

Educational Reforms in the Asia-Pacific Region: Trends and Implications for Research*

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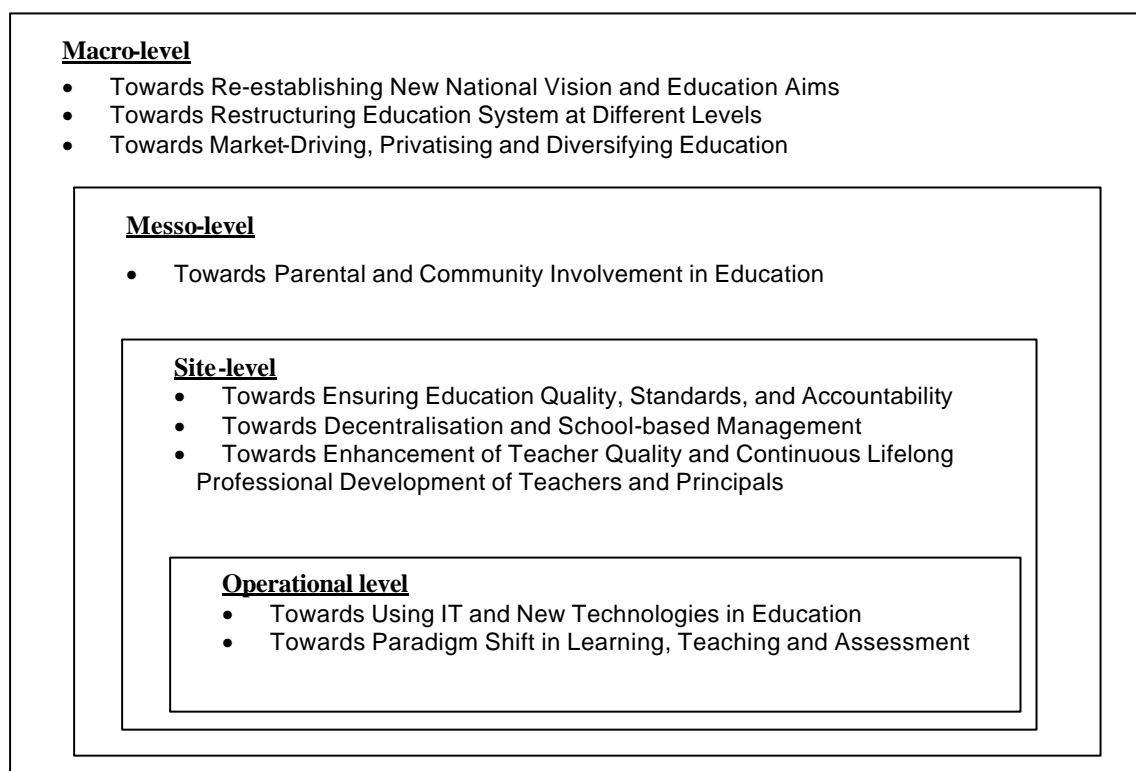
Educational reform, research and policy, globalisation, education quality, decentralisation, school-based management, parental and community involvement, paradigm shift, information technology, lifelong professional development

1. INTRODUCTION

Witnessed since the 1990s are numerous education reforms in nearly all countries in the Asia-Pacific region, in response to the challenges and impacts of globalization, information technology, international competitions, knowledge-based economy and fast societal developments in the new millennium (Cheng & Townsend, 2000). Huge amount of resources and efforts have been put into various types of educational changes and initiatives implemented in such different areas of the Region as Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Lao, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippine, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. Based on the findings and observations from numerous country reports and policy documents of these areas released in the past five years, Cheng (in press a) has identified some major trends of education reforms in the Region, as shown in Figure 1. It provides an overall picture of the region for understanding the direction, nature and progress of the various national initiatives and efforts for development of education in facing the challenges in the new millennium. For the detail of these trends, please refer to Cheng (in press, a).

As shown in Figure 1, these trends represent the major educational reforms addressing issues of development at four different levels. At the macro-level, the main trends include “towards re-establishing new national vision and education aims”; “towards restructuring education system at different levels”; and “towards market-driving, privatising and diversifying education”. To a great extent, these trends address the important issues at the societal level, particularly the following:

Figure 1: Trends of Educational Reforms at Different Levels



- How can the national vision and aims in education be redefined and correspondingly the educational systems be restructured to effectively cope with the challenges in an era of globalization, information technology and knowledge-based economy?
- How can the consumption of limited resources be maximized in planning and managing educational provision for meeting new educational aims and satisfying the diverse and increasing demands from the society, the community and individuals?
- How can the various education services be financed to achieve national aims in a more equitable, efficient and effective way?

At the meso-level, “towards parental and community involvement in education and management” is a salient trend. The educational reforms in this trend often encourage and promote wide participation and partnership in education in order to broaden the support from the community and family to the provision of quality educational services and to ensure the accountability of educational institutions to the public, particularly when the education is funded with the public money.

At the site-level, the major trends are “towards ensuring education quality, standards and accountability”; “towards decentralisation and school-based management”; and “towards

enhancement of teacher quality and continuous lifelong professional development of teachers and principals”. In general, these trends address the issues at the institutional level, of which include the following:

- How can the quality, effectiveness and accountability of education be provided to meet the diverse expectations and demands?
- How can the authority be decentralized to maximise the flexibility and efficiency in consuming resources to solve problems and meet the diverse needs at the site-level?
- How can the teacher quality and educational leadership be enhanced to provide better educational services in such a fast changing and challenging environment?

At the operational level, the main trends include “towards using information technology in learning and teaching and applying new technologies in management” and “towards paradigm shift in learning, teaching and assessment”. The reforms aim to facilitate the change and development of educational practices, particularly at the classroom or operational level, to meet the future development needs of individuals and the society.

Even though in the last decade many countries had poured in huge amount of resources to reinforce their educational reforms, unfortunately, most of the reformers were still disappointed with the performance of their education systems and they doubted whether their graduates had been well prepared to face the challenges in the new century. Inevitably, policy-makers, educators and researchers would have to be concerned with the following two questions related to these trends in educational reforms:

1. What are the major challenges in current trends of educational reforms in the Asia-Pacific region particularly in such a new era of globalization, information technology, competition and knowledge-based economy?
2. What implications can be drawn from these challenges of education reforms for research?

With reference to Cheng (1999, 2001b) and Cheng and Townsend (2000), this paper aims to explore these two questions so as to provide a common ground for sharing the issues and concerns of educational reforms among countries in the Region and drawing implications for building up a knowledge base that can fill up the gaps between research and policy making and inform formulation and implementation of educational reforms in the Region.

2. CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS AT THE MACRO AND MESSO LEVELS

2.1 Challenges and Implications in Re-establishing New National Vision and Education Aims

Numerous examples of reviewing educational aims and establishing new goals that reflect new national and global visions can be found in Australia, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippine, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. a. Nonetheless, the changing role of education in national development has created serious challenges for educators, leaders and practitioners at the system and site levels. They have to echo these new national visions and goals and consider changes in the aims, content, process and practice of their education. They are facing important challenges, such as the following:

1. How should they plan and conduct these necessary changes at different levels effectively?
2. How should they lead their teachers, students and other stakeholders to face up the changes and pursue a new education that is relevant to the future?
3. How can the educational change and development be ensured to be relevant to national growth and development in the competitive global environment?
4. How can the knowledge base of educational aims and school functions be broadened to support more relevant policy-making and educational planning?
5. Given that there are multiple new functions of educational institutions at individual, institutional, community, societal and international levels in the new century, including the technical/economic, human/social, political, cultural educational functions (Cheng, 1996), to what extent can the current educational reforms take all these multiple functions at different levels into consideration?
6. How can the initiatives and reforms ensure a balance in achieving these functions and aims on one the hand and also can reflect the national priority within the constraints on the other hand?

All these are important issues and challenges in educational reforms in the Region. Unfortunately, there seems to be lack of a comprehensive knowledge framework for policy makers and country leaders of these countries and areas to have a broader perspective for review, assessment and development of their educational aims. It is an urgent need to pursue educational research in this area to inform how to tackle the above issues and challenges in the process of redefining and re-establishing educational aims in the light of the new national visions in the new century.

2.2 Challenges and Implications in Restructuring the Education System at Different Levels

Whether in response to the fast increasing developmental needs of the society or to the challenges of globalization and international competition, many countries and areas in the Region have begun to review and restructure their education systems from early childhood education to tertiary education. The purposes are to echo the changes towards new educational aims, improve the selection and allocation of students, enhance educational equality and practice

and/or redress serious drawbacks of the examination- oriented culture particularly in some Asia countries.

In process of reviewing and restructuring their education systems, the policy makers, educators and researchers in the Region have to face some important challenges in such a fundamental structural reform. The examples of the challenges are as follows:

1. Relevant to the Future? Given the changes in the educational aims and national vision, how can the expansion of education and the restructuring of academic system reflect or serve the needs of these changes? How do we know the structural changes of the system are relevant to the future?
2. Appropriate Alternatives? There may be a number of alternatives of education systems that can serve the new educational aims and national vision. But then, how can the policy makers identify those alternatives and understand which one is most appropriate for their country within the existing cultural, political and economic constraints (Cheng, Ng, & Mok, 2002)?
3. Balance between Quality and Quantity? In Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, for example, many people are concerned the issue that the rapid expansion of higher education may be at the cost of the quality of graduates (Lee, 2001). How can the change of the education system keep a well balance between the expansion of education and the quality of education? To what extent, the traditional elite system should be kept?
4. Difficulties in Fundamental Structural Change? Review and reform of education system is in fact a fundamental structural change, involving so complicated and extensive political interests and concerns of nearly all key parties and actors in education and the larger community. As such, how can the policy makers and stakeholders get over all the existing structural and political difficulties and conflicts in the review and reform and then reach at a rational, feasible and commonly acceptable plan for action (Cheng & Cheung, 1995)?
5. Lack of Knowledge Base? Since the review and reform of education system is a very complex and large-scale social endeavour affecting the future of so many students and teachers and the society, it should be based on a very comprehensive knowledge base for review, planning and implementation at different levels of the education system. But then, how can policy makers, educators and other key actors be provided with such a knowledge base for their actions?

The above are just some of many challenges in review and reform. Clearly, all these challenges and issues would inevitably become the core agenda of policy debate of which should be analysed and investigated extensively by research. Unfortunately, there seems to be a gap between the ongoing reforms and the research in many countries. In other words, there is an urgent need for a very wide spectrum of research to address the policy concerns of system change in education in different countries in the Region in these years.

2.3 Challenges and Implications in Market-Driving, Privatising and Diversifying Education

The trend of educational reforms towards privatisation, marketisation and diversification in education has become more and more important in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly when most countries are suffering from the limitation of resources to expand their educational services to meet the diverse and increasing demands of education. In moving along this trend, some critical issues are emerging, of which challenge policy-makers, social leaders and educators in the Region. Some salient examples of them are listed as follows:

1. Equity and Quality? How can equity and quality in education be ensured for students in disadvantaged conditions? This is often a crucial issue in policy debate in many developing countries in the Region (Cheng, Ng, & Mok, 2002).
2. Diverse and Conflicting Expectations? There are diverse and conflicting expectations of stakeholders about education in the Region. For example, teachers or educators emphasise more on the citizenship quality of their graduates. The parents are more concerned whether their children can pass the examinations and get the necessary qualifications for employment. The employers often doubt whether the graduates have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform in the workplace. In view of the above, how should the expectations of these key stakeholders be identified and prioritised if schools have to survive in a competitive market environment? How should they deal with the diverse and even conflicting expectations of different school stakeholders on the aims, content, practice and outcomes of school education?
3. Market Forces and National Aims? The market forces may or may not aim at achieving and realising the national aims and vision in education. As such, how can policy makers and educators ensure that the market forces at the local or community level are in operation in the direction of development at the national or international level?
4. Parental Choice and National Visions? Specifically, how consistent are the parental or individual choices with the national visions and goals? How should these choices be supported by the state?
5. National Framework and Privatization? To what extent a national framework should be set on the market system and privatization without hindering the initiatives from the market but maintaining the national direction and forces in the global competitions?

All these are just some of dilemmas and issues that policy makers and educators face in formulating educational changes towards marketisation and privatisation. Unfortunately, the knowledge for understanding and handling these challenges in the Region is thin. Research on this important area to address and inform the management of the above challenges is inevitably necessary in coming few years if the trend towards marketisation and privatisation in education

is to maintain.

2.4 Challenges and Implications in Parental and Community Involvement in Education

Parental and community involvement in education was not the tradition in many Asian areas, such as Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Thailand . Recently, people in these countries have become more aware of the importance and necessity of wider partnership and involvement in education. There is a growing trend of education reform to promote this kind of involvement and participation. The major concerns and implications in this trend may include the following:

Culture for Parental Community Involvement? Even though parental and community involvement has the advantages, how to effectively promote and implement it is still a core issue in the current educational reforms in the Region. Most Asia countries lack a culture to accept and support the practice of parental and community involvement. Teachers are traditionally highly respected in the community. It is often believed that school education should be the sole responsibility of teachers and principals. Parents have tended to view them as the experts in education. Parental and community involvement is often perceived as the act of distrust of teachers and principals; to involve parents can be perceived as a loss of face among professionals. How can the policy makers and educators change this culture to encourage more parental community involvement?

Inducing More Political Problems? Parental and community involvement in school management and leadership will inevitably increase the complexity, ambiguities and uncertainties in the political domain of educational institutions. How can our education leaders be prepared to lead parents and the community, build up alliances, balance diverse interests between parties and resolve different types of interest conflicts to bring in benefits while avoiding or reducing negative effects of parental and community involvement? Would the induced political problems and difficulties from the external involvement be in fact diluting the scarce time and energy of teachers and leaders from educational work for students? How can they handle these dilemmas in managing parental and community in education?

To understand and manage all these questions and issues urgently needs the support and advice from research if the reforms in this policy direction are to be successful. Unfortunately, the research in this area is still underdeveloped particularly in a context of the Asia tradition.

3. CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS AT THE SITE LEVEL

3.1 Challenges and Implications in Ensuring Education Quality, Standards and Accountability

In the Region, many countries have induced different types of quality assurance initiatives to monitor and promote education quality and accountability. In planning and implementing these initiatives and efforts, there are some important issues challenging policy makers, educators and researchers (Cheng, 1997a). Examples are as follows:

1. How do they know that the existing stakeholders' satisfaction and expectations are relevant to the future of new generations and the society in the new millennium? If the satisfaction and expectations are not that relevant, how can they handle the gap?
2. How can they ensure a balance between school's internal development and accountability to the public? A very strong emphasis of accountability to the public often accompanies with close supervision and control that will stop self initiative for internal development but create stronger defensive mechanism to stop organisational learning.
3. As different stakeholders with diverse and even conflicting interests, how can they handle the potential contradictory purposes between school self evaluation and external evaluation in quality assurance?
4. Education process is complicated involving many factors, how can they know what indicators are valid and reliable to reflect the quality and effectiveness in education and what combinations of indicators of input, performance and outcomes are appropriate to these educational institutions in some specific contexts at a certain time framework?
5. On what basis should the quality standards and benchmarks be set? What are the measures to be taken to ensure that they are acceptable and fair to all involved parties and feasible in management and implementation?
6. Monitoring education quality at the school-site should be different from that at the system level. How could they manage this difference in a more efficient and effective way such that educational institutions or schools will not be overburdened?
7. Given the importance of leadership in pursuing education quality, how can they develop their educators and leaders to implement quality assurance and quality inspection effectively (Cheng, 1997b)?

The existence of these issues and challenges makes it necessary to have research conducted of which would inform leaders, educators and policy –makers who are responsible for ensuring education quality and accountability at different levels for the public.

3.2 Challenges and Implications in Decentralization and SBM

The trend of educational reforms towards decentralisation and school-based management (SBM)

becomes more and more important in the many countries in the Region. According to Cheng and Townsend (2000), the change from traditional external control management to SBM in the regional countries confronts a number of issues that have to be tackled in the process of educational transformation:

1. Decentralisation and accountability? After decentralising the authority and power to the school-site level, there is the need to keep the self managing schools and teachers accountable to the quality of education and the use of public money. Even though a concept of “tight-loose coupling” (Cheng, 1996) has been proposed to tackle this issue, it is still a long way to put it in practice and the issue remains a hot area in ongoing policy discussion about decentralization in education (Cheng & Ng, 1994).
2. SBM and Educational Equality? People often believe that with greater autonomy some better schools may take more advantages to recruit better students and teachers and procure more resources such that the educational inequality will be persistent and enlarged particularly to the students from disadvantageous background. For example, Townsend’s previous analysis and his chapter on the Australia case have raised concerns about it (Townsend, 1996, 1997).
3. SBM as Technological Change and Cultural Change? The shift to SBM represents a type of change in management technology. Yet, whether or not it can be effectively implemented at both the system and school site levels depends heavily on the cultural change among those concerned (Levy, 1986; Ng & Cheng, 1995). Numerous studies have reported that there are various barriers and conflicts in implementing SBM because both education officers at the system level and school practitioners at the school level still have the mind set of external control management when implementing the management change towards the SBM model (Cheng & Chan, 2000).
4. SBM and Educational Outcome? Many contemporary SBM studies address self management only at the school level and often assume that increased schools’ autonomy and responsibilities will result in school effectiveness in producing quality educational. Yet, this assumption is questionable and past empirical studies do not come to a convergent view (Sackney & Dibsiki, 1994). From the perspective of Cheung and Cheng (1996), the linkage of SBM to educational outcomes should be strengthened through multi-level self management at the individual, group and school levels. Even though multi-level self management may be one of theoretical efforts to bridge the gap between management change and student performance, the debate on this issue is still hot and ongoing until there is sufficient empirical evidence to show the linkage.
5. Downsizing Central Education Department? Following the decentralisation of authority from the central office to the schools, the major role and responsibilities of central education department largely disappear and the structure of the existing central bureaucracy in education has to be downsized and reformed. For example, the Education Department of the Victoria State of Australia had been largely cut in the process of implementing SBM.

Downsizing central education department is one of hardest parts of educational change in most countries of the Region. Most of educational changes are often initiated and planned by the central office but downsizing of education department inevitably conflicts with the interest of the bureaucracy.

The above issues together present a wide spectrum of research areas that need a lot of intellectual efforts for understanding the complexity of school transformation and informing policy making and implementation of school-based management.

3.3 Challenges and Implications in Enhancement of Teacher Quality and Continuous Life-long Professional Development

In current education reforms, the trend towards enhancement of teacher quality and promotion of lifelong professional development of teachers and principals is important to ensuring educational effectiveness and quality in a fast changing environment. In such a trend, educators, leaders and researchers are facing some new challenges, including the following (Cheng, in press):

1. How can school leaders build up a new culture of continuous lifelong staff development among their colleagues and related school stakeholders (Cheng, 2000c)? In other words, how can they develop their schools as learning organizations that can support all types of learning and development (Senge, et al., 2000)?
2. How can the relevance of staff's professional development or formal teacher education be ensure to ongoing educational reforms and paradigm shifts in education (Elliot & Morris, 2001)?
3. How can a knowledge management system be built in schools to encourage action learning, accumulate experiences and knowledge from daily practices and inform further development of staff?
4. How can the diverse needs of ongoing school and staff development be identified and satisfied within a limited resource framework?
5. How can internal and external networks be built to provide the necessary support and resources for ongoing school development, professional development and teacher education (Mok & Cheng, 2001)?
6. With the aim to pursue new approaches to education for the future, there is a strong local and international demand for a paradigm shift in educational leadership. What kind of new paradigm in leadership should be in such a context? How should the necessary paradigm shift be conceptualised, organised and implemented successfully among educational leaders?

When compared with the magnificent scale of ongoing education reforms, the existing advances in understanding the nature of staff development, teacher education and leadership development are still insufficient. Clearly, a broad spectrum of research efforts should be needed in these areas in coming years.

4. CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

4.1 Challenges and Implications in Towards Using IT and New Technologies in Education

Many countries in the Region take information technology (IT) in education as one of the most strategic initiatives in ongoing educational reforms (Birch & Maclean, 2001; Gopinathan & Ho, 2000). As pointed out by Cheng and Townsend (2000), the initiatives for promoting IT in education proposed in the past few years are meeting some basic issues:

1. Gaps between IT and New Education Aims?: While IT is very powerful to create opportunities for learning and facilitate learning and teaching in a very efficient way, its functions should not be over-emphasised, because IT is a means rather than the end of education. Therefore, both policy makers and educators have to consider its relevance to achievement of educational aims when formulating strategies for IT in education. Some basic issues have to be tackled: How and what types of IT are related to existing or new aims? To what extent and in what aspects can the use of IT help to achieve educational aims? What potential limitations are there for IT within education?
2. Gap between hardware, software and training? From experiences in some countries, it seems to be easier to purchase such hardware as computers and other IT facilities for schools than it is to provide appropriate software and training for teachers and students. Many school practitioners spend a lot of their energy and time developing 'home-made' software due to a lack of a more comprehensive and sophisticated software system to support teaching and learning in IT. Unfortunately, the quality of the 'home-made' software is often questionable while the development is time-consuming. It has been the case in one country that a central authority sent computers to schools that did not even have electricity. How to provide a comprehensive package including the necessary hardware, software and training, as well as an IT platform to support and maintain the effective and efficient use of IT in teaching and learning, is an important issue, particularly in some developing areas where resources for development are limited.
3. Gap between IT and Curriculum Development? Stakeholders wonder whether the existing curriculum should be changed in terms of aims, subject content, instructional process, or assessment to adapt to the new IT learning environment. And many do not know how to do it. There is often a lack of new frameworks for integrating the strengths and benefits of IT into curriculum development. The advances in IT happen too fast. There is a clear gap

between the rapidly changing IT environment and the curriculum development in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

4. Gap between technological change and cultural change? In the past few years, the efforts to implement IT in school education expended by many policy makers in the Region met strong resistance from school practitioners. There have been not only technological difficulties but also cultural problems. Implementation of IT in education, such a wide technological transformation, inevitably involves cultural change among teachers, principals, education officers, other change agents and even students, if successful change is expected (Levy, 1986; Cheng, 1996). Therefore, how to change the existing attitudes and beliefs into a new IT culture is clearly a serious challenge in the reform, whether in developing countries or developed areas.

How to lead the implementation of IT and other new technology in education is a completely new concern for most policy makers, educators and leaders in the Region. The effective responses and strategies for handling the issues and challenges raised above depend heavily on the deep understanding of them and the knowledge base of implementation of cultural and technological changes in different contexts. All these are in need of the support from educational research.

4.2 Challenges and Implications in Paradigm Shift in Learning, Teaching and Assessment

There is a growing trend of educational reform with emphasis on paradigm shift in learning, teaching and assessment in more and more areas in the Region. Many countries are making effort in this direction through various types of curriculum reforms and initiatives in globalisation, localisation and individualisation in education. The paradigm shift in education inevitably induces a completely different set of concerns and challenges to educational reforms. The following are just some of them:

Cultural Change and Paradigm Shift? Paradigm shift is not only a kind of technological and theoretical change but also a kind of deep cultural change including changes in all concerned stakeholders and key actors' attitudes and their whole line of thinking about the future of the global world, the vision, aims, contents, methods, processes, practices, management and funding of education. How can such a comprehensive paradigm shift be achieved at different levels in ongoing educational reforms?

Teachers prepared as key actors for paradigm shift? Clearly, teachers will play a very crucial role in the whole process of triplization (including globalisation, localisation and individualization) in education and development of students' contextualised multiple intelligence (CMI) (see Cheng, 2001c). Without them, such a paradigm shift in learning and teaching is impossible. How then can teachers be prepared to develop themselves as triplized (i.e. globalised, localised and individualised) CMI teachers, transform their educational

institutions into triplized CMI institutions and facilitate their students' becoming triplized CMI leaders and citizens? Also, how can they help transform curriculum and pedagogy into those that live up to the world class standard to meet the challenges and needs in the new millennium? These are really important questions to be addressed.

New quality assurance for paradigm shift? As explained by Cheng (2001a), there should be new conception of quality assurance responding to the paradigm shift in learning, teaching and assessment. In other words, the reform efforts and quality initiatives should be driven by the new paradigm of education. Therefore, the following issues become important challenges to the policy makers, educators and researchers:

1. How well can learning and teaching be triplized in the ongoing educational reforms? (In other words, how can students' learning and teachers' teaching be well placed in a globalised, localised, and individualised context?)
2. How well can students' learning opportunities be maximised through IT application, networking and teachers in educational reforms? How can the policy makers and educators ensure the linkage of IT and triplized environment so as to maximise the opportunities for students' learning and development?
3. How well can students' self-learning be facilitated and sustained as potentially life long in all the initiatives proposed in the educational reforms? (In other words, how can the maximised opportunities created in the educational reforms be ensured clearly converging to make students' self-learning sustainable to life long?)
4. How well can students' CMI and their ability to triplize their self learning be developed in the new initiatives for learning and teaching? Basically, how can the policy makers and educators ensure the relevance and outcome of students' learning in terms of multiple intelligences, multiple values and ability of triplizing self learning?

Clearly, the implications from these issues and challenges for research are very substantial. It needs a lot of inter-disciplinary and long-term research efforts to study paradigm shifts in learning, teaching and assessment, to investigate and understand the above issues in policy making, management and practice, and to propose appropriate strategies and methods to implement paradigm shifts and reforms at different levels.

5. FURTHER OVERALL IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

In addition to the implications from each trend of educational reforms, there are further overall implications for research on educational reforms and policy-making. With reference to the framework of policy analysis proposed by Cheng & Cheung (1995), there is an urgent need to establish a research environment and a comprehensive knowledge base that can cover the whole policy life cycle to support the continuous development and improvement of educational policy and practice from the individual level and site level to the system level in the new millennium.

The whole life cycle of educational policy in general includes formulation of policy objectives, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy outcomes. According to Cheng and Cheung (1995), to support policy development and effective implementation, there should be four integral frames for policy research and analysis covering the whole policy life cycle, as shown in Figure 2. Research based on these four frames is needed to support the ongoing full scale educational reforms in many countries in the Region.

5.1 Frame 1: Research on Background and Underlying Principles

This frame of research includes analysis of existing problems in the policy background and principles underpinning the goals of policy formulation. Traditional beliefs and values about education, expected functions and hidden functions of education in new millennium, legal and philosophical considerations, as well as practical constraints are some key areas for policy research in this frame. It is hoped to develop new knowledge for understanding the policy background and develop policy objectives for education development.

5.2 Frame 2: Research on Policy Formulation Process

Research involved in this frame focuses on the characteristics of the policy making body (e.g. legitimacy and representation of interest groups, expertise, composition and formation process, etc.); the characteristics and effectiveness of the decision making process (e.g. consultation, participation, open and free discourse, consensus, etc.) ; the various perspectives and technology employed (e.g. ecological analysis, system analysis, economic analysis, management analysis, rationality building, and decision technology, etc) ; and the overall quality of the resulted educational policy (e.g. suitability, feasibility, and acceptability, etc.). The knowledge generated from this research frame is crucial to ensure the fairness, quality and effectiveness of the formulation process.

5.3 Frame 3: Research on Policy Implementation Process

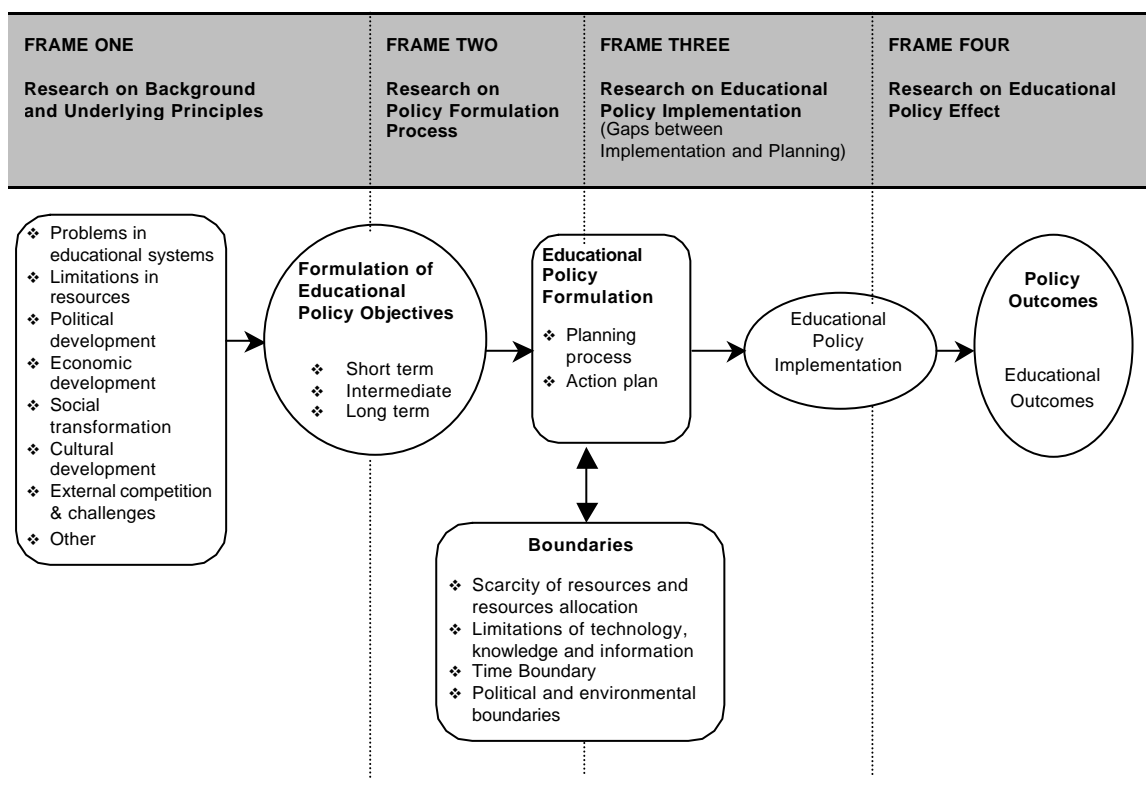
Research in this frame concerns the understanding, identifying and bridging the gaps between education policy planning and its implementation. Key research areas include the cognitive, psychological and technical readiness of stakeholders (e.g. administrators, teachers, students, parents, etc.), the readiness of resources (e.g. human resources, facilities, space, monetary resources, and other related resources, etc.), the framework of policy implementation (e.g. time availability, implementation stages, realistic schedule, etc.), the legal preparation (e.g. legal rights of those concerned, legislation for the policy, etc.), and the level of planned change by the policy (e.g. the system level, organizational level, classroom level, individual level, and the congruence between levels). Some educational initiatives in Hong Kong (e.g. whole day schooling for primary students) with a very good will was finally unsuccessful in implementation because of the ignorance of the necessary preparations for key concerned parties and lack of understanding mutual linkages between levels when in change. Therefore,

comprehensive research on the gaps between planning and implementation is really necessary to reduce the major resistance, redress the potential causes of failure and facilitate effective practice.

5.4 Frame 4: Research on Education Policy Effects

Frame 4 focuses on the analysis of the relationship between implementation and outcomes of education policy. Some policies may aim only at solving an administrative or political problem in resources. In that case, educational outcomes so derived may be minimal or even negative. Some policies do have outcomes that would in turn generate educational outcomes. Some policies, certainly, aim directly at educational outcomes. Key research areas include the nature and scope of policy outcomes and educational outcomes, the relationship between policy outcomes and educational outcomes at different levels, the relationship between these two types of outcomes and the implementation process, the cost-effectiveness of the policy, and the hidden impacts on different aspects of the concerned parties or the education system, and the lessons for improving implementation, formulation, and the whole policy life cycle, etc. (Cheng, Ng, & Mok, 2002).

Figure 2. The Four Frames of Research on the Whole Life Cycle of Educational Policy



(adapted from Cheng & Cheung, 1995)

5.5 Building an Overarching Framework

In addition to the above four frames of research, research on developing an overarching framework is necessary (Cheng, Mok & Tsui, 2000). A particular education policy cannot be developed in isolation. Instead, any education initiative introduced by the government is going to affect the implementation of existing policies and the success or otherwise of the policy itself is in turn being impacted upon by existing policies. Consequently, knowledge base concerning an overarching framework is required to put the proposed education policy into perspective within the constellation of existing policies. For the case of Hong Kong, there is no evidence that the Hong Kong government has undertaken research into developing such an overarching framework in the policy developments included in Education Commission Reports 1-7 (Education Commission, 1984 – 1997). For instance, the use of Information Technology in schools is going to have significant impact upon the management culture of the school, the assessment approaches, the learning culture, as well as the methods of teaching. How is the IT reform to be coordinated with existing reforms in school-based management, assessment reform, Chinese as the chief medium of instruction and other quality education reforms? Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any explicit direction from Education Commission as to how these reform efforts can be orchestrated so that each compliments the others in synchrony to enhance students' learning.

6. CONCLUSION

There are some crucial challenges arising from the ongoing trends of educational reform in different parts of the Asia-Pacific region. The challenges are impacting on the success of policy formulation and reform implementation in education in many countries. It is therefore a great concern about how those challenges and issues can become prioritized items on the urgent agenda in educational research if reforms are to be fully informed and finally successful in formulation and implementation. The implications from these issues for educational research and policy analysis are important.

All in all, given the complexity of research on such comprehensive educational reforms in many countries in the Region, there is an urgent need to develop a critical mass of research intelligence through different types of networking in the Region, of which is a necessity not only for individual countries but also for the whole Asia-Pacific region to meet the numerous challenges in education reforms in the new millennium. It is hoped that this chapter will open a wide range of issues and implications for policy debate and education research on educational reforms in the Region and other parts of the world.

* Note: Part of the materials in this chapter are adapted from Cheng (1999, 2001b) and Cheng and Townsend (2000).

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