

University Curriculum Policy Processes in Chile: A Case Study

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Abstract : Located within the context of accelerating globalization in the 21st-century knowledge society, this paper focuses on one selected university in Chile at which radical curriculum policy changes have been taking place, diverging from the traditional curriculum in Chile at the undergraduate level as a section of a larger investigation. Using a 'policy trajectory' framework, and guided by the interpretivist approach to research, interview transcripts and institutional documents were analyzed in relation to the meso (university administration) and the micro (academics) level. Inside the case study, participants from the university administration and academic levels were selected both via snow-ball technique and purposive selection, thus they had different levels of seniority, with some participating actively in the curriculum reform processes. Guided by an interpretivist approach to research, documents and interview transcripts were analyzed to reveal major themes emerging from the data. A further 'bigger picture' analysis guided by critical theory was then undertaken, involving interrogation of underlying ideologies and how political and economic interests influence the cultural production of policy. The case-study university was selected because it represents a traditional and old case of university setting in the country, undergoing curriculum changes based on international trends such as the competency model and the liberal arts. Also, it is representative of a particular socioeconomic sector of the country. Access to the university was gained through email contact. Qualitative research methods were used, namely interviews and analysis of institutional documents. In all, 18 people were interviewed. The number was defined by when the saturation criterion was met. Semi-structured interview schedules were based on the four research questions about influences, policy texts, policy enactment and longer-term outcomes. Triangulation of information was used for the analysis. While there was no intention to generalize the specific findings of the case study, the results of the research were used as a focus for engagement with broader themes, often evident in global higher education policy developments. The research results were organized around major themes in three of the four contexts of the 'policy trajectory'. Regarding the context of influences and the context of policy text production, themes relate to hegemony exercised by first world countries' universities in the higher education field, its associated neoliberal ideology, with accountability and the discourse of continuous improvement, the local responses to those pressures, and the value of interdisciplinarity. Finally, regarding the context of policy practices and effects (enactment), themes emerged around the impacts of the curriculum changes on university staff, students, and resistance amongst academics. The research concluded with a few recommendations that potentially provide 'food for thought' beyond the localized settings of this study, as well as possibilities for further research.

Keywords : curriculum, global-local dynamics, higher education, policy, sociology of education

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