

# The Clusters of Excellence in Malaysia: A Case Study of Educational Policy and Practice



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## Abstract

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In the past two decades, nations worldwide have been involved in active education reform efforts. In East Asia, many of these efforts are aimed at increasing economic competitiveness by enhancing the quality of education. In doing so, education systems often look to comparative and international experience for guidance and inspiration. Since Vision 2020 was launched in Malaysia in the 1990s, education reform has been a key component in efforts to ensure that the nation stays competitive, and achieves the target of becoming a regional hub for high quality education and economic creativity by the year 2020. In 2006, the Malaysian government prepared an education ‘blueprint’ known as the Education Development Master Plan (EDMP) 2006-2010. One of the core strategies in the EDMP is to accelerate the improvement of educational institutions by forming clusters of excellence among schools so that they become models and benchmarks for others to learn from. Schools in these clusters of excellence are given a degree of guided autonomy through the implementation of school-based management (SBM) to help them achieve and maintain excellence in niche areas such as mathematics, cultural activities and sports.

The research reported here documents the origins, and development of the Clusters of Excellence Policy (CoEP) first introduced in 2007, and provides an analysis of the policy and the initial experience of implementation in practice. This is carried out in the light of the comparative literature relating to international education policy transfer and borrowing, Fullan’s (2007) model of factors affecting policy implementation, and detailed qualitative case study of four CoEP schools. The latter consist of a remote rural school, an aboriginal school, a ‘smart’ school and a typical daily suburban school. At the national level, an analysis of related policy document is carried out, along with in-depth qualitative interviews with key personnel involved in the development of the policy.

The findings indicate that the CoEP has been developed in the light of international experience with models of school clusters, decentralisation initiatives, and school-based management projects elsewhere. However, the project has been carefully developed to fit the Malaysian contexts, to meet national needs and to be consistent with the nation’s guiding philosophy. Conclusions identify the successes that have been achieved, at the same time as they highlight a number of challenges that have been experienced during implementation at the school level. Implications of the study are considered in relation to the case-study schools; to the on-going development of the CoEP; for broader education policy and practice in Malaysia; for the related international literature; and for future research.



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## Abbreviations

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ABRSM	The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BN	<i>Barisan Nasional</i> (National Front/Coalition)
CAT	Common Admission Test
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CoEP	Clusters of Excellence Policy
CSS	Case-study School
DANIDA	Danish International Development Assistance
DAP	Democratic Action Party (Malaysia)
DEO	District Education Office
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (United Kingdom)
DfID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
EDMP	Education Development Master Plan
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Educational Management Information System (Malaysia)
EPRD	Education Planning and Research Division (Malaysia)
EPU	Economic Planning Unit (Malaysia)
ETeMS	English in Teaching Mathematics and Science
EU	European Union
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority (Malaysia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GSoE	Graduate School of Education (University of Bristol, UK)
HPS	High Performing School
IAB	<i>Institut Aminuddin Baki</i> (The National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership, Malaysia)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IJED	International Journal of Educational Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOs	International Organisations
JHEOA	<i>Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli</i> (Department of Aborigines Affairs)
JOA	<i>Jabatan Orang Asli</i> (Department of Aborigines)
KBSM	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah</i> (Integrated Secondary Curriculum)
KBSR	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah</i> (Integrated Primary Curriculum)
LCCI	The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MoEM	Ministry of Education Malaysia
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia)
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
NIC	Newly Industrialised Country
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation

NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAS	<i>Parti Islam Se-Malaysia</i> (The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PEMANDU	Performance Management and Delivery Unit, a unit under the Prime Minister's Department which oversees the implementation of national policies
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PKR	<i>Parti Keadilan Rakyat</i> (People's Justice Party)
PMR	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> (Lower Secondary Assessment)
PR	<i>Pakatan Rakyat</i> (People's Alliance)
RFP	Request-for Proposal
RIM	Recording Industry Association of Malaysia
RM	<i>Ringgit Malaysia</i> , is the official currency of Malaysia
RMT	<i>Rancangan Makanan Tambahan</i> (Supplementary Food Programme)
RSESD	Residential Schools and Excellent Schools Division (Malaysia)
SBM	School-based Management
SED	State Education Department
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
SIQAD	School Inspectorate and Quality Assurance Division (Malaysia)
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Certificate of Education—MCE)
SRP	<i>Sijil Rendah Pelajaran</i> (Lower Certificate of Education—LCE)
STPM	<i>Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Higher School Certificate—HSC)
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TOR	Term of Reference
TSLN	Teaching Schools Learning Nation (Singapore)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPSR	<i>Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah</i> (Primary School Assessment Test)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	U.S. Dollar or the American Dollar is the official currency of the United States of America. The value used in this dissertation is based on an approximate currency exchange rate as published on 1 January 2013.

# Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

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## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study. It begins with the focus of the investigation before presenting the rationale for the research. This is followed by the research aims and objectives, an overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology and an outline for the structure of the dissertation.

## 1.2 Focus of the Study

Malaysia has a bold vision. By the year 2020, it aspires to become a fully developed—economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally—and industrialised nation based on its own mould (Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia, 2009). Towards this end, in the late 1990s Malaysia began to make the transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based one (Aida Suraya, 2001). To ensure that Malaysia meets all the nine challenges of Vision 2020 (Appendix 1), the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoEM) acknowledges the need to further improve the quality of education of the nation (Lee, 1999; Aida Suraya, 2001; MoEM, 2009; Shahril, Norfizah Hayati & Muhammad Faizal, 2009). Hence, the Malaysian education system has gone through a series of major changes. These changes involve a range of policies on issues such as the language of instruction, curriculum, school types, education philosophy and teacher training. One of the most recent of these innovations is the establishment of *sekolah kluster kecemerlangan* (clusters of excellent schools) to “accelerate excellence in educational institutions by building on niche areas in academic disciplines, co-curriculum<sup>1</sup> and sports” (MoEM, 2009, p. 50). In other words, schools within the Clusters of Excellence will be accorded with guided autonomy through the implementation of school-based management (SBM) to help them achieve and maintain excellence in their niche areas. This is referred to as the Clusters of Excellence Policy (CoEP). This dissertation focuses on an analysis of the nature, scope and likely impact of this policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In Malaysia, *co-curriculum* refers to extra-curricular activities in schools.

## 1.3 Rationale for the Study

### 1.3.1 General Rationale



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Education has been recognised as a cornerstone of economic and social development (Haddad, Carnoy, Rinaldi & Regel, 1990). In recent years it has been a major focus of government policy in many countries (Levin, 2001, p. 1). Levin (2001) argues that since education is also intended to serve other social purposes, so ideas about education will change as ideas about those other purposes change. For instance, since the 1980s, globalisation, marketization and quality/efficiency driven reforms around the world have resulted in structural and qualitative changes in education and policy (Zajda, 2010). This has also given rise to new perspectives on the purposes of education, which traditionally have been nation building and cultural incorporation. The dominance of human capital theory which provides a strong argument for more education as a key factor in fuelling economic growth has influenced policy-makers around the world into moving education to the centre stage of ensuring economic survival and the growth of nation states (Levin, 2001; Spreen, 2001).



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Policy shifts influenced by these global trends can be seen across the world. More recently, these reform efforts can also be seen as the result of direct or indirect influence from external or international organisations (IOs). Traditionally education policy has been strongly connected to the nation states as part of domestic public politics. In recent years new developments in the international sphere have challenged this notion. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Study and the Bologna Process, for example, are shaping national education systems (Nagel, Martens & Windzio, 2010). Education policy is now constituted globally as well as locally (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and human capital development targets are currently driving education policy around the world (Walker, 2012). These internationalisation processes exert influence on national education systems resulting in what Ball observes as “the emergence of a set of generic education policies, the globalisation of policy if you like” (1998a, p. 117).



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The convergence of education policies is reflected in the similarities between education systems the world over (Spreen, 2001). Guthrie and Pierce (1990, p. 202) list some of these commonalities as:

A nationally established curriculum that gives more weight to mathematics, science, foreign languages; a devolution of operational decision-making authority to the school site; a greater use of performance tests for accountability purposes; an emphasis on teacher training and teacher professionalism; and for higher education programs, an expansion of access and incentives for life-long learning.

Undoubtedly, globalisation and worldwide convergence in educational policy and practice have revived some of the classic themes of comparative educational inquiry, but arguably none more so than educational transfer (Rappleye, Imoto & Horiguchi, 2011, p. 411). While this has led to an admirable growth of work in the field of comparative education, Rappleye, Imoto and Horiguchi (2011) argue that the complexities involved in understanding transfer have become more difficult and have led to an increasingly less clear, less explicit conceptualisation of transfer phenomenon.

Indeed such complexity in the educational transfer process requires us to be mindful of its consequences. Comparativists, such as Crossley, have argued that there could be increased danger of “uncritical transfer of policy and practice” (Crossley, 1999, p. 251) that pays insufficient “attention to the role and significance of local, cultural factors in the process of education change” (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 62). Consequently, many change efforts have not been implemented successfully. As argued by Crossley and Watson (2003, p. 9):

Many large-scale educational reforms of recent decades—in many different contexts—have been markedly less successful than intended. There is therefore an urgent and current need to take stock of what has happened, where, and with what results, if we are to contribute to the generation of improved understanding and greater success at the level of implementation.

Thus, it is imperative for studies such as this to be carried out to probe and understand “where [the policy comes] from, what [it seeks] to achieve, how [it impacts] on the learning experience and the consequences of implementation” so that educational leaders can respond appropriately (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 8).

### 1.3.2 Contextual Rationale

Malaysia is a former British colony. It gained independence on the 31st of August 1957. Malaysia operates as a parliamentary democracy—a lasting effect of having been a British colony. Today, Malaysia is a multi-racial country of 28,717,780 people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012<sup>2</sup>). Of these, 65% are Bumiputras<sup>3</sup>, 26% Chinese, 8% Indians, and 1% other ethnic groups. The social composition of modern Malaysia is the result of an influx of Chinese immigrants to Malaya (as the nation was known prior to its independence) in the 1850s to work as tin miners and Indians in the 1870s to serve as rubber estate workers (Rosnani, 1996; Hooker, 2003).

During the colonial period, the provision of education was highly decentralised (Lee, 1999; 2006). The education system<sup>4</sup> was divided into four streams: (1) vernacular Malay schools, most of which were primary schools established to serve rural Malay children; (2) Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools, which were set up by the Chinese and Indian communities; (3) English schools maintained by the British government; and (4) Christian missionaries that served the mixed urban population (Lee, 2006, p. 150). Education in Malaysia was a major issue in transitioning from a colonised nation to an independent nation. Hence, in the latter part of the 20th century, as a newly independent country, Malaysia saw

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<sup>2</sup> The Population and Housing Census in Malaysia is conducted once in every 10 years. The last Census was conducted in 2010 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). However, the Department also provides updated figures on its website, known as “Population Clock Malaysia”. The figures used in this study refer to the statistics updated on the Department’s website.

<sup>3</sup> Bumiputera is a noun used by the Malaysian government to collectively mean the ‘sons of the soil’ (Brown, 2005). The term not only refers to the Malays, but other indigenous groups such as the Negrito, Senoi, Proto-Malay, Penan, Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Kadazandusun, Bajau and Murut (Andaya & Andaya, 1982, 2001; Lee, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Today, the education system serves approximately 5.3 million school children (MoEM, 2012) and over 1 million students in public and private higher education institutions at home and abroad (MoHE, 2011). In the public education sector there are over 412,000 teachers serving in 7,723 primary schools and 2,296 secondary schools (MoEM, 2012). There are 20 public higher education institutes, 461 private higher education institutes, 28 Teachers’ Institutes, 27 polytechnics and 70 community colleges (MoHE, 2012). Education matters in Malaysia are overseen by two distinct ministries—the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoEM) for the primary and secondary levels, and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) for the tertiary level.

education as a tool to create bonds between individuals who otherwise might have little in common (Hooker, 2003). This ideal, however, has not been supported by contradicting policies which accommodate the racial identity of the citizens and allow educational instruction to take place in Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil (Rosnani, 1996). The main objective of achieving national unity and development through education has therefore not been met. The adoption of the 1961 Education Act, which was aimed at revamping this fragmented education system of the British colonial era (Rahimah, 1998), saw the establishment of a national education system characterised by a common language, common school curriculum, common public examinations, common teaching service scheme, and central funding for all schools in the public system through centralised bureaucratisation (Lee, 2006).

Over the last five decades, further shifts in the functions and reforms of education in Malaysia—underpinned by the forces of political and sociocultural demands—have also been witnessed (Hussein, 2008). More recently, unanticipated effects of globalisation, liberalisation, and development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have forced Malaysia to implement further reforms “to achieve parity with the global development of education” (Malakolunthu, 2010, p. 79). Some of the more notable changes involve the issues of equality of access to education, quality of the teaching and learning institutions to enhance the effectiveness of education, philosophy of education, education quality, democratisation of education, world-class education, and decentralisation of education. Implementing these reforms was not an easy task as they involve coordination among the various agencies within and without the ministries as well as a huge amount of federal allocation. This is reflected in the increasing expenditure on education as against the total government expenditure and the Gross National Product (GNP) (Hussein, 2008).

Nevertheless, Malaysia can be proud that it has taken great strides in education reforms such as implementing and achieving universal primary education before the target date set by the United Nations (Ibrahim, 2008a). However, this is not to suggest that attempts at reforms in Malaysia are unproblematic. As Malakolunthu (2010, p. 79) observes the reform process in Malaysia has sometimes been problematic:

Not all the reforms have been successful nor has the education standard attained a global recognition. Even more disappointing is the fact that the failing reforms have often been ignored or laid to oblivion over time. Then, another reform will entice and the whole process will get repeated.

These concerns are significant because they are shared by the citizens of Malaysia who have first-hand experience of the Malaysia education system (Ibrahim, 2008a).

The “English in Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS)” policy illustrates the concerns of Ibrahim (2008a) and Malakolunthu (2010). In early 2002, the Prime Minister of Malaysia proposed that to stay competitive in the global market, it was necessary to teach mathematics and science in English. The idea was then taken up by the cabinet, and by July 2002 the MoEM announced the adoption of the policy for implementation in 2003. By 2007, a total of RM1.75 billion (USD580 million) had been spent for the implementation of the policy with a huge bulk covering the cost of providing ICT facilities to schools (Nor Safiza, 2011). However, in July 2009—after six years of implementation—the government decided to revert to the old system of using the mother tongue in teaching mathematics and science. The policy was brought back because “only 19.2 per cent of secondary teachers and 9.9 per cent of primary teachers were sufficiently proficient in English” (The Star, July 8, 2009), and because there was only 2-3 per cent change in students’ command of the three subjects—mathematics, science and English (Siew, June 23, 2009). Since its conception, many have criticised the government for adopting the ETeMS policy, citing insufficient preparation and hasty decision-making as among the reasons for their discontent. The less than successful implementation of this policy has served as a lesson for other policies in the future. But has the lesson been learned?

As the United Nations formulates its various global goals, Malaysia steadfastly continues to formulate and implement its various development plans. On January 16, 2006, the MoEM unveiled its Education Development Master Plan (EDMP) or Blueprint for 2006-2010 (Appendix 2). Again, quality and competitiveness underpin the thrust of the plan (Ibrahim, 2008a). One of the six core strategies in the EDMP is to accelerate excellence in educational institutions by forming clusters of excellence among schools, based on academic, co-curriculum and sports achievements, or other niche areas so that they become models for benchmarking and showcasing purposes. Hence, on March 30, 2007, the Minister of

Education announced the names of 30 schools to be included in the Clusters of Excellence. As of 1 January 2013, there were a total of 170 schools under this programme. Each of these schools has been allocated RM500,000 (USD160,000) to develop and advance their niche areas. On July 27, 2009, the new Minister of Education announced his intention of creating High Performing Schools (HPSs). On January 25, 2010, twenty schools were identified as HPSs each receiving a special fund of RM700,000 (USD228,000). As of 1 January 2013, there were 66 HPSs nationwide .

These changes that are taking place in the education system in Malaysia to provide an efficient system of world-class education has spawned debates within the education fraternity. The failure of the ETeMS policy which had cost the nation billions of dollars (Isahak *et al.*, 2008), the lack of understanding of how the CoEP would improve the education of children, the introduction of HPSs while CoEP was still at its initial stage, the uniqueness of the Malaysian culture and political system, and the prevalent issues regarding policy implementation in Malaysia, all makes it worthwhile to investigate this policy. This study, therefore, provides insights into the formulation and implementation process of the CoEP. It serves as an initial analysis of the nature, scope and likely impact of the policy and is useful for the on-going and future implementation of the policy.

### 1.3.3 Personal Rationale

My twenty years of experience, first as a teacher and later as a teacher trainer, has made me aware of the complex nature of education reform in Malaysia. As a practitioner, it is imperative that I have the knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of policy-making and implementation in order to appreciate the complexity of policy process. When the ETeMS policy was introduced in 2003, I was involved in the in-service training to prepare mathematics and science teachers to teach the subjects in English. For the three years that I was involved in the running of the course, I had come to realise the major challenges faced by practitioners in implementing a policy that they were not included in and prepared for for its inception. This has prompted me to examine the complex nature of policy formulation and implementation in Malaysia.

As a teacher trainer, my involvement in a special programme for the training of head teachers has made me aware of the importance of conducting research regarding the implementation of education policies especially at the school level. Such research helps to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the real nature and challenges faced in implementing policies in ways that can also help teachers and head teachers.

Professor Sufean Hussin of University Malaya, who is among the foremost scholars with regard to education policy development in Malaysia, has emphasised the complexity of policy process. A chance meeting with him led to an engaging discussion on the topic which also prompted me to look into the dynamics of education policy process in Malaysia.

Moreover, my reading of comparative literature brought to my attention the dangers of the international transfer of educational policy and practice. This further underpins the research, and strengthens my knowledge and understanding of the theory, policy and practice of comparative and international education.

#### 1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

In the light of the above, the overall aim of the study is to develop an improved understanding of the policy development process in Malaysia, and contribute to the analysis of the nature, scope and likely impact of the CoEP.

##### 1.4.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the research are to:

1. critically review the relevant international literature on educational policy formulation and implementation, and the processes of international policy transfer to provide a conceptual framework for the Malaysian case study;
2. document the origins, nature and development of the Clusters of Excellence Policy in the light of the related international literature;
3. carry out detailed case studies of school clusters in practice to document the initial views and perspectives of key stakeholders;
4. explore the implications of the study for on-going educational policy and practice in Malaysia;

5. consider the significance of the Malaysian study for the related international literature and for future research.



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### 1.4.2 Research Questions

The research focuses on the following key research questions:

1. What factors, both local and global, influenced the nature and development of the Clusters of Excellence Policy?
2. How do national level and school level stakeholders perceive the policy and its initial implementation?
3. To what extent is the Clusters of Excellence Policy appropriately shaped to fit the economic, cultural and professional contexts of Malaysia?
4. What lessons can be learned from this research for the on-going development of the Clusters of Excellence Policy, for the related international literature and for future research?<sup>5</sup>

## 1.5 Overview of the Theoretical Framework

The intent of this research is to gain an improved understanding of the education policy development process in Malaysia through the analysis of the nature, scope and likely impact of the CoEP. To this end, the theoretical framework that underpins this study is derived from three broad bodies of literature which have implications for the analysis of the CoEP.

The first relates to the international literature on educational policy development and implementation. Policy development is a complex process. It is influenced by different factors on different levels. Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997), in their study about the theoretical implications and problems of educational policies and change, posit that the construction of policy is the product of a particular set of historical, economic and political forces. Hence, their framework critically considers the political context as well as the historical and socioeconomic policy contexts, the connections between these contexts and the micro-levels of educational policy, and the broad and complex nature of reform policies. The policy context is

<sup>5</sup> Research Question 4 refers to the overall aim of this study in the light of Research Questions 1, 2 and 3. It provides detailed discussions about lessons that can be learned from this study.

essential for the understanding of the policies themselves because policy issues “[are usually] embedded in a wider set of pressures or contexts—historical, political, economic—which would need to be understood” (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 12). Not only that, it also “requires an understanding of the dynamics of the various elements of the social structure and their intersections” (Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004, p. 2). Therefore, it is vital to shed light on the “connections between the micro-settings, and policy-making at the macro level” (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 12) which are normally subtle and need to be further explored.

While education policy-making remains dependent upon individual nation-state philosophy and education system, today’s education policy is also increasingly thought about and made within the context of the ‘pressures’ and requirements of globalisation (Ball, 2008, p. 1). For example, agencies like UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD, research agencies like IEA, by virtue of their recommendations, funding power and cross-national comparisons, contribute to education ministries having to adopt an internationalist mindset (Gopinathan, 2007, p. 56). This impact on nations worldwide can be seen in educational reform activities over the last three decades. One of the current global trends in educational reform efforts promoted by UNESCO, the World Bank, and other multilateral and bilateral assistance agencies is the decentralisation of education by giving greater autonomy in decision-making to schools (Lee, 2006). This is part of the spirit of the initiation of the CoEP in Malaysia. For a highly centralised education system such as one that is practised in Malaysia, various structural and functional changes have to occur in order for the decentralisation process to take place. This, thus, leads to the second body of literature that underpins this study.

The second body of literature is concerned with educational change and the process of implementation. Due to the broad and general nature of policy documents and policy statements themselves, each of the stakeholders involved in the process could interpret and construct their own meanings and ideas about the policies. The complex nature of policy process which has been conceptualised as non-linear (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Ball, 1993; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Ozga, 2000; Vidovich, 2002), suggests that the implementation of policies cannot be viewed as simplistic and unproblematic.

As argued above, nations worldwide have been actively involved in educational reform activities since the 1980s. However, many reforms have failed to achieve the desired targets. Substandard planning, poor implementation strategy, lack of monitoring systems at all levels, and a poor understanding of implementation processes are some of the reasons why initiatives have been unsuccessful (Fullan, 2003). Fullan (2007) posits that ‘meaning’ is the crux of any sustainable educational change. Hence he proposes that purposeful actions need to be taken to ensure that “shared meaning is achieved across a group of people working in concert” (p. 37) towards an educational change. In developing policies, policy-makers should not be engaged in wishful thinking because in reality, what matters most “is at the individual level [where] change does or does not occur” (Fullan, 2007, p. 39). Stakeholders’ views of a change policy are important in determining the success or failure of a planned change. How implementers perceive the change initiative and their roles in the initiative are crucial. Fullan’s (2007) model of educational change is especially useful here as it helps in the analysis of policy implementation process at the local level.

Of course educational change is always motivated by criticisms (Levin 2001) which could stem from external and/or internal factors—which will be further discussed later in this section. But in addressing these criticisms, policy-makers tend to learn from and understand what is happening “elsewhere” in education. The most obvious consequence of such activity is educational ‘borrowing’ (Phillips, 2000). Hence the third body of literature underpinning this study relates to the dilemmas of international transfer of policy and practice.

To stay competitive globally, for example, developing countries are being pressurised to increase the efficiency of their education systems and raise standards of educational performance (Ball, 1998). However, in preparing education systems to meet the demands of globalisation, some developing countries turn to developed nations for a ‘proven formula’. This borrowing of educational policy and practice, which began as cultural borrowing, has become rampant in many developing countries today. According to Phillips and Ochs (2004), cross-national attraction in educational policies and practices could be the result of various phenomena such as internal dissatisfaction, systemic collapse, negative external evaluation, economic change/competition, political and other imperatives, novel configurations,