Special Issue on Scientization of International Educational Development

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Editorial Introduction

Academic and development literature (e.g., Carnoy, 1999; Castells, 2000; Gibbons et al., 1994; Knorr Cetina, 2007; Krishnan, 2006; Meyer, 2009, 2010; OECD, 1996; UNESCO, 2005; World Bank, 2002) claim that the contemporary world society is a knowledge society engaged in the significant production, dissemination, and translation (application) of scientific knowledge. This discourse of the knowledge society is often discussed in relation to intellectual or knowledge globalization, which is considered the core of socio-cultural, economic, and political globalization (Krishnan, 2006). *Knowledge* has thus become "the most important factor… critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards" (World Bank, 2002, p. 7). Consequently, governments and other development partners worldwide seem to heavily invest in scientific research and development.

However, there are issues associated with this notion of a global knowledge society. It implicates that the world society gives special currency to knowledge only since recently. Arguably, "since ancient times, all societies have probably been, each in its own way, knowledge societies" (UNESCO, 2005, p.17). Societies having their own (local) knowledge systems and mechanisms of its dissemination and transfer might have existed for centuries. The Abyssinian now Ethiopian, Aztec, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Incan, Mayan, Persian, and Roman ancient civilizations could be considered as case examples. The exact historical marker when societies start to be knowledge societies is thus tenuous.

Moreover, invoking the already dominant thoughts associated with modernity and modernization to characterize and justify the discourse of the knowledge society seems problematic. A Western conception of knowledge and its production can contribute to sustaining the already existing 'epistemic divide' between the West and the rest of the world. What is science or knowledge? What are the most authoritative methods to produce and

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disseminate scientific knowledge? Whose knowledge counts most in the end and why? These are some of the epistemological questions one could raise about the saliency and fidelity of scientific knowledge, its production, and global transfer. Discourses such as knowledge society could also be considered as powerful mechanisms the global uses to transfer policy regimes to the local or the national (Robertson, 2012). In this sense, the very notion of knowledge society could be used as an instrument for justifying and then transferring at scale Western cultural ideals. Regardless of these and possibly other conceptual challenges, the term knowledge society is widely used in the literature, leaving the impression that organizational competitiveness and legitimacy heavily rely on the sustained production, dissemination, and translation of scientific knowledge.

As vital parts of knowledge societies, international organizations, including multilateral or intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (IOs) position themselves as an alternative and sometimes competing sites of knowledge production to the traditional sites such as universities (Bekele et al., 2021; Broome et al., 2018; Meyer, 2009, 2010; Rautalin et al., 2021; Zapp, 2017, 2020). They increasingly use "the authority of science as the *primary* source of legitimacy – and even survival – in an increasingly crowded and competitive field of global education governance" (Zapp, 2020, p. 1). Particularly, the OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank are becoming significant sites for the production, global transfer, and translation of scientific knowledge to policy ideas and tools. Their scientization efforts coupled with their financial and cultural capital seem to put IOs at the helm of global governance and international development.

However, our understanding of scientization in IOs is as limited as it is fuzzy. Much of the available scholarship seems to focus on examining the topic taking into consideration a few multilateral organizations such as the OECD, the UNESCO, and the World Bank as the units of analysis. Studies on these organizations seem to mainly focus on their research productivity as indicated by their publications in in-house and international outlets. Our understanding of the processes and indicators of scientization in IOs as linked to policy and practice is thus limited. Further theoretical, conceptual, and empirical studies that examine scientization in other IOs having educational mandates are yet to gain momentum (Bekele et al., 2021; Niemann, 2018; Zapp, 2020).

This Special Issue of the Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE) aspires to extend our understanding of scientization in IOs. It explores how and why IOs, in their attempt to contribute to educational development in the Global South, are engaged in the significant production and application of scientific knowledge. The goal is not to create consensus as such but to unravel the possible opportunities and complexities linked to global epistemic governance in education.

The Special Issue's contribution to comparative education scholarship on global governance and scientization lies both in its approach and substantive focus areas. The five studies included in the Special Issue interrogated scientization from varied vantage points and used varied methodologies. Both conceptual and empirical studies are included for problematizing scientization at the global level and drawing on Nordic perspectives and experiences of planning, implementing, and evaluating scientized intervention programs in select countries in the Global South. This global-regional-national level of analysis involving conceptual and empirical dimensions supports the mapping of the conceptual features of scientization and the

identification of associated issues. The studies overall aspire to deepen our understanding of the rationales behind scientization, the strategies used for its dissemination and application, and indicators used to assess it.

Two of the studies included in the Special Issue are conceptually driven, examining why and how IOs engage in scientization. The study, *Problematizing scientization in international organizations,* mapped out the conceptual contours of scientization. Drawing on literature and institutional theories, it problematized scientization and proposed a generic and holistic conceptual framework. The study indicated that scientization is multipurpose; it is employed to boost organizational credibility, legitimacy, and impact worldwide. To trigger further discussion, the framework also identified components and indicators of scientization in IOs.

Drawing on the global-local problematique in globalization and Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) discourse, Kabanda Mwansa and Florian Kiuppis maintained that scientization is primarily a Western construction. They argued that most of the "SDP programs and ways of implementing them have been conceptualized in the Global North, to be implemented in the Global South". This consolidates arguments linked to epistemic domination or epistemic hegemony by the West.

Overall, the two conceptual studies provided a global overview of scientization, problematizing its rationales, strategies, components, indicators, and associated issues. They also provided conceptual scaffolds to the empirical studies that examined the practice of scientization linked to international educational development programs implemented in Ethiopia, Cambodia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

The empirical studies explored how international and Nordic-based organizations are engaged in the scientization of educational development in the mentioned countries. These studies interrogated the scientized process of creating intervention programs in basic and higher education and their observed impacts. Alebachew Kemisso Haybano and colleagues studied how a Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)-sponsored project contributed to the establishment of a center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies and its doctoral program in Comparative and International Education at the Addis Ababa University (AAU), Ethiopia. Stockholm University and lately the University of Gothenburg partnered with AAU to implement the project. The study explored how a North-South nexus could be conceived and nurtured for ensuring impact at various levels. The authors underscored "the importance of expanding Southern knowledge in education and the need for further reflection on the geopolitics of knowledge in research capacity development cooperation".

As discussed in the first study of this Special Issue, conducting and sponsoring research, and developing indicators or benchmarks are some of the indicators of scientization in IOs. Cameron Ryall and Lisa Zook examined how Save the Children International (SCI) developed a holistic approach for improving learning, wellbeing, and child development. Drawing on literature and international reform initiatives, SCI developed what is called the Quality Learning Environment (QLE) framework with its four guiding principles and 28 indicators to assess quality education. Save the Children Norway (SCN) appropriated this framework to inform and support research and programming in Cambodia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. This study explored not only how and why SCI and SCN were engaged in scientizing educational development in the Global South but also identified tensions and issues observed along the way.

Lisa Zook and Cameron Ryall analyzed the effectiveness and impact of the SCN intervention program called *I'm Learning!*. The focus was on how the QLE supported locally relevant intervention programming in basic education in Cambodia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, the study analyzed project impact and achievements linked to literacy, numeracy, and child development- using life skills as its proxies. It also discussed issues and tensions linked to applying a global education quality framework, developed by SCI and SCN, to support locally driven solutions in the Global South. As it discussed opportunities, issues, and tensions between Western conceptions and Southern realities, this study contributed to the existing comparative education scholarship on the interlinkages between the global and the local.

Overall, scientization in IOs is a complex but interesting and significant research area within comparative and international education. The contribution of this Special Issue lies in its identification and interrogation of core conceptual and methodological features of scientization and associated challenges. It also problematizes how Northern (Norway and Sweden) and Southern (Ethiopia, Cambodia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) development partnerships use scientization as a vital strategy for impact and organizational legitimacy and credibility. To further deepen our understanding, theoretical frameworks that explain the processes and outcomes of scientization across organizational types and contexts are needed. Further studies that explore the intersection of power and scientization, scientization and quality assurance mechanisms and views and experiences of stakeholders about scientized development programs are warranted.

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