergência dos sistemas. Portanto, é importante que os especialistas em educação comparada e as agencias internacionais de financiamento, avaliem criticamente as intenções, práticas e os comportamentos dos líderes políticos que aceitam as reformas globais.

Palavras-chave: Bósnia e Herzegovina; descentralização; reforma da educação; isomorfismo institucional; teoria da utilidade política; política de educação; países pós-conflito.

Introduction

Educational reforms around the world have often been characterized as isomorphic (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). In particular, educational reforms in post-conflict nations, such as Kosovo, Timor-Leste, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), are expected to closely follow global trends because the international organizations that are heavily involved in these nations' institution building often guide or pressure the new governments into conforming with global reform models. In this way, education governance reforms in these nations are expected to look similar. A closer look at the reform implementation in BiH, however, reveals resistance to it by the very authorities who adopted the reform. This indicates a need to pay closer attention to the practices and behaviors of national policy leaders when they adopt the reforms advocated by international organizations (these reforms are hereafter referred to as "global reforms"). Such an inquiry may illuminate the dimensions of reform adoption and transfer that isomorphic theories do not fully explain.

Drawing upon Hans N. Weiler's (1983; 1990) political utility theory, this paper offers a political analysis of the school-based management (SBM) reform adoption in BiH by focusing on the national authorities' decision to accept the reform, and their practices and behaviors with regard to its implementation. Despite their agreement with the SBM reform, as signified by the ratification of the national Framework Law on education that introduced decentralized school governance, the ruling political parties exhibited reluctance to implement the reform. The political leaders' reluctance or resistance is illustrated by delaying the adoption of by-laws and by retaining ministry control in school governance. Considering the public's general disapproval of their governments, such leadership behavior can be explained by political utility theory. The theory posits that a national authority adopts decentralization in order to increase their legitimacy, rather than to actually redistribute power (Weiler, 1983; 1990). It is possible to argue that BiH political leaders presented themselves as reformers in tune with "European global standards," thereby responding to the public's aspiration for European integration, while in reality preserving the status quo as much as possible during the reform implementation stage. By offering a political analysis of the SBM reform in BiH, this paper intends to contribute to a better understanding of educational reform adoption in the globalized world. At the end of the paper, implications for studies on global education transfer and international engagement in education assistance are discussed.

Context

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a divided society. During the sixth and seventh centuries, South Slavs immigrated to the Balkans, and many of them later adopted Christianity. Many also converted to Islam during the 400 years of the Ottoman occupation. In the early 1990s, Yugoslavia, which included BiH, became engulfed in a series of internal ethnic conflicts. The violent conflicts were particularly severe in BiH where there was no absolute ethnic majority. When the republics of Slovenia and Croatia declared separation from Yugoslavia, Bosniak (Muslim) leaders in BiH followed suit. This ignited a military confrontation between the three major ethno-national groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) and involved many civilians. The Bosnian conflict lasted three years, from 1992 to 1995, resulting in more than 100,000 deaths and the displacement of half the population (Bakke, Cao, O'Loughlin, & Ward, 2009). BiH became a sovereign state in 1995 due to the Dayton peace agreement mediated by the international community. Presently, the population of 3.8 million is comprised of approximately 43.7% Bosniaks (Muslims), 31% Serbs (Orthodox Christians) and 17.3% Croats (Catholics) (OSCE, n.d.).

As a result of the conflict, the education governance system is highly fragmented along ethno-national lines. The BiH state consists of two major "entities," namely the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), plus the Brčko district. FBiH is further partitioned into 10 cantons. The education ministries in the 10 cantonal governments, RS entity government, and Brčko district government have extensive jurisdiction over education in their respective localities. Since the war ended, these regional governments have been dominated by political parties promoting ethno-nationalistic agendas, such as the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) representing the nationalist interests of Bosniaks, the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) dominating the RS, and the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ), a Croat nationalist party. Since the state-level government never had meaningful functions in the area of education, these twelve regional governments, or more precisely their ruling ethno-national parties, have been the key policy leaders in shaping the BiH education systems. These parties have promoted their agendas through ethnically segregated schooling and ethnocentric curriculums.

Another notable characteristic of the public policy-making process in BiH is the intensive involvement of the international community, reflecting a post-cold war form of international peace-keeping operations. At the conclusion of the war, an Office of High Representative (OHR) was set up by the United Nations to supervise and monitor the implementation of the peace agreement. In 2002, the OHR delegated its responsibility to monitor and assist education to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Since then, the OSCE has worked with other European agencies to align BiH education with "European standards." This transition to the European norms is important since the majority of BiH citizens hopes for EU integration (UNDP, 2007). The OSCE and its partner European organizations periodically assess the progress in BiH and their assessment is used to help determine the nation's candidacy for EU membership.

Since the end of the war, a major challenge confronting the ruling BiH political parties has been their weak legitimacy and the general lack of trust among local constituents. To illustrate this point, a 2003 UNDP survey (n=1900) found that the citizens were largely skeptical regarding the fairness of government practices. Governments at all levels were perceived to be partial, discriminatory and non-participatory (UNDP, 2003). The BiH public generally wants constitutional change and a new political structure (UNDP, 2007). A 2010 survey shows that the majority of citizens (87 percent, n=2000) felt that nationalist parties were leading the country in the wrong direction (National Democratic Institute, 2010). Their ethno-centric agendas are not appreciated by the citizens, and many citizens have stated that they are willing to engage in inter-ethnic cooperation

(O'Loughlin, 2010; Whitt, 2003). In addition, the level of corruption in BiH is said to be the highest in Europe (Transparency International, 2009), further reducing the public confidence in the governments and their political leadership. In view of this situation, Domm (2007) argued that building public trust in political institutions needed to be given priority over institutional effectiveness. The adoption of global reform models by BiH authorities should then be analyzed within these contexts. By viewing the legitimacy deficit of national leaders as an important policy context, this paper seeks to explain the adoption of an internationally popular SBM reform in post-conflict BiH from a political perspective.

SBM Reform

The education governance reform principles in BiH are laid out in its two state-level documents: the Education Reform policy paper published in 2002 and the *Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education* (hereafter, *Framework Law*) passed in 2003 by a BiH bicameral National Assembly representing the three dominant political parties. These two documents, drafted with the support of international experts from the European Union (EU) member states, define the school governance system in BiH. The Education Reform paper first declares that education needs to be depoliticized, then states that BiH education is governed by the notion of democratic and participatory school management (Government of BiH, 2002). Such a notion of school management is said to be in accordance with European organizational standards and norms (OSCE, 2006). The *Framework Law* then established that the SBM reform was intended to strengthen school-based governance by shifting the locus of authority from the regional governments to local actors including parents and local communities. The *Framework Law* specifies that the school benefits from autonomy whereby the school director is responsible for school management and the pedagogical process, and a school board representing the local school community oversees school policy (Government of BiH, 2003). After the *Framework Law* was passed, the twelve regional governments, dominated by the same ethno-national political parties that controlled the BiH National Assembly, were expected to promptly pass their respective by-laws to implement the SBM reform.

Central to the SBM reform is the establishment of school boards to enhance school autonomy and community participation in school management. The *Framework Law* sets up the school board as the primary decision-making body, with tasks ranging from drafting a school's annual plan to appointing school directors[1] "with the aim of increasing civic-government links and promoting a sense of local ownership" (OSCE, 2006, p. 21). The roles of school boards are defined to achieve the purpose of the SBM reform, as the school board represents "the interest in promoting a decentralized, democratic school management body capable of decision-making – a body that would ensure appropriate accountability measures and would bridge the community and education officials" (OSCE, 2006, p. 14). The reform was intended to ensure the school's accountability to the community it serves, thereby depoliticizing education, improving inter-ethnic relations and forging trust between schools and their communities (OSCE, 2006).

The *Framework Law* includes two essential provisions to ensure that school boards reflect the principles of local ownership and civic engagement. First, it regulates that the local community and parents must have as many seats on the board as government officials. Article 51 of the *Framework Law* establishes that "the school board members are elected from school staff, school founder, local community and parents, in accordance with legally proscribed procedure, and based on principle of equal representation of all structures' representatives" (Government of BiH, 2003, p. 15). It should be noted that the government authorities[2] can still influence the school boards' work through their official representation as founders of the schools. These representatives may be personnel working in schools or in government offices. Since school board decisions are made based on majority vote, the number of founders' (government) representatives is a very important indicator of a school board's autonomy and has implications for a board's work (OSCE, 2006).

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[1] School principals or heads are called school directors in BiH.

Second, the *Framework Law* requires that public school directors be appointed by the school boards. Under the SBM system, school boards determine school policies and effectuate their decisions through the appointment of school directors.[3] Among the school board tasks, the appointment of school directors is indeed regarded as one of the most important duties, along with approving school budgets and addressing personnel issues (OSCE, 2006). This provision is a significant departure from the previous system where directors were appointed by the respective ministers of education; under such an appointment system, school directors were compelled to conform to the agenda set by the cantonal and entity governments (U.S. Department of State, 2005).

Reform as Political Utility

On the surface, the adoption of the SBM reform in BiH appears to follow the pattern of institutional isomorphism, an influential perspective in the field of comparative and international education. According to the theories associated with institutional isomorphism, such as neo-institutionalism and world culture theory, nation-states do not develop education systems unique to their national contexts; they adopt global models of education systems, or reforms to improve them, legitimized by the network of international organizations (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). This isomorphic pressure is considered to have an inescapable force, supposedly facilitating homogenization deep within institutions. Policy-makers do not have a choice but to accept and enact the global models which have "historically gained scienticized legitimacy, much professional elaboration, and extensive resources" (Ramirez & Meyer, 2002, pp. 10-11). With the global models more easily available and actively advocated by international organizations, it is argued that these global models penetrate daily life more than ever before (Meyer, et al., 1997).

It is important to note here that the sociological analysis of institutional isomorphism focuses on systems rather than the individuals who control them. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizations are increasingly similar because these organizations want to enhance political power and institutional legitimacy. In this context, the principle unit of analysis is organization. Institutionalists emphasize the symbolic or cultural processes of reform adoption, and distinguish themselves from micro-realists who view policy-making as a consequence of rationalistic calculation of interests by the individual actors involved (Meyer et al., 1997). In institutionalists' studies, therefore, national policy leaders' decisions to adopt externally imported reforms are often not contextualized and closely scrutinized.

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[2] The term "government authorities" here refers to both regional and municipal governments, each of which can be a school founder. Generally, both governments are controlled by the same ethno-national political party. In ethnically mixed regions, however, a regional education authority is headed by an ethno-national political party, while some municipalities in the region may be led by a party belonging to another ethno-national group.

[3] Article 15 of the *Framework Law* stipulates that "the director for each public school is appointed by the school board, in the proceedings that are envisaged by the Entity's, Cantonal and Brčko District of BiH laws and School's Rules" (Government of BiH, 2003, p. 15).

In fact, institutionalists in comparative education assume that policy leaders adopt global reform models for the same reason that they predominantly desire to enhance the international recognition of their nation-state legitimacy. Mass schooling funded by the state is a typical example provided by institutionalist scholars to illustrate this point; such a state project is assigned "meaning and legitimacy" as a program to promote nation-building, while making other programs "unintelligible and unsupportable" in the eyes of the international community (Ramirez & Boli, 1987, p. 3). It should be pointed out that institutionalists recognize that globally popular projects, such as mass schooling, do not necessarily withstand empirical evidence to support their efficiency and effectiveness. Still, the important point remains that national leaders believe in "secularized and unconditionally universalistic versions of the salvation story," and pursue it persistently in order to increase the nations' legitimacy (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 174). From the institutionalists' perspective, then, policy leaders loyally transmit global values and facilitate their embodiment in national education systems.

In the past, critiques of institutional isomorphism theories have pointed out variations in policy implementation. Steiner-Khamsi (2006), for example, insisted that the global convergence of education occurred only at the level of "policy talk" and very rarely at the level of implementation. Indeed, various case studies indicate that global models of education reforms deviate from their original intents during implementation due to local practitioners' norms, practices and resistance (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Rui, 2007). What seems to be lacking, or not sufficiently employed, in these critiques is a political analysis focusing on the practices and behaviors of the national authorities who introduce the reforms in the first place. This paper illustrates that attending to the legitimacy contexts in which these national authorities find themselves and noting their commitment, or lack thereof, to follow through on legislated reforms can provide meaningful insights into the process of global reform adoption. In conducting such an analysis, Weiler's political utility theory provides a useful guide.

While the institutionalists' claim of isomorphism would lead us to believe that policy leaders uniformly adopt globally popular reform agendas and implement them in their own countries, the political utility argument of reform adoption calls for the need to consider the reasons that elites decide to adopt a global reform and to critically view their commitment to implement it. Hans N. Weiler (1983) contends that modern capitalist states are in constant need of legitimation as the range and scope of the state's activities expand. Governments face legitimacy deficits since their resources are insufficient to satisfy the local constituents' needs or to "purchase legitimacy through various kinds of material gratification" (p. 261). Weiler then asserts that education is one of the most contested areas and requires high levels of legitimation because of its role in socializing future citizens into accepting and sustaining existing social structures. It is not surprising, then, that policy leaders may view education reforms as an important mechanism for legitimacy compensation (Weiler, 1983).

Weiler's argument concerning policy leaders' legitimacy, which is central to his political utility theory, contrasts with that of institutionalists. While institutional isomorphism theorists assume that policy leaders adopt global reforms in order to enhance the legitimacy of statehood ("external" legitimacy), that is, recognition from the global community of nation-states, political utility theory predicts that national authorities do so in order to augment their own legitimacy among domestic constituents ("internal" legitimacy). The institutionalist focus on external legitimacy is understandable in light of the fact that institutional theory originates from organizational studies. In a business or professional organization, the leadership's primary concern for legitimacy is often directed toward external stakeholders who determine the continuity or discontinuity of the leader's service. The leadership in many nation-states, however, survives on internal legitimacy. It is this reason that Weiler's political utility theory is useful, indeed necessary, when analyzing the motivation of politicians to adopt global reform models. It should be noted, however, that policy leaders may want to increase both internal and external legitimacy since they are often complementary. In the case of BiH, increased trust from the international community could help gain public trust since their leaders are then seen to have the confidence of key international supporters who can usher BiH into a regional block of prosperity.

The political utility argument also differs from a perspective developed by Gita Steiner-Khamsi, a leading critique of institutionalism in comparative education. Having noted the gap between policy rhetoric and implementation in policy importing nations, Steiner-Khamsi offers her insights into the reason that policy leaders adopt global reforms. In her analysis, a group of policy leaders often evoke "international standards" in order to advance their own ideas against others,' as these standards are supposedly neutral, and therefore have a salutary effect on protracted policy conflict (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Once international funding is secured, however, policy leaders "reinterpret" global norms and implement reforms in the ways they believe enhance national development. In Mongolia, for example, political leadership continued its rhetorical support of decentralization in order to receive international funding, while they in fact re-centralized some of the education administration functions due to their belief that a centralized system is more effective in delivering educational services (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). Curiously, the analysis of reason behind the adoption of global reforms, namely the promotion of nation building, resonates with the previously described institutionalist argument regarding education reform transfer. The analysis offered by Steiner-Khamsi (and Stolpe) did not sufficiently take into account, or address, the aspect of reforms as compensatory legitimation.

Among various global reforms, decentralization of education governance is particularly illustrative of compensatory legitimation. According to Weiler (1990), education decentralization, which promises to redistribute authority, improve system efficiency, and facilitate cultures of learning, is a "precarious and problematic proposition" (p. 439) since there are also powerful arguments favoring centralization to advance the learning environment. Against the background of legitimacy deficit that modern states are presumed to face, Weiler developed a hypothesis that policy makers adopted decentralization reforms, not because of their belief in the supposed benefits of decentralization, but because of their desire to increase political legitimacy among the nations' populace. Weiler alludes to the fundamental contradiction between decentralization and the central authority's desire to consolidate power. He argues that genuine sharing of power seriously affects the central authority's ability to use the education system to maintain existing social relations and systems. In this context, Weiler continues, national policy leaders may attempt to achieve two conflicting objectives with regard to decentralization reforms: "retaining as much (centralized) control over the system as is possible without a severe loss in legitimacy, while at least appearing to be committed to decentralization and thus reaping the benefits in legitimation to be derived from that appearance" (Weiler, 1990, p. 442).

Weiler's analysis of a reform as legitimacy compensation is pertinent to the SBM reform in post-conflict BiH. At the time of the SBM reform introduction, BiH suffered from a severe lack of resources and administrative capacities to deliver public services since the nation was emerging from the civil war. In addition, political leaders' ethno-nationalistic agendas were not necessarily appreciated by the citizens. Already, the public trust in regional governments appeared to have been weakening; the polling patterns during the general elections between 1996, a year after the conflict ended, and 2002, a year prior to the promulgation of the *Framework Law* that introduced the SBM reform, showed that citizens' support of the three dominant ethno-national parties was declining (Søberg, 2006). The twelve regional governments, each of them acting as a central authority in their respective localities, may have perceived the SBM reform as an opportunity to enhance their legitimacy among local constituents who increasingly viewed their governments as incapable and corrupt. The acceptance of the EU-endorsed SBM reform, at least rhetorically, was particularly important for the BiH political leaders since it would respond to the public aspiration for European integration. Such behavior by the authorities is congruent with the fact that all three dominant political parties have consistently expressed their commitment to the nation's integration into the EU (Toal & Maksić, 2011).

At the same time, however, these political leaders would not desire to compromise their authority over the schools through which they eagerly promoted their ethno-nationalist agendas. Their political platforms are built on ethno-centric ideologies. They may have considered the adoption of the SBM reform a means to gain public support, while in reality, implementing it superficially without losing their control over the schools. In order to substantiate this thesis, the authorities' practices and behaviors regarding the reform implementation should be examined, since they can indicate the policy leaders' views on the decentralization reform as either political utility or genuine redistribution of power. The meaning of such an inquiry was evoked by Thomas Popkewitz in his analysis of educational reforms. Popkewitz (1991) questioned the assumption of institutional isomorphism regarding the linear and natural process of reform and change, and called on the importance of social epistemology to underscore the social relations of actors when analyzing educational reforms in each national context. He urges an analysis grounded in political, social, and cultural contexts to locate indigenous forms of control that affect actual practices (Popkewitz, 1991; 1996). Since decentralization entails a change in power relations, it is then critical to contextually examine who actually holds power to affect school governance. As this paper shows in the next section, empirical data seem to indicate that BiH authorities want to retain their power over schools, despite their official approval of the SBM reform.

Evidence of Derailed Reform Implementation

This study advances the thesis that policy leaders in BiH accepted an SBM reform in order to enhance their internal legitimacy, rather than to advance decentralized school governance and the nation's legitimacy as a democratic member of the international community, as institutionalists would claim. As such, the supposed objectives of the reform, such as school autonomy and local community ownership, may not be the leaders' primary concerns. This section presents evidence suggesting that the ruling political parties, while they accepted the *Framework Law* at the National Assembly, in fact resisted the SBM reform during a less publicized implementation stage in the respective regions under their control. The forms of resistance or reluctance tend to be subtle, but sufficiently indicate the governments' unwillingness to relinquish their exclusive control over school management.

The evidence presented here reveals that the ruling political elites in regional governments, though in different degrees, generally did not respect the principles of school autonomy and local ownership of schools. First, this section will show the regional governments' possible attempts to delay the implementation process. This evidence was drawn from donor reports and OHR press releases. Second, the member composition of school boards in all twelve regions will be presented to illustrate that the governments have been over-represented on the boards, in most cases at the expense of local stakeholder representation. Lastly, the section demonstrates that the school director appointment process currently used does not clearly reflect the concept of school autonomy. The empirical data supporting the latter two points was drawn from a field study conducted in 2011.[4] In addition, regional by-laws were reviewed and cross-referenced with the *Framework Law* and field data.[5] These sets of evidence were then assessed in combination with the legitimacy contexts of the policy leaders to argue that the political utility theory can effectively help explain the SBM reform adoption process in BiH.

First, records show that the three regional governments in FBiH, ruled by the same party, delayed the SBM implementation process. All twelve regional governments were expected to amend their regional by-laws on education in accordance with the content of the *Framework Law* soon after its enactment. However, the three governments failed to do this, resulting in the OHR's imposition of the necessary amendments in their regional by-laws. As an illustration of this affair, an excerpt from an OHR press release is presented below, where the OHR reprimanded the ruling party in the three cantonal governments (OHR, 2004).

> With this Decision, the High Representative has addressed a situation which represented a challenge both to the Rule of Law and to the international obligations of BiH. Last year, the HDZ, together with all other parties, voted for the State Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education. This was a unanimous vote in the State Parliament. Yet since the end of last year, these cantons with HDZ education ministers have consistently failed to take action to harmonise their cantonal laws with the State legislation.

The regional governments run by HDZ eventually enacted their by-laws, but these laws were not faithfully applied to the formation of school boards. For example, in one of the three regions, its by-law stipulated that "members of the school board shall be elected from among the teachers and professional associates, founder, local community and parents" (OSCE, 2006, p. 69). This provision appears to honor the corresponding section in the *Framework Law* that ensures inclusive school governance with the participation of laypersons from the school communities. This clause is followed by another one expressing the principle of equal representation between key stakeholders: "one third of the school board members shall be elected from among teachers and professional associates, one third from among the founder …, one third from among parents" (OSCE, 2006, p. 69); however, it is important to note that this second clause did not include local community representatives, a central tenet of local community ownership of schools as guaranteed by the SBM reform. Moreover, the field data showed that almost all school boards in this region actually included two ministry representatives and only one parent. This evidence suggests that the regional government deliberately deviated from the reform goals of decentralized governance.

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[4] The study employed an anonymous, self-administered paper survey which was distributed to all 291 secondary school directors in BiH based on the lists provided by the twelve regional governments. The survey contained closed-ended questions and a section for additional comments concerning the composition of school boards and the school director appointment process. The response rate was 51.5%. All regions in BiH were represented by survey results. The study did not discern significant regional patterns in terms of the response rates. Concurrently, 16 interviews were conducted with school directors selected by the combination of purposive and random sampling. All the regions, except Canton 10, were represented by at least one interviewee. The interviews were conducted to understand the nature of the relationship between school directors and school boards, and the general dynamics of school governance after the introduction of the SBM reform. The interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality of their personal information. For more information concerning the methodology utilized by this study, see Komatsu (2012). Quotes presented in the present paper were modified for clarity.

[5] The study reviewed translated versions of regional by-laws enclosed in the OSCE report on school boards (OSCE, 2006).

The over-representation of government-appointed personnel on school boards is seen in other regions of BiH as well. In many of these regions, the governments are more represented than local stakeholders, namely parents and local community representatives. Table 1 shows the summary of findings regarding the school board composition in all twelve regions.[6] In presenting the data, a comparison was made between government representation, including those appointed by the ministry and municipality (they are normally managed by the same political party), and local representation, including both parents and local community members. Teachers were not incorporated into the analysis since they may represent both the interests of governments and local stakeholders, rendering it difficult to assign them to either group. The table shows that government representation outweighed the local stakeholders in seven regions (R6-R12). Only two regions (R1 and R2) truly respected local ownership by ensuring more representation of local stakeholders. Another three regions (R3-R5) demonstrated more or less equal representation of parents and governments, though none of them included local community representatives. In fact, the school boards in only one region (R1) consistently included at least one local community representative. The field data largely show the BiH governments' reluctance to cede their power over schools, despite their agreement with the *Framework Law* mandating school-based governance and management.

Table 1

School board member composition

Representation	Region											
	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12
Ministry	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Municipality	0	0	2	3	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Parents	1	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Local Community	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teacher	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
Government representatives compared to parents and local community members	Less	Less	Equal	Equal	Equal	More	More	More	More	More	More	More

Source: Compiled by the author based on data collected in 2011.

Finally, the governments' reluctance to fully implement the SBM reform is also observed in the school director appointment process. As noted earlier, the *Framework Law* entrusts school boards with the authority to appoint school directors. However, the field data indicates otherwise. The survey data showed that, in most cases, school directors were chosen in two stages, with the involvement of regional authorities in the second stage. Typically, school boards forwarded their recommended candidates to regional authorities for approval; rarely did school boards choose their school directors without the consent of regional authorities.

Remarks made by survey respondents are indicative of the nature and extent of such government interference. One survey respondent pointed out the ambiguity of the dual confirmation system, wondering whose word is final in determining the selection of a candidate. Most respondents indicated that it was the education ministers who had the final say on appointments. Many also complained that the school director appointment process was influenced by the party politics of the ministers, as the following remark indicates: "In practice, the minister chooses directors. He abuses his position. He wants 'party' schools." Another respondent admitted the government's influence in school board work by disclosing that "active participation of school boards in governing schools is greatly limited by the ministry. The ministry often makes obstructions against the authority of the school boards."

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[6] Some variations regarding school board composition exist among schools within a region. The table reflects the majority case in each region.

Interview data generally concurred with the survey data presented. Some interviewees expressed concerns about the confidentiality of their responses in the beginning of their interviews, exhibiting great sensitivity towards the government authorities; this indicates that school directors' status and work is seriously affected by the decisions of education ministers. During interviews, many participants alluded to the persistent influence of government authorities on school governance. For example, one interviewee, noting that the ratio of government representatives on school boards recently increased in the region, bluntly admitted that "perhaps they wanted to increase their influence in schools." Another interviewee alluded to the influence of party politics on school governance, while stressing that such influence came from the government, rather than from among civilian members of the board. Lastly, the following remark made by one interviewee clearly captures the politicized situation of school governance: "Those political parties…schools belong to particular parties. … They say this school is red, this one is green, this one is…or the director would be this one, or that one." The government authorities' persistent influence on school governance is clearly noted in these interview remarks.

In this section, the analysis of official documents and field data was presented to show that regional governments derailed the SBM reform implementation by faltering on implementation or altering the alignment of their by-laws, thus maintaining significant influence on school boards and on the appointment of school heads. Both survey and interview data demonstrate that a core function of school boards, or more broadly decentralized school governance, was compromised in the reform implementation stage, and suggest the education authorities' unwillingness to fully implement the SBM reform. These pieces of evidence point to the possibility that the government gesture to accept the global SBM reform by signing the *Framework Law* may have been a public display, rather than the reflection of their commitment to redistribute power and promote democratic school governance.

Summary and Discussion

This paper presented an argument that the SBM reform in BiH may possibly be the outcome of a political utility consideration. The ruling political parties accepted the SBM reform in policy rhetoric, but resisted its implementation. Against a backdrop of dwindling public approval of government performance, BiH political leaders may have utilized the EU-endorsed SBM reform as an opportunity to appeal to the populace's aspiration for European integration, thereby compensating for their legitimacy deficit. If this is the case, the political leaders' agreement with the SBM reform should not be interpreted as their belief in the "universalistic scientific and professional definitions" (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 174) of education systems advocated by international organizations, as presumed by institutionalists. By presenting this argument, the study advocates the need to closely attend to political leaders' legitimacy contexts, along with their practices and behaviors, as they adopt and implement global reforms.

A major limitation of the political utility theory lies in its inherent difficulty to prove empirically that national authorities adopt reforms for legitimacy compensation. A less than full implementation of decentralization reforms may indicate the lack of authorities' commitment and suggest the use of the reforms as political utility. However, policy implementation gaps may also be the result of technical errors, capacity deficiencies, or "cultural misunderstanding" (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004, p. 46) of global norms. Institutionalists, on their part, would argue that policy implementation gaps are the results of "decoupling." Decoupling denotes that organizations adopt mainstream ideas to gain legitimacy with their external constituents while their actual practices may vary in response to practical considerations; in this case, organizations encourage autonomous professionalism so as to allow grass-roots implementers to adjust policies to local contexts (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, the evidence presented in this paper suggests otherwise. BiH education authorities have maintained, rather than loosened, their control on school governance by ensuring their solid representation on school boards and by influencing the school director appointment process. In this aspect, this study shares Steiner-Khamsi's view that loose coupling should be interpreted as resistance by government authorities (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Considering that education has been heavily politicized in post-conflict BiH, a cautious look at the reform process from a political perspective, rather than an administrative or cultural view, is warranted.

A crucial point in this paper lies in its assertion that national policy leaders can still be central players in reform adoption, even in the globalized world that exerts isomorphic pressures on national education systems. While isomorphism theories may describe institutions and their decision-makers as somewhat passive recipients of environmental pressures, the political utility theory assumes that national authorities are active players in utilizing reforms to advance their political gains. While political leaders may not always make decisions based on the calculation of self-serving interests, this paper argues that assessing their motives, practices and behaviors is crucial to understanding the process of global reform adoption, particularly in societies where political leaders do not enjoy broad-based support from the public.

Implications

This study has implications for research concerning education reform transfer. The study suggests the importance of political analysis that scrutinizes policy leaders' intent to accept global reforms and critically examines their practices and behaviors during reform implementation, especially when the reform entails the redistribution of power and the political leadership is unstable or in serious crisis. In this context, Weiler's political utility theory, which sheds light on national leadership's commitment to decentralization reforms, can make an important contribution to the debate around educational reform transfer. Comparative and international education scholars are urged to incorporate the aspect of legitimacy compensation into their analysis of why and how global reforms are adopted in policy-importing nations; this is particularly important considering that many global reforms, such as community participation, a child-centered approach, and organizational autonomy, are essentially democratic notions which entail the redistribution of power and challenge the authority of political leadership. Taking into consideration the full range of political leaders' reasons to adopt externally induced reforms should enhance our ability to analyze and explain the process of global reform adoption.

The study has practical implications for international assistance as well. Attending to national authorities' reasons for adopting reforms is important because policies implemented with "an ulterior reason" often fail to achieve their objectives, with grave consequences. Fullan (2001) argues that grass-roots implementers of education reforms, such as school principals and teachers, accurately assess whether new policies or reforms are implemented with the serious intent of the authorities or not; if it is the latter case, these implementers will never take the reforms seriously. Moreover, a policy failure may increase the implementers' cynicism toward any future reforms (Fowler, 2009). In some cases, international assistance may lose its credibility from these crucial field-level implementers, and even the general public, if it keeps supporting reforms that politicians have no intention of implementing. Positioning national authorities at the center of reform adoption is indeed a critical step when assessing the feasibility of any global reform implementation.

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