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Europeización de la educación superior en Chile y Colombia: el desarrollo de los Marcos Nacionales de Cualificaciones

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Summary

The Europeanisation of Higher Education in Chile and Colombia

The development of the National Qualifications Frameworks

This study explores the phenomena of converging higher education policies worldwide, focusing on the study of Qualifications Framework policy transfer in the context of recent higher education reforms in Latin America, specifically, the cases of Chile and Colombia.

Over the last few decades, higher education in Latin America has undergone diverse reforms aimed at promoting educational quality. Said changes have mainly been a response to a series of internal processes in different countries. However, it is clear that the experience in other countries, especially European ones, has been very influential on the search for and adoption of new policies, instruments and mechanisms.

One of the key elements that this study has aimed to develop and that, to date, has been in discussion for more than a decade refers to adopting Qualifications Frameworks. On one hand, these frameworks are instruments that provide higher education systems with transparency and legibility. On the other hand, they are a strategy used to describe students' educational journeys.

Since the 1990s, the Qualifications Frameworks policy has been the most important trend in higher education system reforms worldwide. It originated in the 1980s in the United Kingdom and subsequently spread worldwide. Currently, there are more than one hundred National Qualifications Frameworks globally. In addition, seven Regional Frameworks have been created for the frameworks for Europe, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, among others. These instruments recognise, develop and classify a person's knowledge, abilities and proficiency into a series of levels. These levels are expressed in terms of learning results – in other words, affirmations of what a person should be able to demonstrate at the end of a certain educational cycle.

Up to now, the study of the development of Qualifications Frameworks has mainly concentrated on analysing their impact on higher education systems, leaving to one side

the policy transfer perspective. However, evidence from the study of Qualifications Frameworks has shown that these instruments are always related to the topic of policy transfer. This is because each framework created in the last twenty years explicitly refers to a previous framework designed in another country.

On one hand, in the framework of policy transfer processes, one of the approaches used recently to analyse the spread of Qualifications Frameworks worldwide has been the Europeanisation phenomenon. Europeanisation refers to the process in which the national policies created are transformed by internalising the norms and expectations of a complex system of collective European policies. This approach is particularly relevant because it recognises that the European Qualifications Framework has affected different higher education systems globally. This framework has become the basis and model to emulate for designing and implementing national Qualifications Frameworks, especially in European Union member countries.

In this context, this study focuses on the Europeanisation phenomenon in higher education in Latin America, exploring the impact that the European experience has had on the development of Qualifications Frameworks in the Latin American region. Specifically, this study analyses the cases of Chile and Colombia, whose policy designs are complete. This topic is particularly relevant in the context of Latin America, where there are no specific obligations or incentives to implement this instrument.

The general aim of this study, therefore, is to compare the policy transfer process of the national Qualifications Frameworks in higher education in Chile and Colombia. To do so, any possible isomorphism with the European Qualifications Framework is analysed, with the study exploring both the transfer process itself and the results of Qualifications Framework development in Chile and Colombia.

The study also has three specific aims. The first is to help conceptualise public policy design and implementation as a result of policy transfer in higher education. To do this, the European influence on policy design in Qualifications Frameworks worldwide is identified. The second specific aim is to briefly characterise the Qualifications Frameworks' design processes in Chile and Colombia. As a result, three different process

stages can be identified: transnational attraction, deciding on and designing policies and then their implementation. The third and final aim is to analyse the presence of Europeanisation in Qualifications Framework policy design in Chile and Colombia. As a result, attempts will be made to see whether there is isomorphism between said policies and the European Qualifications Framework.

This study uses a descriptive-type methodology and a multiple case study design. Information was collected from the documental analysis of each policy's development and results and from semi-structured interviews with three groups involved in their development. These groups were the policy design teams (mainly members of both countries' Ministries of Education); those who benefit from the policies (mainly top-level directors, rectors and vice-rectors from different kinds of higher education institutions) and international experts involved in designing each country's framework. In Chile, a total of eleven interviews were held and, in Colombia, ten.

The book is divided into five chapters and a final chapter with conclusions. Chapter 1 tackles the convergence of education policies from a global perspective, specifically exploring the policy transfer phenomenon in higher education and the Europeanisation of higher education. Therefore, the content of this chapter includes a general revision of the literature that discusses the convergence of education policies, analysing the two main positions on this phenomenon: the theory of global culture and the systems theory, which explains this convergence. This study uses the systemic focus, allowing subsequent topics to be dealt with theoretically.

Next, the main models used to analyse policy transfer processes in higher education are developed and integrated, as well as the main variables that condition them. Specifically, the models that provide the analytical framework for the previously mentioned case studies are described, looking at the different variables that affect policy transfer, such as policy transfer stages.

Finally, the phenomenon is studied from a current perspective, referring to policy transfer from Europe to the countries that make up the European Union and beyond. The Europeanisation of higher education in general is analysed, as well as the specific

Europeanisation of higher education in Latin America and existing research on this subject.

Chapter 2 deals with the transfer of Qualifications Frameworks as a higher education policy from a historical perspective. First, this chapter includes a technical review of Qualifications Frameworks' main characteristics, bearing in mind their type, structure and aims.

Next, the emergence and history of Qualifications Frameworks is described, analysing the main differences between first, second and third-generation frameworks. In this section, the five first-generation frameworks are described in detail – from the England and Northern Ireland (commonly known as the UK Framework), Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. This allows for a subsequent analysis of the main concepts developed in these, as well as their transfer to and spread among other Qualifications Frameworks worldwide.

Finally, the European Qualifications Framework and its main characteristics are analysed. As a result of an empirical analysis of all the National Frameworks worldwide to date, the way in which the Qualifications Frameworks have been transferred from one country to another is examined. Transfer of the European Qualifications Framework is looked at specifically, both within and beyond the continent, and the way this has affected the creation and structure of different qualifications is evaluated.

Chapters 3 and 4 include the empirical case study results, namely the transfer of the Qualifications Frameworks in Chile and Colombia respectively. Both chapters are organised into three main sections. The first contains a revision of each country's higher education system, paying special attention to their composition, the actors that play a role in them and their degree structure, as far as the latter's certification attributes are concerned. This chapter reveals the structural similarities of both cases, something particularly relevant to interpreting the differences between the policies designed in each country.

In the second section, the Qualifications Framework policy constructed in each case is analysed, with attention mainly paid to historical facts and how the policy was created. In this study, political and legislative-regulatory aspects and the main actors involved are described, followed by the framework as a product of the policy created. For the latter, the framework designed in each country is characterised using the technical elements described in the previous chapter. In both cases, they have shared aims for current higher education system reform, although these generate very different relationships between institutions.

Finally, policy transfer maps are created, for example in a tree graph of the whole transfer process, including the arguments both for and against reform or resistance to the policy. The actors involved are also described, as well as their discourse, arguments and the externalisation or external references they use to validate these. The different stages of policy development can be distinguished in the maps created: an initial transnational attraction, followed by policy decisions and creation and finally implementation. The attraction and decision-making stages are analysed in both Chile and Colombia. However, implementation can only be studied in the case of Colombia, since Chile has not yet achieved this.

Chapter 5 offers a comparative analysis of the Qualifications Framework policy transfer process in Chile and Colombia, using a set of variables to study the policy transfer phenomenon, both as a dependent and as an independent variable. By analysing the responses to these questions, conclusions are then drawn about the Europeanisation of Qualifications Framework policies in Chile and Colombia and then about the ideology on which the relationship between higher education and employment is based.

In relation to the Europeanisation of Chile and Colombia's framework policies, the existence of Europeanisation is analysed according to three structural dimensions: local structures, public policy and cognitive and regulatory structures. In this sense, the effects of Europeanisation in Colombia, but not in Chile, can be seen. In addition, the findings are described as domestic opportunism in both cases – in other words, the use of a European reference point to legitimise developing local agendas, as seen in elements of both countries' policies.

Secondly, regarding the ideology on which the relationship between higher education and work is based, it is noted that this is the study's most determining variable. This facilitates understanding both of the actors' discourse as well as the results obtained in each country.

As a result, a comprehensive framework of analysis is developed for the Qualifications Framework employability aspect, as described in Chile and Colombia's frameworks. It can be seen that understanding the stance adopted on this idea is key to identifying who is in favour of and who is against the framework's policy, inasmuch as they do or do not lean towards a focus on employability. The evidence points to the fact that a focus on employability is dominant and that a policy that does not include this has fewer chances of actually being implemented, as has occurred in Chile.

Conclusions are included in the final chapter, which deals with the most relevant topics and an understanding of the cases studied. These topics can be useful both for future research and to design and implement new Qualifications Frameworks, especially in Latin America. In particular, the impact of the frameworks' technical characteristics, their complexity and how they adjust to local structures and specific policy elements are analysed. In addition, coercion, the role of international experts and isomorphism are identified as policy transformation process variables.

The evidence from the case studies points to the fact that the success of Qualifications Frameworks is not due to their technical characteristics. On the contrary, the results should be interpreted specifically in relation to how relevant they are and the local adjustments made, as well as regarding their relevance to a set of associated policies.

On the other hand, these cases underline the importance of the actors involved and their experience in and beliefs about policy ideation and design, which significantly affect their main characteristics and results. Likewise, they highlight the importance of actor networks that, in the case studies, have led to policy design. Finally, the importance of the influence of actors or external experts can be seen in how these trigger policy transfer processes, something that occurs in the two countries studied. At the same time, it can

also be seen that the main role of external experts is to give the policies legitimacy, rather than provide specialist advice on their design.

As far as coercion as one of the study's main topics is concerned, it can be seen that the more there is, the more isomorphism exists in the policy and Qualifications Frameworks used as a reference. This isomorphism can be real or apparent, coinciding with general structures, but with important basic discrepancies masking local agendas. To understand the isomorphism phenomenon, attention must be paid to the tension between legitimacy and relevance. Isomorphism acts as a mechanism to provide policies with additional legitimacy, preventing the idea of an original creation based on specific interests. Therefore, the loss of legitimacy's relevance could lead to a structure that is not particularly adequate for the country, as well as resistance to its implementation, as seemingly occurs in the case of Colombia. On the contrary, the loss of legitimacy's relevance could cause a resistance discourse that advocates for foreign examples as an indicator of quality, such as occurs in Chile.

One of the relevant findings on isomorphism in this study involves the 'Australianisation' and 'South Africanisation' phenomena in the Southern Hemisphere. There is a tendency towards using these countries' frameworks, a phenomenon that has not yet been described in literature. Regarding these cases, it is important to note that both refer to pioneering first-generation frameworks within their regions. Also, in both cases, these frameworks have agendas aimed at spreading and promoting said frameworks, with the aim of putting educational systems' connectivity mechanisms into motion, especially in higher education.

Related to the Europeanisation of higher education in the cases of Chile and Colombia, this study concludes by recognising the presence of Europeanisation mechanisms in both countries, primarily discharged by the market and chosen because of their ideas and discourse on good policy and best practices. It can therefore be understood that Europeanisation is not just the effect of a European project aimed at promoting genuine regional integration and extending European influence to other parts of the world. It is also a phenomenon welcomed by other countries, as long as it legitimises national actors

so that they can carry out the reforms needed, backed up by justifications and offering solutions as part of the national debate.

In the case of Chile, Europeanisation mechanisms are not visible in local structures or public policies. In contrast, in the case of Colombia, and although the effects of Europeanisation are not seen in local structures, there is an important Europeanisation effect on its policies. This effect can mainly be seen in the emulation of the European framework structure in that of the country, assuming a basic structure of eight levels and three descriptors. There are therefore also values and discourse directly related to European policy that prevail among different actors as a result of the application of the policy in the country.

From a different point of view and as opposed to the Europeanisation phenomenon, there are elements of domestic opportunism in both countries, which is why the European example is used as a way of applying pressure to achieve a local agenda or one that is of interest to a particular group.

Finally, this study identifies the ideology that is at the heart of the relationship between higher education and work, with the latter as the main variable affecting a Qualifications Framework policy's chances of failure or success. As far as this relationship is concerned, it is essential to recognise that it is at the basis of policy development as such, something that has been true since the very first frameworks emerged worldwide, in which the idea that frameworks should favour employability predominates. As a result, and in Europe at least, the development of frameworks as a Europeanisation phenomenon can be seen as a country's response to a European education policy that makes student and worker mobility easier and guarantees access to a common European job market.

In Chile and Colombia, it is recognised that the stances of actors in favour of reform and that of those who show resistance are mainly in direct opposition on this point, at least at a discursive level – in other words, about whether higher education should be orientated towards satisfying the needs of the job market or not. While universities from both countries lean towards comprehensive integration and establishing that they do not educate for employability, colleges, on the other hand, are advocates for educating for the

workplace. In both cases, the policies whose design has advanced are focused on employability. This is why Colombia's policy has reached a stage of initial implementation, while Chile's policy has been halted and replaced by a technical Qualifications Framework. In this way, adjusting the policy to the predominant idea of employability seems to be the most relevant variable for predicting the framework policy's chances of success.

In general, although the two policies that are moving towards implementation in Chile and Colombia can be identified, the high level of resistance among important groups of higher education institutions could explain why none of these countries have managed to effectively implement a Qualifications Framework to date. By definition though, a framework like this implies broad agreement across society, although it is key that this is implemented transversely from compulsory through to higher education. After a decade of discussion, Chile and Colombia are still not in this position, which is why their policies could be considered a failure to date.