

Abstract

The study explores the shapers and impacts of privatisation in the disregarded area of English education for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and identifies ways to ensure the quality of education without compromising equity. Many governments, including Hong Kong, have recently adopted a new line of privatisation through educational reforms, allowing for third parties' participation in curriculum delivery in public schools funded by public monies, i.e., New Education Privatisation (NEP) in Burch's (2009) definition. In addition to general privatisation trends, within-country NEP and its cross-national development at the government/supranational level have rightly attracted scholarly attention. However, the conditions which enable its infiltration into individual schools in the complex nexus of global/local relations has not received due attention, particularly for ESOL. ESOL requires special attention as equity issues can be heightened in it, English being crucial, but not readily accessible, social capital to enhance life chances for marginal groups of students, and is an attractive area for NEP. Furthermore, previous research has aptly provided criticism of NEP-induced changes in teacher professionalism (e.g., fragmentation of the teaching force) and educational quality and equity; however, there is little discussion of how schools and teachers should be prepared for NEP. This study will make an original contribution by identifying the shapers and impacts of NEP in ESOL through comparison of NEP in four countries, i.e., China, Japan, Australia and Greece, which have had divergent histories of, and relationships with, ESOL and NEP. Building on the research team's previous work, this investigation seeks to answer the following research questions (RQs): 1. What ideas and material and structural conditions (global and local) have enabled/shaped the NEP in ESOL in schools in the four national case contexts? 2. In what ways, does NEP in ESOL change teachers' practices, their professionalism and public schooling? 3. What quality is sought in privatised ESOL and how does it affect equity in education? 4. What lessons can be drawn from the cross-country analysis for the theorisation of NEP in ESOL and its appropriate use in public school systems? The sequential mixed-method study consists of analysis of supra-national, national, and sub-national policies concerning ESOL NEP; case studies in ten schools; a survey with 330 schools; and synthesis of findings through comparative analysis. It will extend the theorisation of NEP and debates about relevant policies, pedagogy and teacher education, in order to develop partnerships between public schools and third parties that will enhance quality education for all.