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Exploring postcolonial relationships within policy transfer: the case of learner-centred pedagogy in Ghana

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ABSTRACT
Framed by Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space of enunciation, this study explores postcolonial relationships conceivably enacted through policy borrowing processes of learner-centred pedagogy (LCP) in Ghana. Nine Ghanaian and nine foreign stakeholders were interviewed. Conscious of the power imbalance implicit in traditional aid, the case project attempted to challenge the asymmetrical power relationships by allocating policy leadership and responsibility to Ghanaian stakeholders. However, the third space of enunciation created within the project did not seem to lead to a hybridisation of pedagogical ideas: while it was the Ghanaians themselves who promoted LCP within the project, the conceptual basis of the reform was dependent on knowledge and experiences which they gained in the West. This article concludes that the postcolonial turn through hybridisation of indigenous and Western pedagogies was not observed, although hybridity may happen in the process of actualising LCP at school and classroom levels.

探究政策转移中的后殖民关系：加纳以学习者为中心教学法的案例

摘要
本研究以霍米·巴巴的“混杂性”和“第三发声空间”概念为框架，探讨加纳以学习者为中心教学法（learner-centred pedagogy）的政策借鉴过程中可能形成的后殖民关系。九名加纳本国和九名外国利益相关者接受了访谈。意识到传统援助中隐含的权力失衡，该案例项目通过将政策领导权和责任分配给加纳利益相关方，试图挑战不对称的权力关系。然而，该项目中创造的第三发声空间似乎并没有导致教学思想的混杂化：尽管是加纳人自己在该项目中推广以学习者为中心教学法，但改革的概念基础依赖于他们在西方获得的知识和经验。本文的结论是，尽管在学校和课堂层面实践以学习者为中心教学法的过程中可能出现混杂性，但未能观察到通过本土和西方教学法混杂化而实现的后殖民转向。

KEYWORDS
Postcolonial theory; learner-centred pedagogy; Homi Bhabha; Ghana; teacher education reform; pedagogical reform

关键词
：后殖民理论；以学习者为中心教学法；霍米·巴巴；加纳；教师教育改革；教学法改革

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Introduction

Globalisation – or a growing interconnectedness in economic, political, social and cultural relationships across nations – has stimulated a 'policy-borrowing' phenomenon in educational arenas (Ball 2012; Cowen 2009; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow 2012). Countries around the world have increasingly borrowed and adopted policies formulated and suggested by multilateral agencies, international non-governmental organisations and think tanks. Learner-centred pedagogy (LCP) epitomises this policy-borrowing phenomenon; considered a 'best practice' in education reforms, LCP has been widely borrowed and lent from one culture to another (Steiner-Khamsi 2012). Developed by constructivist educational philosophers and theorists largely from the West (Dewey 1916; 1938; Piaget 1975; Rousseau 1762; Vygotsky 1978), LCP encourages the active involvement of learners and the development of democratic student – teacher relationships throughout teaching and learning processes. Underpinning the policy-borrowing phenomenon of LCP throughout the Global South is an ideological intention to promote individualism and consumer capitalism, and this has been advanced by Western-led aid organisations (Carney 2008; Tabulawa 2003). The current aid architecture exemplifies the absolute influence of international donors and the unidirectional path taken by policy transfer, due largely to the conditions placed by donors in exchange for external aid (Mundy 2016; Steiner-Khamsi 2014). During the process of producing policies, however, various educational stakeholders interact and negotiate to determine what gets incorporated into official policies, during which diverse participants exercise their agency to navigate interpersonal and institutional power dynamics.

Framed by Homi Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and the third space of enunciation, among others, this article explores the particularities of the LCP policy transfer process, taking Ghana as a case country. It considers the role that the agency of local actors plays in determining the national response to international aid, while focusing on the possibility of creating hybridised pedagogies in an aid project.

In what follows, we first explore definitions of LCP eclectically developed from the ancient Greeks to modern times. We then look at the LCP policy-borrowing phenomenon in the global arena, as well as within Ghana. This leads us to consider the relevance of Bhabha's concepts in examining the framing of educational aid in the current context and in particular the transfer of LCP policies. After outlining our methodological approach with semi-structured interviews conducted virtually, we present our results on the approach an aid project took to form policy relations among various stakeholders and on the process through which LCP was integrated into the project. Our discussion and conclusion consider ways in which cultural hybridisation does or does not manifest itself within the aid architecture of LCP transfer.

Defining LCP

The term 'learner-centred pedagogy' is an eclectic idea, and various educational theorists and philosophers have contributed to the development of the concept over hundreds of years. Several scholars have sought to define the term, but they have not reached a consensus on one agreed definition. When trying to define LCP, historical figures originating in the West are often cited: For example, Socrates is said to be one of the founders of

learner-centred ideas, with his way of teaching through questioning and instruction based on the interests of individual students (Nola 1997; Swardson 2005). Rousseau (1762) endorsed discovery learning derived from children's experiences; Dewey (1916; 1938) advocated for individualised learning and for fostering democratic citizens through 'progressive education'; and Piaget (1970) observed children's active meaning-making, in addition to other Western-based educationists such as Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori. All are said to have contributed to the formation of what LCP means (Chung and Walsh 2000; Thomas and Schweisfurth 2021).

Referring to the history of LCP, Schweisfurth (2013) came up with seven 'minimum standards' that constitute LCP. She rejected the teacher-centred / learner-centred dualism of classroom pedagogies, conceptualising them as 'a continuum from less learner-centred to more learner-centred' (11). The seven minimum standards include engaging lessons, mutual respect, learners' existing knowledge, dialogue, curriculum relevant to learners' current and future lives, skill-based curriculum and relevant assessment (Schweisfurth 2013, 146). In a more recent work, Bremner (2021) reviewed 326 journal articles and analysed the definitions of LCP found within them; six main characteristics of LCP emerged, which demonstrate a degree of similarity with Schweisfurth's conceptualisations: active participation, adapting to needs, autonomy, relevant skills, power sharing and formative assessment (Bremner 2021, 214). In addition to identifying these six characteristics of learner-centeredness, Bremner argued that a *flexible* approach to defining LCP is vital considering the inevitability of contextual variation. For example, a lesson could be 'active' in the sense that learners are involved in practical, hands-on activities, but there might be little opportunity for 'power sharing' or the curriculum might be quite rigid.

Bremner's (2021) definition proposes a novel understanding of LCP, that any pedagogy which employs one or more of the six LCP-related characteristic(s), depending on the context, can be considered learner-centred. This definition puts forward an alternative way of defining LCP, as opposed to seeking a globally conforming 'one-size-fits-all' form of LCP largely based on concepts developed in the West. Comparative education research values *understanding the contextual conditions* over applying universal means to measure teaching quality (Luoto 2023); thus the more flexible approach to defining LCP (Bremner 2021) allows teaching and learning approaches that have been developed indigenously in non-Western cultures to be regarded as learner-centred. For example, a locally initiated educational movement called *Escuela Nueva* in Columbia involves LCP-related approaches, including students' active participation and problem solving (Colbert and Arboleda 2016). Sakata, Oketch, and Candappa (2021) have claimed that the *ujamaa* philosophy in Tanzania adapted overlapping concepts with LCP, such as hands-on learning and practical teaching. Although schools in the Global South have not often been considered to be practising LCP (Schweisfurth 2011; Westbrook et al. 2013), some of the indigenous pedagogies may involve learner-centredness in their underpinning philosophies and practices according to the flexible LCP approach.

The LCP policy-borrowing phenomenon

Despite a multitude of definitions of LCP possibly extant in different contexts, the pedagogy has been considered a one-size-fits-all 'best practice' in the global educational

architecture. Labelled a travelling policy (Dimmock 2000; Schweisfurth 2013; Steiner-Khamsi 2012), LCP has gained prominence in the pedagogical discourse over the past few decades, especially since the launch of Education for All (EFA) in 1990. Many governments in low-income countries, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, have adopted international LCP policies (UNESCO et al. 2015; UNICEF 2009). Botswana, Uganda and Senegal put into practice curriculum changes imbued with learner-centredness around 1990 (World Bank 2008), and Kenya did so later in the 2000s (Yates, Foster, and Barasa 2008). The dissemination of LCP is often tied to funded projects, and recipient countries in the Global South are expected to adhere to international recommendations as a condition for receiving aid (Steiner-Khamsi 2014). Power differentials extant along the policy borrowing process of LCP is epitomised by the direction of funds, where borrowing countries are supposed to follow LCP tenets, at least rhetorically, in exchange for aid.

The trajectory of teacher education reform in Ghana since the EFA era seems to embody a policy-borrowing mechanism, with the promotion of learner-centred tenets embedded within donor-funded programmes. The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE), introduced in 1995 and initiated by the World Bank with funds contributed by multiple donors, included a continuous professional development programme emphasising learner-centred instruction (Akyeampong 2020; Ministry of Education 1996). Another programme running almost in parallel with the FCUBE, the Junior Secondary School Teacher Education Project (JUSSTEP) started in 1995 and funded by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK FCDO: then the British Overseas Development Agency), also incorporated LCP tenets into the training of teacher educators. Teacher trainers were exposed to LCP-related instructions such as small group work and discussions, as well as problem-solving tasks (Ghana Education Service/Teacher Education Division 1990).

Support for LCP continued to surge in Ghana after the turn of the millennium. Child-friendly school initiatives (UNICEF 2009) filled with tenets to put children at the centre of teaching and learning were prevalent in Ghana (Miske et al. 2012; Mooijman, Esseku, and Tay 2013), and the National Literacy Acceleration Programme led by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID 2005) considered effective teachers to be constructivists who involved pupils in activities (Torto 2018).

The most recent teacher education reform in Ghana, Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL), was initiated by the Ghana Ministry of Education with financial support from the UK FCDO in 2014. The project produced a range of policy documents emphasising learner-centred principles. The National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education 2017) considers 'competent teachers' to be those who 'use a learner-centred pedagogy and an inclusive approach' (11). The resources that T-TEL generated for teacher trainers and student teachers included a *Teaching Practice Handbook* (Ministry of Education 2016a) that promotes a 'learning environment conducive to the active learning of all pupils' (10) and a series of professional development resources organised in themes including group work (Ministry of Education 2016b) and creative approaches (Ministry of Education 2015). These documents made available by T-TEL clearly indicate its inclination towards learner-centred, activity-based pedagogical approaches. As such, the LCP discourse has prevailed in Ghana's teacher education reforms embedded within various aid programmes.

However, LCP pronounced at the policy level is not necessarily translated into expected outcomes; policy actors in recipient countries inevitably shape the outcomes of LCP transfer. Steiner-Khamsi (2012) argues that a policy reform is often selectively borrowed and adapted to local contexts, in which the active agency of policymakers and implementers – rather than simply the obedient recipients of aid – exists throughout the policy cycle. The literature has demonstrated how the universally promoted principles of pedagogy manifest as a locally particular pedagogy due to resistance and local adaptations, appropriated in a different manner than expected (Waldow 2012). Vavrus (2009) illustrated Tanzanian student teachers' resistance to performing social constructivist teaching because of what was measured in the national exams, severe material conditions and cultural traditions distinctive from learner-centred principles. Brinkmann (2019) examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in terms of learner centredness, and the results revealed that the enactment of LCP-related practices significantly varied depending on teacher beliefs about LCP. Both examples suggest the non-negligible agency of policy actors in determining how and to what extent LCP travels to the classroom in the Global South.

Postcolonial relationships within LCP transfer

Looking at the process of policy borrowing in which policy actors may well exercise their agency (Steiner-Khamsi 2012), this article explores policy relationships formed through personal and institutional connections and negotiations during the formation of LCP policies in Ghana. Although LCP policy borrowing may exhibit the unequal power of, and unidirectional path led by, international aid organisations, the process of LCP transfer may become the site for interactions and co-mingling of different ideas. By framing the LCP policy-borrowing phenomenon with concepts presented by the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha, this research examines postcolonial relationships in the context of LCP and, more broadly, within the architecture of aid. We intend to examine whether and in what ways local institutions and individuals were given a space to enact their agency in making decisions and implementations during the process of LCP promotion.

Homi Bhabha (1994) observed that the nature of the colonial discourse is *ambivalent*, where the coloniser and colonised influence each other and their relationships are floating and changing. But as the coloniser perceives the prospect of equal status within the coloniser – colonised relationship, the former endeavours to suppress that possibility by means of *mimicry*, a process to produce '"translated" copies of the coloniser's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values' (Andreotti 2011, 26). The effort to transfer LCP policies to the Global South as a one-size-fits-all 'universal panacea' epitomises the venture to mimic the coloniser. Guthrie (1990) argued that the transferred policy of LCP – promoting learner autonomy, participation and ownership – attempts to inculcate Western values associated with liberal democracy. Tabulawa (2003) agreed with Guthrie and argued that LCP is an ideological enterprise rather than a mere educational project. This view is further supported by Carney (2008), who regarded LCP as part of an international agenda to spread Western capitalism and democracy. Consequently, LCP has been labelled a process of Westernisation (Guthrie 1990) and of cultural imperialism (Carney 2008) that contributes to maintaining postcolonial relationships between the former coloniser and the colonised.

Although the coloniser attempts to carry on the fixed power differentials in relation to the colonised, Bhabha (1994) denied that the cultural identities of the two are binary or fixed. He introduced the concept of *hybridity*, a process in which different cultures and systems of representation interact and influence each other to construct new cultural norms and meanings. Bhabha considered that hybridity offers an enabling space for cultural translation and reversal for other denied knowledges and marginalised others to challenge dominant discourses (Andreotti 2011). This space, called the *Third Space of Enunciation* (Bhabha 1994, 37), can:

> [challenge] our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force, authenticated by the ordinary Past […] [T]he disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation.

It is in this third space that hybridised understandings and practices can emerge through ongoing negotiations among different cultural systems and actors. Bhabha emphasised the potential of hybridity for subverting and creating opportunities for transforming relations of power (Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia 2006).

George and Lewis (2011) explored the possibility of creating a third space where global and local knowledge interplay and generate a hybridised knowledge system in the Caribbean. While cognisant of the asymmetrical power relations between the Global South and North in the realm of educational development, they illustrated how indigenous knowledge can 'perform together' with knowledge developed in other parts of the world. In the context of Ghana, Poloma and Szelényi (2019) conducted a historical analysis of higher education development immediately after the country's independence. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), studied abroad in the US and, upon his return to Ghana, led the establishment of higher education institutions in the country. Poloma and Szelényi (2019) observed historical interactions between the US and Ghana through this Pan-Africanist president's experience of living in both countries, which led to the creation of a hybrid model of higher education institutions in Ghana: Nkrumah partly borrowed the idea and systems of US technical training, but critically adapted them to incorporate African traditions, values and culture.

Taking postcolonial concepts associated with Bhabha, this article explores the views and experiences of policy actors at the apex of LCP transfer, who have not received wide scholarly attention in studies on LCP (Sakata, Bremner, and Cameron 2022). This research investigates the policy formation processes for LCP and the intentions behind the process based on an education aid project promoting LCP in Ghana. By tracing the trajectory of the development programme and by exploring the details of policymaking processes within educational aid, we aim to illustrate whether and how the process of LCP transfer may offer a third space where hybridisation of local and foreign ideals of pedagogies might occur. We ask the following questions:

- How is LCP incorporated into the educational development project?
- Whose intentions lie behind the project, and what are those intentions?
- Does the incorporation of LCP into the education system in Ghana contribute to hybridisation of pedagogical ideas between international and national stakeholders, and if so, how?

By focusing on policy actors who seemed to manifest their agency in borrowing LCP in Ghana, this research navigates a complex terrain of educational policies and policy transfer formed through the implementation of an aid project.

Context and method

To examine the views and experiences in formulating LCP policies, this research explored the roles played by Ghanaian and international policy actors, taking a teacher education reform project in Ghana as a case. With financial support from a development partner, the project was managed by a range of government offices in Ghana, together with a foreign-based consultancy company contracted by a bilateral aid agency.

The research employed semi-structured interviews with Ghanaian and international stakeholders involved in the case project. The participants were selected purposively. Through internet searches and reading related policy documents, as well as through personal connections of the research team, we first identified four Ghanaian and four international staff employed by the programme as potential interviewees, whom we approached through emails and phone calls to explain the purpose and procedure of the research. During and after their interviews, several participants recommended and introduced us to their colleagues involved in the project, whom we then contacted electronically to ask if they might also be interested in participating in the interviews. The second group of interviewees chosen through this snowball sampling comprised five Ghanaians and five international participants. In addition to these policy-level personnel, six tutors at six colleges of education were identified via personal connections with the authors and were also interviewed. The total number of interviewees was 24, consisting of six college tutors in Ghana, nine policy actors in Ghana and nine development workers from outside the country. This paper focuses on the 18 interviews with the policy officials and project staff in Ghana (nine) and the international development workers (nine).

The interviews took place from February to October 2021. Given the travel restrictions within and across borders during the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted online, except for four interviews that were carried out face-to-face to accommodate the interviewees' preference. Ethical clearance was obtained by the ethics committee at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. An information sheet and a consent form were sent electronically in advance of the interviews, and any questions and concerns were resolved beforehand. All interviewees were also asked for oral permission to record the interview before it began. The analysis and write-up of this research was then shared with the participants whose interview data were used in this article, and their comments were integrated as much as possible.

In the interviews, we asked about the participants' educational and career background, their involvement in the focal project, their relationships with other project stakeholders, their understandings and perceptions of LCP concepts, as well as their experiences with formulating and/or implementing LCP principles.

All interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim afterwards. We employed thematic analysis to identify codes and themes, organised using Excel, NVivo and MAXQDA. The different kinds of software were used based on their availability at the institution of the team members. Each team member, as well as several research assistants, first carried out the analysis individually. We then met virtually to discuss the

codes. The discussion was not meant to create complete agreement on codes among the researchers but to inform and facilitate each other's analysis. The limited collaboration functionality between the different types of software hindered synchronisation of the codes; at the same time, the team members could pursue their own interest and focus within this research project – which we are currently writing up jointly – while keeping the general direction of the analysis consistent. This article reports the findings organised according to the themes of power relations, policy leadership, policy process and the focus on pedagogy, to which we now turn.

The teacher education reform project

The project initially started off as a classic change improvement project, in which the development partner and contracted management agency established operational oversight outside of the mainstream structures of government. A government committee chaired by the Ministry of Education comprised Ghanaian staff, while the office for the foreign consultants was set up outside the national implementation body in Ghana to support the project. A bilateral aid agency, which provided oversight and accountability, and programme partners in Ghana co-funded the project, and management fees and consultancy services offering technical inputs sought to make the aid project profitable while meeting the agreed donor and government policy goals and project objectives.

Within this aid framework, the project did not have a mandate to promote any specific pedagogical approach including LCP at the outset, although it engaged in pedagogical activities such as developing teaching skills and carrying out peer-to-peer teaching. Having worked on development projects in several African countries, one of the senior consultants understood how difficult it is to shift existing pedagogy to LCP:

> I don't care really what the pedagogy is as long as it happens [and] as long as learning takes place (effectively). […] There was a time when I was much more [like] 'you gotta have activity-based learning' etc., etc. But over the period, I've sort of learned that that's not that easy in places like Ghana and in Africa.

Instead of pedagogical reforms, initially the project primarily focused on promoting structural and institutional reform, as the consultant articulated:

> We were hoping to be a catalyst to help those Ghanaians who already saw the need to rebuild the [existing education] system. So, what we were trying to do is to shift it, push it towards … Can we get a curriculum that allows the colleges of education: (A) to have more autonomy over what they do; but (B) to focus much more on classroom practice really, or what a teacher does in a classroom and how they do it. Pedagogy will come later.

The strategy to achieve this objective involved restructuring and streamlining apex structures and creating a government-led steering group.

Making the project Ghanaian-led

To enable a wide range of institutional changes in the teacher education system in Ghana, the consultancy company stressed the necessity of working with the government of Ghana and its associated organisations. In doing so, the questions of who would take the policy leadership and how this would be achieved were a shared interest among

the stakeholders. However, some of the interview participants in Ghana expressed their discomfort with the unequal power balance often embedded within a typical aid structure. They contrasted this with the case project. Speaking of how development aid gets done in general, one of the Ghanaian interviewees noted:

> Looking at the way foreign and local people interact and my perception of them, I think that people come as outsiders. Their perception of the work they are doing is built upon what their mindset is. Because they come with the colonial mindset that [local] people know nothing, we have come in to teach them and give them something that we know. You make the biggest mistake. [Local] people have rich experiences, and in their locality, they have the knowledge and everything.

Another participant in Ghana indicated his agreement with the above quotation. Talking about how foreign workers are typically brought into aid projects, he described his view of the process:

> The tendency is for them [foreign development workers] to regard themselves as those who know it, and probably you believe that it is a foreign-directed programme, [but] we have to avoid that, because I think that we [Ghanaians] have experts in this [education reform]. I've had the opportunity over many years to work for the World Bank, the Canadian government, DFID [UK Department for International Development], USAID [United States Agency for International Development], you know … I've met with Ghanaians who are experts in their own right and who can be compared to any expert they bring from any part of the world. But unfortunately, we don't get ourselves organised, and because we also don't have the funding and the funding comes from them, when they are coming, they come with people they call 'experts' who sometimes know nothing and have to learn from us.

These narratives highlight the postcolonial struggle that local people may go through in carrying out externally funded projects. When the former coloniser senses the possibility of equalising their relations with the colonised, the former seeks to maintain supremacy over the latter (Bhabha 1994). Similar to what Powell (2001) illustrated based on funded TVET projects in Jamaica and the Gambia, typical aid projects offer little room for local involvement or control, which in turn results in the failure to achieve project objectives and in the unsustainability of the projects. Power differentials and the unidirectional flow of ideas seemed to be intensified through the aid to education from the viewpoint of local stakeholders.

In contrast to this conventional aid mechanism, however, the current case project had Ghanaian policy actors exercising decision-making power and spearheading the project implementation from its very beginning, while the foreign aid workers played more of a facilitative and supportive role. The project team leader, who led the whole team, and the lead advisor for policy reform and teacher standards were both Ghanaians. Several interviewees, regardless of their country of origin, highlighted the atypical feature of this particular project being led by Ghanaians, not by foreign expatriates. A development worker recalled that he faded away into the background as the project proceeded:

> I helped out a lot in the first year or two, but actually we have a team leader on the ground and the team on the ground – it's their job to implement the project and lead its direction. My job is to oversee that and give advice and support.

One Ghanaian interviewee was particularly well connected with and respected by Ministerial officials and various stakeholders on the ground. Instead of the aid workers having

interactions with them, it was this local individual who interacted, negotiated and led the project. Having worked in development programmes throughout his career, he had a lot of confidence in himself and respect for his Ghanaian colleagues, believing in what they could achieve technically with financial support from foreign aid:

> If you don't have the resources, you go to the person who has the resources. But I believe that in terms of technical capacity, we have people here in Ghana. [This] project made us believe that there are Ghanaians who are as competent or even more competent than any foreign expert that they bring in.
>
> This project may be funded by the [foreign] government, but for me it is a national programme. […] [W]hatever was intended from the beginning, we ended up doing a lot more than that. […] They were willing to support me, and then it became work between them and the Ministry, to support the Ministry to do what it intended to do.

This quote points to the interviewee's endeavour to challenge coloniser – colonised relationships embedded within ordinary development projects, and as one development worker suggested, the team leader was 'aware of and sensitive to anything that smacks of outsiders' feeling that they were arrogant enough to tell Ghana what to do'. The Ghanaian interviewee was enacting a postcolonial push against the power relations extant in a typical aid framework, and the current project seemed to create a space to enable this endeavour.

The feature of the reform project as Ghanaian-led was further highlighted by other international consultants. One aid worker, who worked closely with the Ghanaian team, suggested the emphasis be put on making the project locally led: 'I think one of the reasons why the [Ghanaian person] was leading the project from the outset was because the project wanted to be Ghanaian-led. It wanted to not be somebody rocking up from [our country], telling everybody what to do'. Another development worker, who had project responsibilities not only in Ghana but across West Africa, compared the current project with other foreign-funded projects he had worked on: 'I can't think of a similar example which has shown quite the same sort of steepness as the trajectory of the increase in aspiration, driven by national stakeholders'. The interviewee went on to underscore the feature of the project as being spearheaded by Ghanaians:

> One of the characteristics of [the project] that I think is really interesting is that, by far, the greatest proportion of the heavy lifting has all been done by Ghanaian team members on the one hand, consultants and counterparts and stakeholders in the colleges and universities [in Ghana on the other]. […] You saw it in the curriculum review. They were the ones who'd written everything, absolutely everything. They defined the frameworks, they defined the criteria for success, they defined the content.

With policy leadership taken by Ghanaians, this reform seemingly may have diverged from more traditional aid projects in that it attempted to challenge perpetuating power relationships between the funder and the recipient of aid as perceived by Ghanaians themselves. The project was initiated by locals at different stages of policy formulation, which is necessary to create a site of hybridity in aid projects (George and Lewis 2011). From the perspectives of both parties, the ownership of the project was in the hands of the local Ghanaians from the outset, which created a space where Ghanaian people were able to confront the exclusionary system (Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia 2006) and where hybridisation of policymaking could possibly happen (Bhabha 1994).

This feature of a locally led project continued and was reinforced when a new consultant was appointed to join the project halfway through its life cycle and steered it to further reduce the project management unit on the foreign side. He recalled the ambience within the project when he joined and the decision he took:

> [W]hen I joined, I made quite a few changes to the way that we were running the programme. It seemed to me that [the project] was being quite directive and was perceiving itself as a separate entity [… However,] it needed to be playing more of a facilitative role, and less a kind of command and control and more supporting the institutions that were there.

The first exercise this person undertook was to further remove international consultants working on the project, who had already been gradually reduced in the previous phases, to make sure that 'it's a Ghana-run team'. Another development worker corroborated this account while commending his newly appointed colleague for ensuring that the project was being steered by local policy actors:

> The proportion of international or external expertise was reasonably intensive at the beginning in a classical project mode, because we were trying to build capacity. But certainly under his leadership, we switched to almost no expatriate visits, almost. I can't even remember the last time I set foot in the country. I haven't needed to. Because there were Professor A and Professor B [on the ground], and we're just driving everything forward with [him] embedded in the Ministry and the Secretary and so on. So it really was very much their work, and I think that was very much appreciated. All credit to [him] for the kind of pushing through that management style. I think we played a facilitative role in making that way that we operate it, and you can see the result.

Consequently, the project was progressively mainstreamed and localised by strengthening and empowering government oversight and accountability measures.

LCP advancement through the project

Along with the above system change driven by Ghanaians, pedagogical reform – which was not the initial focus of the project – gradually gained momentum and impetus. This was part of an effort made by the Ghana-led team, and especially by those with ties to both Ghana and Western countries; they placed an emphasis on pedagogical reform espousing LCP tenets, while stressing the role of Ghanaians leading the reform.

A policy official working for one of the government organisations noted, '[The project itself] does not take the lead in the realisation of this [LCP] concept, because the realisation of this concept is supposed to be initiated by the colleges of education themselves'. According to another Ghanaian interviewee, LCP had become a national aspiration shared by a wide range of Ghanaian stakeholders. Talking about the way his colleagues looked at LCP, he said:

> We have developed a nationally accepted approach to the way teachers need to be trained. […] and I'm saying that we did this in a collaborative manner with all kinds of stakeholders, […] and it follows a national kind of aspiration. People from University A were part of it, University B, University C … all the universities are training teachers taken from that [learner-centred] view. Whoever trained teachers, they were part of that. We had teachers and the private sector people … you know, everybody. So we kind of went through a series of national consultations, where we consulted very widely and came up with this. So, we think that this is what is fit for Ghana and what we want for Ghana.

These accounts suggest that the local stakeholders spearheaded the integration of LCP in the reform on their terms. Within a space where a funded project envisaged locally led educational reform, Ghanaian policy officials and project staff, in consultation with other stakeholders, embraced the tenets of LCP. Here LCP policy transfer seemed to take a path distinctive from the conventional form of policy borrowing – where LCP is incorporated into funded projects from the beginning as a condition (Steiner-Khamsi 2012): It was the Ghanaian policymakers occupying the apex who espoused LCP concepts and pushed it forward through the current reform project. The funded project provided a space where hybridisation of pedagogical policy was stimulated, and local policy actors brought in LCP of their own accord.

However, whether genuine hybridisation occurred within this space remained an open question. Several Ghanaian interviewees explained LCP by drawing on examples from the West and referring to Western educationalists and philosophers. When asked where LCP theories originated, one Ghanaian interviewee referred to the Montessori approach, which 'has been built in learner-centred approach, where the kind of environment that had to be created for the learner to discover learning for himself or herself'. Another interviewee in Ghana similarly drew on theorists and philosophers in the West in describing the history of LCP:

> Learner-centred pedagogy placing learners at the forefront of teaching and learning has a very long history. I know the works that early educators have done, like Dewey, like Frobel, like Pestalozzi, and so on and so forth. All gave credit to the fact that learners are active beings or active agents who want to be given the opportunity, who will be able to create knowledge by themselves. And I think maybe later in the 60s, works like Vygotsky also start to give this way of teaching and boost the momentum, where you propose the social constructivist theory, which basically dealt with our focus on creating an environment, getting better environments that gave learners opportunity to create learners themselves, giving learners the opportunity to interact with other elements in the environment, so they can create knowledge. So, the efforts to promote learner-centred pedagogy had actually started a long, long, long, long, long time ago.

Where, then, did such conceptualisations of LCP come from? Many of these interviewees, who sat at the top of the policy pyramid, had ties with both Ghana and Western countries. According to one of the international aid workers:

> [These] Ghanaian educators had maybe studied in the [West] or taught in the [West] or been on master's programmes or PhD programmes. […] So there were strong links between the Ghanaian education sector and our country.

Another development worker elaborated how LCP might get into the policy space:

> [T]here are a lot of Ghanaians who believe in learner-centred education over the years. A lot of them have been to Western countries, done degrees, etc., etc. So there's a lot of people in Ghana […], who know a lot about education and will be pushing that [learner-centred education] within these committees.

Many of the Ghanaian officials and project staff we interviewed were educated in the West and had been exposed to LCP-related theories there. Three of them had gained their PhD degrees in Europe and two had studied in North America. In the post-PhD period, one worked as a teacher and another as a teacher trainer in the country where they obtained their doctorates. As one development worker observed, these Ghanaians have got 'dual

identities' within the space of education systems in Ghana and the West. Looking back at the history of education development in Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah also studied abroad in the US in the post-independence era. His engagement with US universities and institutions led Nkrumah to establish the higher education system in postcolonial Ghana while partly borrowing the model of training colleges in the US (Poloma and Szelényi 2019). In leading the education reform in present Ghana, those who sat at the top of the reform structure were also seemingly influenced by exposure to the education systems of the West; they embraced LCP concepts and practice while justifying it based on their experience of studying and working abroad.

One of the interviewees who obtained his PhD in North America remembered what he observed in a school there: in teaching how to sort their different kinds of garbage, children were tasked with classifying them at home, making a bar chart depending on the kinds of garbage and making a demonstration in the class. The interviewee questioned, 'So why is it that we don't engage our students [in Ghana] in the same way? They [the children in North America] were so excited about it. Why can't we do the same thing?' Another participant with a European PhD expounded his view on the differences in pedagogical emphases between the West and Ghana, while indicating his inclination towards the former. When asked whether he thinks his colleagues shared the ideals of LCP, he responded:

> Let me share my experience when I came back [to Ghana]. I thought that people saw the way I worked was different. I think I would say that my colleagues at the time did not really understand what it [LCP] meant. It was because of the way I had been trained in [Europe], and I've been trained in a way that could then make me express myself as a learner when I was a student [there]. And so, when I came back to Ghana, […] people saw my methodology as completely different. And my colleagues, you know, were actually into teacher-centred pedagogies [because] that was what they were exposed to. But I think, with time, people are changing, but I wouldn't say everybody has changed. I mean that people who still believe that, you know, the teacher must be in control and dictate. I mean there are cases where even some colleagues will actually take note, and I found that very strange when I first came into this country or when I came back from [Europe]. You would never ever hear this. But I'm sure that things have changed now because most colleagues have been involved in a number of projects, and so they are all becoming, to some extent, believing in learner-centred pedagogy.

These Ghanaian interviewees at the structural apex seemed to accept LCP as a Western pedagogical idea. In exchange for educational and cultural opportunities obtained by studying abroad, they adopted the ideals of LCP and encouraged its furtherance in Ghana. What is noteworthy is that this happened in the third space intended for local policy actors to lead the project who exercised their agency. What does this indicate about the policy borrowing of LCP embedded within educational assistance? We now consider the mechanism of LCP transfer in the global to local arena in Ghana.

Discussion

The focal project in this research set out to introduce a structural change into the teacher education system in Ghana. The project endeavoured to delink an existing colonial relationship within the aid architecture, and so it left the responsibility for decision-making and project implementation power in the hands of Ghanaians. Within a space

where the hybridisation of educational ideas between Ghana and the West could have occurred, LCP, which was not the initial focus of the project, gained momentum with the backing of Ghanaian stakeholders at the apex.

The policy transfer of LCP epitomised in this research was not instituted through conventional means, whereby international aid agencies advocate LCP as a universally effective pedagogy (à la UNESCO, UNICEF) in order, in part, to instil a particular ideology in the periphery (Guthrie 1990; Tabulawa 2003). Part of the problem with LCP policy transfer lies in development players' endorsement of this specific pedagogy as a 'universal panacea', without necessarily prioritising local meaning, political and economic settings, agencies and historical contingencies playing out and affecting each other. LCP has been criticised as a way for outside people to inculcate Western ideology and values, thus perpetuating coloniser – colonised relations through donor-funded projects (Guthrie 1990; Steiner-Khamsi 2012; Tabulawa 2003).

At the same time, culture is not static but fluid; relations and cultural exchanges in the globalised world can bring about forms of cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Tikly 2020), thus possibly leading to local people's adaptation of Western-originated pedagogy to some degree. It would seem too simplistic to reject local people's support of LCP merely because LCP originates in the West. In particular, the current project handed over policy leadership and project responsibility to Ghanaian policymakers and policy actors who decided on the direction and implementation of the project, and it was these Ghanaians who accepted and advocated for LCP in their own terms.

The third space of enunciation created within the project nonetheless did not seem to lead to a hybridisation of pedagogical ideas. The narratives obtained in this research indicate that while it was the Ghanaians themselves who led the reform, including the promotion of LCP, the conceptual basis of the reform was dependent on their knowledge and experiences, which they gained in the West. This is in contrast with the transnational higher education interactions brought about by Nkrumah, who called for 'correlation between African culture and that of Western world' (1943, 38 cited in Poloma and Szelényi 2019, 645). Critical of adopting US higher education models, Nkrumah aspired to the Africanisation of higher education and integrated indigenous values, cultures and history into the curricula (Poloma and Szelényi 2019).

Conversely, the Ghanaian participants in this study seemed to embrace LCP concepts without necessarily being critical of those concepts when endorsing them. Hybridisation of pedagogies does not seem to have come to fruition yet, as the elite Ghanaians brought back the tenets of LCP from the West without much adaptation of local values and traditions. In this regard, the postcolonial turn through hybridisation (Cottrell, Preston, and Pearce 2012) of indigenous and Western pedagogies was not observed during this research.

George and Lewis (2011) claimed that for externally funded projects to become a third space for enunciation, genuine collaboration between local and international partners must take place at various stages of the policy cycle, from the problem identification and conceptualisation phase through to the evaluation phase. This study focused only on the policy formation and conceptualisation stages; it did not pay attention to the processes of actualising LCP in the classroom or of engaging with other educational stakeholders in the process (i.e. teachers, parents, students). It is at this stage that hybridity may happen by incorporating local values and traditions into the Western-originated

form of LCP. This could then create a Ghanaian version of LCP based on the flexible approach to LCP definitions (Bremner 2021). The investigation into the experiences and desires of other local stakeholders is necessary to determine if, and in what forms, LCP-related approaches might be locally appropriate in the search for a best practice that is not universal but unique to a specific context.

Conclusion

This article investigated how the agency of policy actors embodied itself in an educational aid project advancing LCP in Ghana. Interview accounts from Ghanaian policy actors and foreign aid workers suggested the local policy actors adopted LCP principles on their own terms. Although a third space for enunciation was seemingly created within the reform project, the cultural hybridity of Ghanaian and Western pedagogies did not seem to come to fruition. A nuanced understanding of the process of LCP implementation and aid projects is necessary when considering the postcolonial relationships within the pedagogical aid mechanism, especially where a periphery country is negotiating its own trajectory away from postcoloniality and breaking old mechanisms of external control.

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