If Not "the Best of the West," Then "Look East": Imported Teacher Education Curricula in the Arabian Gulf

Olena Aydarova[1]

Abstract

By examining why nations borrow policy discourses, research on transfer has overlooked the implementation of transferred educational practices, models, or curricula. This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the transfer and implementation of teacher education curricula in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Based on interviews with teacher educators and administrators and document analysis of college materials and newspaper articles, the study shows that the significant actors' interpretations of the local culture, context, and students' abilities play a central role in modifying, reducing, or substituting the transferred curriculum. These findings raise questions whether transfers lead to the outcomes that nations engaging in them expect to gain. The study reveals that the choice of a model deals less with the intended outcomes but more with the nation's symbolic orientations of political and economic alliances, as well as their pursuit of power and prestige.

Keywords

cross-national education transfer, teacher education, curriculum

Discourses of global economic competitiveness and knowledge economy have contributed to the politicization of education and teacher education. In many countries, the results of international tests, such as Programme for International Student Assessment

[1]Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

Corresponding Author:
Olena Aydarova, Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education, 313 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA.
Email: aydarova@msu.edu

(PISA) or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), created tensions and debates about national educational systems. When politicians are confronted with students' poor performance on international tests, they look for models that will improve their students' achievement (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2006). This search for the silver bullet, accelerated by the growing impact of globalization, has led to the increase in cross-national education transfers, which represent the movement of policies or ideas across national borders and constitute cases of borrowing and lending of educational theories, policies, and practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). In addition, commodification of education and a belief that educational systems can be decontextualized and de-territorialized have contributed to the growing number of educational borrowings (Arnove & Torres, 1999). Educational transfers have also gained greater momentum because of the institutionalization of human capital theory (Schultz, 1961) that views education as a form of investment in the country's economic development and growth (Arnove & Torres, 1999).

The effect of these forces is further intensified by international organizations' involvement in diffusing standard prepackaged solutions for diverse local problems (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). International organizations, such as the World Bank, often exert overt pressure on developing nations to borrow educational models or practices in exchange for financial assistance (Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Of the nations that engage in the most publicized educational transfers, however, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the least likely candidate to borrow in return for financial assistance. An oil-rich state that has been hitting the world headlines with news of lavish investments in various businesses and enterprises, this nation does not depend on the handouts of international aid agencies to determine the path of its educational development. Yet invoking the rhetoric of human capital and pursuing higher student achievement on international tests, this nation has identified transfers of various educational models as a sure path to development.

Despite the exponential growth in the number of educational transfers, research has focused largely on the transfers of educational policies and policy discourses. Drawing on Tyack and Cuban's (1995) distinction between policy talk and policy action and employing Luckman's approach to education as a self-referential system, studies have revealed that nations engage in borrowing educational policy discourse to justify a predetermined set of reforms. Steiner-Khamsi (2002) claimed that the concept of borrowing "policy talk" explains why "what finally is implemented at school level does not necessarily reflect the borrowed model" (p. 83). She also suggested that research should focus on transfers of policy discourse because transferred practice is reinterpreted and localized to such an extent that it bears little resemblance to the original model. This suggestion contributed to the proliferation of studies examining transfers of policy discourses but left largely unexamined transfers of educational models or curricula.

Therefore, because of this orientation toward policy discourse, very little has been done to examine the implementation and indigenization of curriculum transfers. A few notable exceptions have shown that transferred policies and curricula are reinterpreted in the new contexts (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Kanu, 2005), sometimes with negative

consequences for student learning (Balarin & Benavides, 2010). Also, some studies have shown that even though transfer research assumes that transferred policies and curricula become decontextualized, it is impossible to remove the cultural beliefs, implicit assumptions, and inherent values from them (Alexander, 2001; Saud & Johnston, 2006). What has not been examined before is how the interpretations of those involved in curriculum transfers affect their implementation and indigenization. Finding out these interpretations can shed light on the consequences of transfers for the nations involved in them.

In this study, I examine the processes of teacher education curriculum transfer and the impact of the significant actors' interpretations on their implementation and indigenization. Based on the interview and document data from two teacher-training colleges in the UAE, this study raises questions about whether transfers accomplish what they intended to accomplish and problematizes why nations continue engaging in them despite their limited success. I argue that significant actors' interpretations of and responses to the constraints placed on them by local contexts reduce the transferred curriculum and prevents it from delivering the intended results. Yet, because educational transfers play an important role in the nations' webs of symbolic and political alliances, they continue to proliferate.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is a policy-borrowing framework developed by Phillips and Ochs (2003, 2004). This framework conceptualizes transfer as a cycle consisting of four stages: cross-national attraction, decision-making, implementation, and indigenization or internalization. During the first stage, impulses, such as a negative external evaluation or a systemic collapse, forces national governments to look for solutions to educational problems abroad. Impulses are accompanied by externalizing potential, when another country's philosophy or educational system structure may be seen as similar enough to facilitate transfer. The next stage is decision-making, during which the nation embarks on borrowing a policy to either provide a quick fix or create a sustainable solution to the existing problem. During the third stage, implementation, the borrowed policy either receives support and is implemented with relative ease, or is resisted and faces obstacles. Finally, during the last stage, the policy becomes internalized or indigenized: it assimilates local features and is considered a local creation. Ochs (2006) tested the framework in a study examining cross-national policy borrowing by Barking and Dagenham Boroughs in the UK and suggested that the framework had to be revised to incorporate evaluation of the borrowed policy.

Although this framework provides a useful heuristic for understanding the process of transfer, it has overlooked the role of "significant actors" and the impact of "contextual factors" on the transferred policy or curriculum (Phillips, 2009). In addition, previous research focused predominantly on cross-national attraction stage leaving the other stages largely unstudied. In this article, I address these gaps by examining the role of significant actors and contextual factors in curriculum implementation and indigenization.

Method

The goal of this qualitative research study was to answer the following research question and subquestions:

What was the process of transferring teaching education curricula in the UAE?

1. How were the choices made?
2. What types of decisions influenced the choice of the models?
3. How were the models implemented?
4. How were they adapted for the local context?

To answer these questions, I identified two relatively recent cases of teacher education curriculum implementation in the UAE. West Gulf University (WGU)[1] opened in 1998 and followed an American model, whereas East Gulf College (EGC) opened in 2007 and followed a Singaporean model. The two colleges were selected because the models implemented were borrowed from different countries and happened 10 years apart. Further details about the two colleges are provided in Appendix A.

Methodological Approach

The interpretive policy analysis used in this study places great value on the local knowledge of the participants, "the very mundane, expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience" (Yanow, 2000, p. 5). To access this local knowledge, it is necessary to identify interpretive communities that engage in meaning-making processes as they participate in policy implementation. Although there are several communities involved in the process of transferring curriculum, in this study I focus on the data from teacher educators and administrators.

Participants

The study participants are former and present administrators and teacher educators of West Gulf University and East Gulf College. Seven participants were from the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, and Singapore and spent from one to 11 years in the UAE. It is important to point out that Emirati college instructors or university professors are somewhat rare; so the participants in this study are all expatriates. More detailed information about the study participants is presented in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Phillips and Ochs's model of borrowed policy borrowing (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, 2004) was used to design the interview protocol for this study. Each interview lasted on average about an hour. Due to geographic distances only one interview was conducted face-to-face, whereas the rest were conducted over Skype or over the phone. In addition to interviews, I used newspaper articles, curriculum documents, and the

colleges' online resources for triangulation and additional insight into transfer processes in the UAE.

Data analysis

Two approaches were used to analyze the data: a chronological approach was used to reconstruct the process of teacher education curriculum transfer in each case, and a thematic and interpretive approach was undertaken to identify key elements of the transfer processes and to gain additional insight into transfer implementation and indigenization.

Findings

I present the findings for each college separately to underscore that even though the cases look largely dissimilar on the surface, they reveal the same patterns of implementation and indigenization. The presentation of the findings follows the flow of the policy-borrowing framework: cross-national attraction stage, decision-making, implementation, indigenization or localization, and evaluation stages.

The Case of West Gulf University

Cross-national attraction stage. The literature on the UAE reveals multiple long-standing political and economic ties between the UAE and the United States (Davidson, 2005; Peck, 1986), which may have contributed to the cross-national attraction that led to the choice of the American model. The United States has had a large presence in oil, military, engineering, and construction industries for more than two decades (Davidson, 2005; Peck, 1986). Speaking about the UAE attraction to the U.S. models, Ella, WGU's former employee, quickly established a connection between the UAE interest in the U.S. education and the U.S. position of power and prestige:

> They [the UAE] liked the U.S. model. The UAE, in general, seems to have admiration for the U.S. educational system and much more so than the UK or Australian or New Zealand system . . . For some reason, they see the United States as the big superpower and cutting edge . . .

Ella makes an interesting observation that with many viable options present, one educational model stands out not for the reasons of high academic attainment of its students, but rather for the powerful position and prestigious status of the country on the world stage.

Decision-making and implementation stages. The interview data shed only limited light on the decision-making or implementation processes during the early history of WGU transfer. Some old-timers say that the sheikh who founded the university received his undergraduate degree in the United States and was therefore more inclined

to build a university based on the American model that he himself had experienced. But when Rhonda, a longtime WGU's faculty, arrived in the UAE, the College of Education was admitting its first students and there was "only a list of fifteen courses." So, the newly arrived teacher educators had to take the course titles from the list and design courses as they were delivering them to the students. So, even if the model was transferred from the United States, course content was allegedly developed locally. Rhonda justified the lack of preexisting curriculum this way: "You can see elements of things that have come from many places but it isn't just a place where you can bring in something and plunk it down wholesale."

By stating the undesirability of "plunking something down wholesale," Rhonda points to the need to be selective about transferred curriculum:

> People are different here and expectations are different here. And they need to see their own culture in what they are doing . . . There is a real concern here. They want the best of the west as far as education but they want the best of their own culture and heritage.

Indigenization stage. Although the desire for "best of the West" served as the attraction to borrow, the concern for the local culture and heritage led to indigenization and localization of the transferred model. In numerous newspaper articles published in the UAE in the past 10 years, journalists, academics, and parents shared their concerns about the threat of foreign models to the national identity and Arabic and Islamic heritage of the UAE. Many of them call for the blend of western science and local religion, traditions, and language. A response to this concern is reflected in the former description of the university: even though English is the medium of instruction, the university's goal is to prepare students "fully bilingual in English and Arabic." This concern is also addressed in the curriculum structure of the program: among courses that can be found at any American teacher preparation program, such as human development or children's literature, are courses on Islamic civilization, Arabic concepts, and teaching Arabic literacy. These elements reflect elements of indigenization, where the elements of local context and local culture have been incorporated into the transferred model. Including these courses allows Emirati students "to see their own culture in what they are doing." However, this type of indigenization is highly circumscribed: of the 42 courses listed in the curriculum plan, only four courses deal with elements of the local culture. Although the mission statement includes a commitment to the students' development of bilingual proficiency, only one course is dedicated to Arabic. Most courses are taught in English and it is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score that determines students' ability to enter the program or continue in it, not their native language proficiency. Explicitly stated goals of localization are minimally present in the curriculum structure which points to the superficial treatment afforded to local context in the curriculum.

The extent of localization and the local development of the courses need to be examined further. As Angela explained,

> Human development is always interesting. The textbook we use is an American text Mintrop, well-known and weighs a ton. We have been very selective in the content that we can cover, you know. Students have the textbook and they can read any aspect of it any time they want. But what we do with that course is [we] get them to relate to the ideas to the UAE context . . . The issues arise when the family is concerned about the content or textbooks and things like that . . . To be honest it doesn't seem to be a big issue, in a sense should I use it or should I not, some of the content we touch on briefly in human development. For example, premarital pregnancies and things like that, it might be interesting for them to know about, but it is not likely to occur in this society, to a degree. But we don't focus that much on that aspect. . . . We look at the cross-cultural perspective, but we would not spend so much time on that as you might do at an American university.

One theme that this quote illustrates is that because most of the faculty come from the West, they are more likely to adopt Western textbooks. Adapting those for the local situation involves placing the burden of making connections between the American text and the local context on the students. But in addition to the adaptation by looking at things "cross-culturally," teacher educators have to be selective about the content because some topics, such as premarital pregnancies, may be considered offensive in the local conservative Islamic context. Even though Angela hedges that "it does not seem to be a big issue," the families can vehemently object, if they find the topics or the pictures in the textbooks unacceptable.

Rhonda, a faculty with a science background, discussed a similar approach to dealing with culturally inappropriate areas: spend less time on certain topics and omit some topics from the curriculum altogether. For example, such topics as evolution, or sexuality and reproduction of mammals and humans, are deemed as culturally inappropriate and are therefore not included in the science curriculum for preservice teachers.

In addition to avoiding controversial topics, the participants shared the need to adapt the materials for the local context by providing linguistic simplifications and by changing geographic names. The linguistic simplification was seen as necessary because students' first language is Arabic; therefore, teacher educators sometimes rewrite texts to help students understand key concepts. And with geographic names, to avoid confrontation with students the Persian Gulf is substituted with Arabian Gulf; Israel with Occupied Palestinian Territory.

These adaptations reveal a conflict of interests. When the leaders choose an American model of education, they want "the best of the West" in math, science, English, and education. Importing these models into the local context creates conflicts

and tensions because Emiratis who are already outnumbered by foreigners in their own country feel threatened—their culture and language are being eroded by the introduction of foreign models and the English language. When they call for a blend, they hope their culture will be recognized in the curriculum, in the materials, and in the teaching approaches. Instead, teacher educators use their own interpretation of Emirati culture as a filter through which they "sift" the curriculum, eliminating features that they think do not belong. As a result, the indigenization of the transferred curriculum becomes not the enrichment of the curriculum with local features in courses other than those explicitly dedicated to the elements of the local culture, but rather the selective trimming of content deemed to be culturally inappropriate. In contrast to Steiner-Khamsi's (2002) claim that trimming removes alien elements, this trimming is done not to remove alien elements, but to cleanse the curriculum of the features allegedly incompatible either with the cultural expectations or the linguistic abilities of the students. In the end, the students are shortchanged as they get little of "best of the West" and even less of "local culture and heritage."

The influence of the West, however, does not end when the curriculum is implemented in the new context. An unexpected theme that emerged from the interviews with WGU teacher educators and administrators was WGU's pursuit of National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation. As Ella was explaining the UAE interest in the American model, she immediately transitioned into describing WGU's application for NCATE accreditation:

> In fact, WGU is the first institution outside of the United States to even seek the accreditation by the national, meaning the U.S. national accreditation board. Because there is another accreditation process called International Recognition of Teacher Education . . . So, there is an avenue for international colleges of education to be recognized as an accredited program . . . and originally we were gonna go that route but the sheikhs decided that they did not want to do that. They would rather seek out being the first [teacher preparation program accredited by] NCATE.

Interestingly, the choice of evaluators is closely linked to the choice of the original model. Among other available options, the national leaders chose to apply for accreditation with an agency that does not specialize in international programs. As the college is going through the accreditation process, the standards developed for the U.S. context create challenges for the overseas program. The incongruence between the NCATE's standards and local context surfaced in the interview with Angela who explained the difficulties in applying the U.S. human diversity standards in the UAE.

> The diversity standard, a different perspective here, if you like. We are a woman's college, we don't have any men, it means we do not have any diversity in terms of gender. The school system is relatively small here and the government schools that we prepare for the students are mostly local Emirati, they don't

have a huge range of different cultures in the government schools. The private schools are a different story, but not many of our students go to private schools . . . But the diversity one, we need to think about it in terms of diversity among the students themselves. We don't have a broad range of students from different cultural backgrounds or different socioeconomic backgrounds. That's not a way that we would look at diversity here, whereas in the States, that would be quite an issue. We have to think about what fits with the local context and situation as we are building our case for NCATE.

Angela's concluding words about the local context and what fits in it raise interesting questions. The demographic profile of the UAE, with 80% of the population being expatriates from India, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Ethiopia, South Africa, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, is far from being homogenous. Even the notion of Emirati is a highly contested issue: prejudice against certain tribes and racism against certain racial groups are a commonplace occurrence in students' daily lives and in the classrooms. Gender differences and inequalities are present as well, with discrimination against women as well as sexual minorities being widespread. Even WGU's expectation that its graduates will become leaders in "family life" can be perceived as sexist, considering that the majority of its students are females. The socioeconomic disparities between representatives of different groups and even within the Emiratis themselves are enormous. For example, in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, the Al Bateen area, with beautiful green lawns and armed gunmen guarding the gates of walled-in mansions, stands in stark contrast with the town of Bani Yas buried in the desert sand only a 10 minute drive away. The run-down three-story apartment complexes with broken windows covered by wooden planks and shoddy villas with chipped paint and withering date palms in the yards are a silent testimony to the structural socioeconomic inequality inherent in the Emirati society. Teachers working in the national public schools inevitably face the challenges of working with students from diverse backgrounds, even if they all have UAE citizenship.

Why then does Angela suggest "that's not a way that we would look at diversity here?" A possible explanation may lie in yet another cultural interpretation. Later during the interview, Angela described the early days of her time at WGU when the faculty were explicitly told what they are not allowed to discuss in the classroom:

We were given a wide range of information, what was appropriate and what was not appropriate for class discussions. For example, you don't talk about politics the way we might talk about it in our culture. Their understandings of certain things are not open for criticism and change, political issues or issues related to beliefs and so on. So, those things are just understood.

Thus, the need to look at the diversity standard in a different way is not a statement of a lack of need to address the issues of diversity, inequality, and discrimination or

inappropriateness of the standard because it does not apply for the context. It is a statement that reveals another taboo. Discussing these issues is akin to embarking on political critique, a sure path to jail or deportation. Thinking "about what fits with the local context and local situation in building our case for NCATE" will take enormous creativity as the elements of an alien ideology need to be reintroduced into the curriculum in such a way as not to trespass the boundaries set by the local culture and the local political elites. This time, however, it is not just the teacher educators' interpretations of the local culture alone, but the constraints placed on them by the context that leads to the redefinition of diversity and its significance in teacher education. And yet again, "the best of the West" captured in the ability to question and critically examine important social issues is trimmed away not to bring in controversial issues that may upset the students or their families.

Despite challenges in implementation, indigenization, and accreditation, the university website already claims that it is an "accredited" university that grants "internationally recognized" degrees. The interview data, however, revealed that the reduction of the curriculum content and of the international standards raises important questions about what is actually delivered in the programs. Thus "internationally recognized" may not be a reflection of the content or the skills that the degree provides, but rather the status and the power of the country that has endorsed it. It is the name that matters as the seal of approval that enhances the status of the college and of the university. The power of the name matters more than the power of the approach, curriculum, or model.

The Case of East Gulf College

Cross-national attraction stage. Both the interview and the document data revealed the significance of the political consequences of 9/11 for the Middle East. The 9/11 political tensions were only further exacerbated by the war in Iraq. Arab human development reports of 2002 and 2003 produced by the United Nations Development Program accused the United States of stalling progress in the Arab World and urged "Arabs to fashion their own future rather than allow the West to dictate the changes" (Janardhan, 2005). As a result, the whole region, including Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE, turned from attraction to the West to the policy of looking East.

As the dissatisfaction with the United States was escalating in the UAE public discourse, the UAE interest in Singapore was growing as well. Robust ties between the UAE and Singapore are being developed through oil trade, tourism, training programs, and economic and financial agreements. UAE newspapers are peppered with references to Singapore's academic and economic achievements (Al Asoomi, 2010). The rhetoric that connects a country's performance on international tests with its ability to compete in the global economy made Singapore, one of the global leaders in international assessments, an appealing choice. Finally, interest in Singaporean education also stems from its citizens ability to speak English, the language of global markets and knowledge economy. As Jack, EGC's former administrator, explained during the interview,

> When they looked to the east, Singapore shone out brightly not because [they] are more capable or whatever but because [they] use English as the medium of instruction, administration and commerce and business. China, Korea, they are equally successful, but in Singapore English is the medium of instruction.

English as the medium of instruction was particularly important in the nation's attempts to create a new generation of teachers, who could become "the cutting edge educators in the country and in the region." The desire to reform education by staffing schools with professionally trained Emirati teachers led to the UAE leaders' negotiations with the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore. The story is that it was the suggestion of the Singapore ambassador's wife to one of the sheikhs that sparked these negotiations.

Decision-making stage. The decision-making stage of EGC curriculum transfer spanned several years. After the decision to set up a professional development college to provide training for teachers was made in 2003, two or three small teams visited the UAE to study the culture and the context and collect information about the educational system and educational policies already in place. The information collected during three-to-four-day visits was supposedly used to write the curriculum for the new college. From the perspective of curriculum designers, "curriculum is not just a list of topics or guidelines. It is actually detailed lesson plans. Curriculum plan, worksheets and everything." To develop it, NIE teams, the significant actors at this stage, modified the NIE curriculum for the UAE context.

When prompted to describe the modifications, one of the curriculum writers explained that it was adjusted for the context, culture, and competence. For the context, Singapore holidays were substituted by the UAE holidays; for the culture, the Chinese names were changed to Arabic names. The language was simplified for the UAE students' low competence level. Jack commented that curriculum designers "had to water down the level of content" because the quality of the UAE students does not match the quality of Singapore's students.

Implementation stage. Despite these alleged modifications by the curriculum designers, many EGC's teacher educators believed "the curriculum was unusable" because it was too hard for the students. In their opinion, adapting it for the local context would require "dumb[ing] it down" even further. Another criticism leveled against it was that it was not suitable for English learners because the linguistic level of the materials was too high for the Emirati students. For example, a course in phonetics and phonology became a pronunciation course: due to the allegedly low students' abilities only the practice of sounds was included in this semester-long course. A course in semantics that in NIE curriculum included an extensive analysis of semantic rules, at ECG became a course on learning new vocabulary.

Because of this negative evaluation, one of the deans suggested that the curriculum should be "chucked out." When the dean was informed that the curriculum had to be implemented, he changed his approach only slightly, "We must take their course titles to make it look as if we are following the framework they'd given us but we will populate

it with our own things." As a result, the NIE curriculum materials were discarded and "all these hundreds and hundreds of books languished in a store room." Only the structure of the NIE curriculum remained, but the rest of the materials were substituted for the content chosen by the staff. Because most of the faculty were either from the West or educated in the West, the courses were populated with Western textbooks or materials, or according to Crystal, a former faculty member, "the standard, old-fashioned stuff, Trawick-Smith, Laura Berk, the usual stuff." Even though the impetus for the substitution was the alleged mismatch between the NIE's materials and the local context, the ultimate result of this change was not greater localization or incorporation of local culture or indigenous knowledge but the implementation of western materials. The faculty took the responsibility for simplifying the language and making the content more comprehensible for the students, but the burden of making connections with the local context was once again placed on the students themselves, as the following quote illustrates:

> One of the main texts that we were using, Trawick-Smith, looks at cultural differences. [. . .] Very often we would be saying, "This is how it is in the UK or in America, how is it here? What's the same or what's different in the UAE?"

Indigenization stage. As to indigenization or localization, because the college had to keep the NIE model, no courses on Islamic civilization, Arabic language, or heritage culture were introduced. Therefore, the program did not incorporate any features of the local context. With the faculty filtering the curriculum based on *their* interpretations of students' abilities or contextual constraints, the curriculum was modified for the local level only by reducing the content or simplifying the language. One of the participants, Mark, defended the high level of NIE curriculum and criticized this reductionist approach:

> You cannot teach down. Progress does not happen by teaching down, you have to level up. That's what educational improvement is all about. It is not about teaching down to the students because you will always be there. It is all about leveling up. And that's a concept in the Middle East that a lot of expats don't understand. "Oh, these guys can't make it. Oh, we can't give it to them". That's what we call educational injustice. Or technically what we call educational malpractice.

In Mark's opinion, the students are shortchanged as substitutions, modifications, and adaptations trim the curriculum and reduce the quality of their education. As a result of these modifications, students do not receive the academically rigorous curriculum that they were supposed to get as a result of transfer.

Even though many were aware that the superficial structure was all that remained from Singaporean model, EGC continued using Singapore and NIE's names in its public relations materials. When the NIE withdrew from the project, the newspapers

were still writing "Schools in Abu Dhabi plan to boost standards through collaboration with teacher-training institutes in Singapore, widely recognised [*sic*] as a world leader in this area." (Latham, 2010). One of the former ECG faculty, Robert, explained the situation in the following way:

> They were able to get a name that they could bring in. And from my short experience in the UAE it is quite clear that reputation and prestige is very important in that culture . . . It is not what you have, it is the name associated with what you have, and that was one of the perks associated with the NIE.

EGC's case illustrates that what matters most is not what is transferred, because much of the original model is filtered out as inappropriate for the local context, but what the borrower is able to do with the lender's name. It is through the name that the borrower receives the high status and prestige of the lender.

Discussion

The findings of this study make several contributions to the research on cross-national transfer. First, this study raises questions about Steiner-Khamsi's (2000, 2004) claim that it is only policy discourse that becomes transferred. Although the UAE newspapers are in fact peppered with the "global speak" of accountability, standardization, and international benchmarking, which supports Steiner-Khamsi's observation, when it comes down to selecting a teacher education curriculum, there is no predetermined path of reform. Whether it is the shell of the American curriculum or "lock, stock, and barrel" of the Singaporean curriculum, both transferred curricula are intended for actual implementation.

Second, this study raises some important questions for the policy-borrowing framework proposed by Phillips and Ochs (2003, 2004). At present, there are only suggestions that evaluation needs to be incorporated into the framework. The case of WGU may suggest that it can be added after the indigenization stage. The case of EGC, however, shows that evaluation can happen prior to implementation, preclude the curriculum from being implemented, and lead to its substitution with other materials. Phillips and Ochs's (2003, 2004) framework does not allow for exit points of the transferred products and does not include a possibility of substitution. Adding evaluation at all stages of borrowing would create exit points for the transferred products and possibilities of their substitution at different stages of the process.

This study also problematizes the present understanding of the indigenization or localization stages. One of the assumptions in many transfer theories is that the more time passes from the time of transfer, the more indigenized the model becomes. Although WGU, with its incorporation of Arabic and Islamic classes, renders some support to this assumption, it also provides a contradiction to it in the content of other courses. Although 10 years passed since WGU model's implementation, according to the study participants, the course content remains distinctly Western. In addition, in

both cases the local culture was reduced to its most salient features of taboos, celebrations, and names. As a result, the process of indigenization involved changes in superficial features, leaving the deep structures intact. This finding challenges the claims that in the process of transfer, the transferred product is reinterpreted and infused with local meanings (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). I show that because interpretations and substitutions are done by the significant actors, such as administrators or teacher educators, their cultural background and consequently their interpretation of the local context play an important role in the implementation and indigenization stages. When these actors are themselves not a part of the local context or when the local context places constraints on their ability to enact changes, indigenization is limited and superficial. It reduces rather than enriches the transferred curriculum.

In addition to the interpretations of the context, significant actors' assessment of the transferred products and the gap between the level of the product and their students' abilities affect implementation. When educators believe that students possess low levels of linguistic and academic abilities, they reduce and simplify the content. As a result, the curriculum gets diluted or trimmed to cater to the local students. The two UAE cases show that the deficit conceptions (Milner, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) that teacher educators hold of their students lead them to "dumb down" the curriculum or skip over controversial topics. As Mark stated, this kind of localization is akin to "educational malpractice." This evaluation raises questions whether transfers can improve students' achievement and their learning outcomes. This observation points to the need to incorporate the analysis of local actors' interpretations of educational transfers into the borrowing framework and future studies. How people on the ground make sense of the transferred curriculum and its ability to fit into the local context has major implications for its implementation. The two UAE cases represent educational transfers that are based on the technocratic linear conceptualization of education: through the provision of certain inputs, policy-makers aspire to produce desired outcomes. This conceptualization however is problematic once it encounters the complexity of human experience: significant actors' interpretations, desires, and fears transform the transferred curriculum. It is reworked not necessarily to fit the context better, but to match the significant actors' representation of that context.

In fact, the UAE's importing of educational models, curricula, and products have been widely criticized in the media. For example, one professor shared at an education conference that "transplanting wholesale Western education models to the UAE does not work" (Hilotin, 2010). Critics also observe that importing educational products is costly and instead this money should go toward developing "homegrown" curricula, methods, and approaches (Salama, 2010). Why, then, do policy-makers not heed these words and invest their money in building local capacity and local resources?

Both cases illustrated that it was not the actual approach to preparing teachers, but the power of the lenders' names that accrued the prestige of the colleges. In addition, both transfers of teacher education curricula were accompanied by many other political and economic ties. Thus, cases of transfer represent the building of symbolic alliances and strengthening of political relations with other nations. So, for example, the

transfer of NIE curriculum is accompanied by national discourses where the example of Singapore is held up high as a model of a nation that accomplished fast development through investment in education (Al Asoomi, 2010). Thus, Singapore becomes not only the lender of educational products or partner in financial or military exchanges, but also the symbolic referent for the UAE's hopes for the future. Thus, the name of Singapore gains power in policy-makers' discourses about the plans for the country's development and serves as a stamp of approval on those models and policies that resemble what has been done in Singapore. Furthermore, educational transfers are framed as shortcuts to desired outcomes and results. An ECG faculty who has spent a number of years working at different institutions in the UAE alluded to this commonly discussed point.

> They have so much money that they feel they can buy things from the outside. They can hand responsibility to others. They do not want to go through 200 years of development and revolutions, they don't want to go through the pain of it so they just say they would buy it.

In other words, what is attractive about the American model is not the culture of critical thinking that it promotes; what is appealing about the Singaporean model is not the ethics of hard work that it instills. In the global pursuit of competitive performance and the discourse of knowledge economy, both are seen as a shortcut to achievements and accomplishments that would have otherwise required many years of local development.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the implementation and indigenization of transferred curriculum depends heavily on the significant actors' interpretations of the local context and of the students' cultures and abilities. These interpretations lead to reductions, simplifications, or substitutions of the transferred curriculum. All of these factors raise important questions about how much of the transferred curriculum filters down to the students and whether transferred educational models lead to improved student performance. The study also shows that despite these limitations, nations or institutions are willing participants in transfers because through them they build their political and economic alliances and accumulate symbolic power and prestige.

This study attempted to fill the gap created by the predominance of studies examining cross-national attraction or the transfer of policy discourse in the field of comparative education. Research on educational transfer will benefit greatly from studies that attend to the struggles and tensions that occur when transferred educational models or curricula are implemented on the ground. Ethnographic accounts that incorporate interpretations of transfer of various interpretive communities, such as students, their families, and their teachers, as well as policy-makers, will further problematize what it is that actually happens when one nation chooses to adopt someone else's educational policies, approaches, or practices.

Appendix A

Institutional Features.

	West Gulf University (WGU)	East Gulf College (EGC)
Year launched	University—1998, College of Education - 2000	2007
Type of program	A college in a liberal arts university	A free-standing teachers college
Country of origin	North America	Singapore
Degrees offered	Bachelor of science or arts	Bachelor of education
Faculty from or educated in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia or New Zealand	23 out of 24	17 out of 21
Students	Predominantly Emirati, international and expatriate students are allowed only in several programs	Only Emirati
Language of instruction	English	English

Appendix B

Study Participants.

	Participants from West Gulf University	Participants from the East Gulf College
Administrators	1	2
Teacher educators	2	2
Years in the UAE	4-10	1-10
Nationality	New Zealand, United States	UK, United States, Singapore
Still employed by the college[2]	2	0
Pseudonyms	Rhonda, Ella, Angela	Jack, Mark, Robert, and Crystal

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Notes

1. The names of institutions and individuals have been changed to protect subjects' confidentiality.
2. Of the four EGC participants, none was still working for the college at the time of the interviews. Of the three WGU participants, two were still working for the university. Being currently employed by the university may have affected the answers that the WGU participants were willing to provide. To protect their position with the university, the participants may have stayed away from potentially more controversial answers. At the end of the interview, one of the WGU participants inquired about the details of my research and when I proceeded to explain that I am researching educational transfer and how it gets implemented in new cultural contexts, the participant switched the tone of the conversation, started adding Arabic words, and emphasized extensive collaborations with national citizens. All of these features were distinctly absent prior to my explanation. This example suggests that the participants' perceived need to protect the reputation of the university and their role in it may have affected some of their responses to interview questions.

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Author Biography

Olena Aydarova has taught at teachers colleges in China, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Her research focuses on globalization and recontextualization of educational policies, practices, and theories. She is currently examining the impact of the Bologna Process on teacher education in the Russian Federation.