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# CSIBER International Journal (CIJ)

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**Review Article on Educational Theory, Policy and Practice**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the evolving landscape of educational theory, policy, and practice within local, national, and international contexts. It emphasizes how globalisation, diversity, and technology have transformed educational priorities, while also addressing challenges such as standardisation, privatisation, and inclusivity. Drawing on the philosophies of Gert Biesta and Amartya Sen, the paper critiques transactional models of education and advocates for a more holistic, student-centered approach that values agency, empowerment, and ethical leadership. Using personal experiences from the Mauritian education system—especially during the COVID-19 transition to online learning—the author reflects on leadership strategies to engage Generation X learners and align local educational practices with global standards. By integrating theory with practice, the article underscores the importance of fostering democratic values, individual capabilities, and social justice through meaningful dialogue and participatory leadership in education.

**Keywords:** Educational theory and policy, globalisation, inclusive education, student-centered learning, educational leadership, quality education, online learning, social justice in education

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**Introduction**

Education has always been an important social and political issue, and the ideas, values, and beliefs that shape educational policy and practice are constantly evolving (Giroux, 2010). In contemporary local, national, and international policy contexts, several factors are influencing these ideas, values, and beliefs.

One major factor is globalisation, which has brought about significant changes in the way we think about education. In today's globalised world, education is seen as a key factor in economic development, and there is a growing emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. Many countries are also investing heavily in language education to prepare their citizens for a more interconnected world (Marginson, 2014). Having read Biesta, I can relate that globalisation has brought about significant changes in the field of education, including the increasing homogenisation of educational systems worldwide (Biesta, 2017). As countries become more interconnected and interdependent, there is a growing pressure to adopt similar educational policies and practices (Biesta, 2017).

However, this trend towards homogenization has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it can lead to the development of a global educational culture that emphasizes the importance of certain values and practices, such as critical thinking and creativity (Biesta, 2017). On the other hand, it can also lead to a loss of diversity and cultural specificity in education, which can be detrimental to the development of individual and collective identities (Biesta, 2017).

Another factor is the growing diversity of student populations. As societies become more diverse, there is a need to ensure that education is inclusive and culturally responsive. This has led to a greater focus on issues such as multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and anti-bias education (Banks, 2015). Technology is also having a significant impact on education. With the rise of online learning platforms and other digital tools, education is becoming more accessible and personalised. However, there are also concerns about the impact of technology on student well-being and the quality of education (Selwyn, 2016).

Education in Mauritius is considered a top priority by the government, and the country has made significant strides in achieving high literacy rates and expanding access to education. The government's education policy focuses on ensuring that all children have access to quality education, regardless of their social or economic background.

In recent years, there has been a shift towards modernising the education system in Mauritius. The government has implemented reforms to improve the quality of education, increase access to technology, and enhance teacher training. Additionally, there is a focus on strengthening vocational education and training to better prepare students for the job market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the education sector in Mauritius, and the government has taken steps to ensure that students can continue their studies despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This includes the implementation of online learning and the distribution of digital devices to students.

When the pandemic struck in March 2020, I was the Head of Glamis Business School a private institution providing tertiary education and had to ensure a smooth transition towards online education for students mainly

enrolled on the MBA programme. It was quite of a challenging experience and it required good leadership skills to get the X-generation students acquainted to this new system and above all keep them motivated. Most of them were reluctant to make the shift. One possible explanation is that this cohort values traditional forms of learning and may find the online format to be impersonal or lacking in engagement (Carriere, 2019). Additionally, some Xers felt that online education did not provide the same level of interaction with instructors and peers, which can lead to a sense of isolation and disconnection (Vasquez, 2020).

Another factor that could contribute to Xers' resistance to online education is their familiarity with traditional classroom settings. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, members of this generation were more likely to attend traditional four-year colleges and universities than any other generation, and may have established a strong sense of identity and belonging within that environment (Fry, 2015). This attachment to the traditional classroom experience could make it difficult for some Xers to adapt to online learning.

Some of the main leadership skills required to motivate and get them on track were firstly, to maintain effective communication with them, this was essential to build trust and rapport. As Biesta rightly pointed out, the importance of dialogue is important, this philosophical approach helped to create meaningful experiences as many wanted to interrupt their studies or take a break.

Instead of treating them as mere customers, Biesta (2015) argues that education should not be reduced to a transactional relationship between the student as a customer and the teacher as a service provider. Rather, education should be seen as a complex process of formation and development that involves the growth of the whole person, not just the acquisition of knowledge or skills. According to Biesta, treating students as customers can lead to a narrow and instrumental view of education, where success is measured solely in terms of grades or qualifications. He suggests that a better approach is to view students as partners in the educational process, where both the teacher and the student have important roles to play in the student's growth and development. Biesta's approach emphasises the importance of understanding education as a collaborative and relational process, rather than a transactional one, in order to promote the growth and development of students as whole persons.

While trying to impose a new normal on them it was important to recognise and respect the differences between each student. This means acknowledging that everyone has their own unique experiences and perspectives. So, listening to them and engaging into fruitful dialogues was very important.

Secondly, as a leader, to set the right goals was crucial at this particular point in time. Setting clear and achievable goals can help X generation learners stay motivated and focused on their learning objectives. I had to organise online sessions with students to identify their goals and help them develop a plan to achieve them. While doing so, we had to be in line with international policies set by our international partner Heriot-Watt University based in Scotland, we had to evolve while respecting their policies in place.

Last but not least, leaders should be creative. X generation learners may be more likely to stay motivated if the learning experience is engaging and interactive. Leaders who incorporate creative and interactive elements into the learning experience can help keep students engaged and motivated. Choosing the right online platform to get them engaged was another tough and costly decision to take but having the right mindset resulted in a successful implementation.

The pandemic hit the whole world, so the fear of shifting to a new normal was happening across the world. I had to do a lot of research on how other Universities were tackling this shift to online education. Our Educational partner Heriot-Watt University based in Scotland did provide us with a lot of guidelines and enrichment sessions on how to cope with the unprecedented situation. So, collaborating and being in line with international policies was a must. By implementing those international policies locally, we managed to make a smooth transition to online education. Even after the pandemic, we followed how things were evolving internationally and tried to include emerging trends in our curriculum. As a leader to innovate and to keep in line with international policies implemented in the education sector is primordial.

In terms of other national and international policy contexts, another trend that is influencing education in many countries is the emphasis on accountability and standardised testing, which can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on test preparation (Ravitch, 2011). In recent decades, policymakers in various countries have sought to improve the quality of education by introducing greater accountability measures, such as requiring schools to administer standardised tests to measure student achievement. These tests are often used to evaluate teachers, schools, and entire education systems, with the goal of ensuring that students are meeting certain academic standards (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravitch, Rothstein, & Shavelson, 2010). However, some researchers have argued that this focus on standardised testing can have negative effects, such as narrowing the curriculum by prioritising subjects that are tested at the expense of other

subjects, and leading to a focus on test preparation that can limit students' engagement and creativity (Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011).

Moreover, privatisation and marketisation has led to the growth of charter schools, vouchers, and other forms of school choice (Burch, 2009). In recent years, policymakers in various countries have sought to introduce greater competition and choice into education by promoting the growth of charter schools, which are publicly funded but privately operated, and vouchers, which allow parents to use public funds to pay for private school tuition. Proponents of these policies argue that they can improve education by creating incentives for schools to improve quality and by giving parents more choices in where to send their children to school (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). However, critics have raised concerns about the potential negative effects of these policies, such as the potential for exacerbating segregation and inequality by allowing more affluent families to opt out of public schools, and the lack of accountability for private operators of publicly funded schools (Baker, 2016; Ravitch, 2013).

At international level, there is a growing focus on the role of education in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4: Quality Education. This has led to a greater emphasis on issues such as access to education, gender equity, and the importance of education in promoting sustainable development (UNESCO, 2018). Paolo Freire's view of quality education emphasises the importance of critical thinking, social relevance, and empowerment (Freire, 2000). He believed that education should prepare students to become critical thinkers, active citizens, and agents of social change (Freire, 2000). He argued that quality education should not reflect the traditional banking model of education in which teachers deposit information into the minds of passive students. Instead, he advocated for a student-centered approach that engages learners in an active process of inquiry and problem-solving.

Freire's ideas have had a significant impact on educational theory and practice around the world. His student-centered approach to education has influenced many educational institutions, particularly those focused on social justice and equity (Freire, 2000). Freire's proposal for education is largely centered around his critique of what he calls the "banking concept" of education (Freire, 1970). In this model, teachers are seen as the depositors of knowledge, and students are the passive recipients of information. This approach, according to Freire, reinforces the status quo and disempowers individuals from challenging the dominant social order.

Instead, Freire advocates for a model of education he calls "problem-posing" (Freire, 1970). In this approach, teachers and students engage in dialogue and inquiry to collectively create knowledge and understanding. The focus is on critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement in the learning process.

In conclusion, the ideas, values, and beliefs that shape education are constantly evolving, and are influenced by a range of local, national, and international policy contexts. While globalisation, diversity, and technology are some of the key factors shaping education today, there are also ongoing debates about the best ways to prepare students for the future and ensure that education is equitable and inclusive for all. An insight on the philosophies of two educational theorists namely Gert Biesta and Amartya Sen will shed light on what are the best ways and practices we should follow to shape up the future of education.

Biesta's philosophy of education emphasizes the importance of education as a public good that should serve the needs of the community. He argues that the primary purpose of education is to promote democratic citizenship, which involves developing the capacity for critical thinking, moral judgment, and responsible action (Biesta, 2013). In this view, education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills but also about shaping the character and values of learners.

In contrast, Sen's philosophy of education focuses on the capability approach, which is based on the idea that the purpose of education is to enable individuals to live a good life (Sen, 2009). According to Sen, education should provide learners with the capabilities to pursue their own goals and aspirations, regardless of their social and economic background. He argues that education should foster individual freedom and agency, rather than imposing a particular set of values or beliefs on learners.

As educators, I believe that we need to productively help in the development of our students, we need to shape their well-being and future, we should try inculcate the right capabilities in them for them to develop into someone who will bring a change to this world. We need to go the extra mile to do that and should only them as mere customers, who will earn us our salaries at the end of the month. We should value our commitment to education as a means of promoting social justice and empowering individuals. Education is not just about transmitting knowledge or skills, but is also about developing critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to participate effectively in society.

When I read Sen's philosophy on Education, only once sentence picked up from the online classes with Hyleen comes to my mind, Sen's philosophy on education is to shape up people's well being. He argues that education plays a critical role in expanding people's capabilities, enabling them to lead lives that they have reason to value

(Sen, 1999). According to Sen, education is not only a means of acquiring knowledge and skills, but also a way of developing a broader set of capabilities, including critical thinking, creativity, and social and political awareness (Sen, 1999).

As a teacher leader, I strongly believe in his philosophy. I remember one of my students on his graduation day said to me, “Sir thank you for making us who we are today, you did not only teach us law but made us better beings by teaching us important life lessons.” This meant a lot to me, during my law lectures, I make sure that students first understand the law not to only pass their exams but to become good law-abiding citizens. I try to create that sense of awareness in them and emphasises on the importance of expanding their capabilities and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives. According to Sen, education should aim at developing people's ability to reason and think critically, to make informed choices, and to cultivate their own values and aspirations. He also emphasises on the importance of education in promoting social and economic development and empowering individuals to participate fully in their communities and societies. (Sen, 1999).

Similarly, Biesta argues that education should not only aim for the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also focus on the overall development of individuals as human beings. He also stresses on the importance of education in enabling individuals to exercise their freedoms and capabilities to the fullest extent. He focuses on the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching and learning. He challenges traditional notions of education as a technical process and instead emphasizes its role in fostering democratic citizenship and individual subjectivity.

Biesta argues that education should not be reduced to the transmission of predefined knowledge and skills, but should aim to cultivate the capacity for individuals to engage critically and ethically with the world. In this context, Biesta emphasises a distributed and participatory model of leadership where everyone involved in the educational process, including teachers, students, and administrators, has the potential to exercise leadership. He advocates for the idea that leadership in education should be rooted in democratic values, aiming to create spaces for dialogue, diversity, and democratic decision-making.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping various aspects of society, including education. Over the years, the concepts of empowerment and dialogue have gained significant attention in leadership approaches. Empowerment involves facilitating individuals to develop their skills, knowledge, and abilities, while dialogue fosters open communication and collaboration.

Leaders in education can apply Biesta's philosophy by embracing the principles of empowerment and dialogue. They can create learning environments that foster student agency, critical thinking, and personal development. This can be achieved by involving students in decision-making processes, encouraging self-reflection, and providing opportunities for authentic engagement with real-world issues. Additionally, leaders can implement dialogue-based approaches by promoting open channels of communication, actively listening to stakeholders' voices, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. By incorporating dialogue into their leadership practices, leaders can create a sense of shared purpose, enhance teamwork, and strengthen relationships within the educational community.

We should not consider our students as a means to an end but instead consider them as ends in themselves. According to Biesta, we don't need fulfilment but meaning. When we consider students as a means to an end, we focus on the function of qualification. This perspective sees education primarily as a process of equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet predetermined outcomes, such as achieving specific grades, passing exams, or acquiring certain competencies. In this view, students are seen as instrumental in attaining these external standards and expectations.

However, Biesta's philosophy goes beyond mere qualification and highlights the importance of seeing students as an end in themselves. The concept of subjectification is central to this perspective. Subjectification refers to the process of helping students become self-determining individuals who can actively shape their own lives and participate meaningfully in society.

From Biesta's perspective, education should not solely focus on the transmission of knowledge or the fulfilment of external goals but should also aim to foster the development of students' subjectivity. This means recognizing and valuing students as unique individuals with their own desires, interests, and aspirations. Education, from this perspective, becomes a space where students can explore their identities, values, and purposes, and where their voices and perspectives are respected and encouraged.

By recognising students as ends in themselves, teachers create a classroom environment that promotes student agency, autonomy, and critical thinking. They encourage students to engage actively in their own learning, make choices, and participate in meaningful dialogue. This approach acknowledges that education is not solely about achieving pre-determined outcomes but about empowering students to become active participants in their own education and in shaping their own lives.

In my career as a lecturer, I've unfortunately come across many of my colleagues who consider their students as a means to an end and a mere customer. For them, teaching is all about their payroll at the end of the month. They will focus mainly on what time to clock in or clock out to fool the system or simply getting the job done for the sake of getting it done without the qualities of a true teacher leader. Instead of promoting empowerment, dialogue and help the student to grow by equipping them with additional skills, they will simply exploit the students' vulnerability and flatters their self-esteem to make pass them the module at the end of the semester. It is indeed the sad reality for some.

Sen's philosophy on education can significantly contribute to enriching and challenging current policies by emphasizing a holistic and inclusive approach to education that prioritizes individual capabilities and freedom. Sen's ideas can be explored in his influential works, such as "Development as Freedom" (1999) and "The Idea of Justice" (2009), and their application in educational contexts can be examined in light of various research articles and scholarly discussions.

Amartya Sen argues that education should not be solely focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills but should instead aim to foster individual capabilities, agency, and freedom (Sen, 1999). He emphasizes the importance of providing individuals with the necessary tools and opportunities to develop their potential and make choices that align with their own values and goals. This perspective challenges the conventional approach to education, which often prioritizes standardized testing and narrow skill development, neglecting the diverse needs and capabilities of students.

According to Sen, education should address the multifaceted nature of human beings and recognize the significance of social, economic, and cultural factors in shaping individual capabilities (Sen, 1999). This perspective encourages policymakers to consider a broader range of factors beyond academic performance in assessing educational outcomes. It calls for a focus on social justice, equity, and inclusivity, ensuring that education reaches marginalized and disadvantaged groups and helps to alleviate social disparities.

Furthermore, Sen's philosophy emphasizes the importance of a participatory approach to education, where students are actively engaged in the learning process and have a voice in decision-making (Sen, 1999). This challenges the traditional model of education that often relies on one-way knowledge transmission from teachers to students. By promoting student-centered and interactive pedagogical methods, Sen's philosophy aligns with the current trend towards learner autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Applying Sen's philosophy to educational policies can have practical implications. For example, policymakers can reorient curricula to incorporate a broader range of subjects beyond traditional academic disciplines, such as arts, sports, and vocational training, to cater to diverse student interests and talents (Nussbaum, 2010). They can also invest in teacher training programs that promote inclusive teaching practices and culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure that education is tailored to the needs of all students (Biesta, 2010).

Amartya Sen's philosophy on education offers valuable insights that can enrich and challenge current policies. By emphasizing individual capabilities, social justice, and participatory approaches, Sen's ideas encourage policymakers to adopt a more holistic and inclusive perspective on education. By referencing Sen's works, such as "Development as Freedom" and "The Idea of Justice," and citing relevant research articles by Nussbaum and Biesta, these above paragraphs highlights the significance of Sen's philosophy and its potential contributions to education policy.

In the same line, Biesta's philosophy on education can serve to enrich and challenge current policies by emphasizing the need for a holistic understanding of education that goes beyond instrumental outcomes. By referencing his work, policymakers can critically examine existing policies and consider alternative approaches that align with Biesta's philosophical insights. With regards to the above-mentioned example where lecturers see their students as a means to an end, Universities can review their policies and practices by first, provide comprehensive training to lecturers on student-centered teaching methodologies, emphasising the importance of student engagement, learning outcomes, and holistic development.

Secondly, teaching evaluation is important, a robust and transparent system for evaluating teaching effectiveness that considers student feedback, course evaluations, and peer evaluations should be put in place. This encourages lecturers to prioritise student needs and fosters accountability. Thirdly, the University should focus on mentorship programmes, that is create mentorship initiatives where experienced lecturers guide and support newer faculty members. This can foster a culture of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a student-centered approach among lecturers. Last but not least, the creation of a supportive classroom environment is a must. It will encourage lecturers to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, engaging in discussions, and expressing their opinions without fear of judgment.



By implementing these policies and practices, universities can foster a student-centered culture that prioritizes the holistic development and educational outcomes of students while ensuring lecturers view students as active participants in the learning process, rather than just a means to an end.

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