

Reforming Education in the Context of Weak States: The Political Economy of Education Reforms in Peru 1995-2020

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María Balarin and Mauricio Saavedra

Abstract

In this paper, we explore the political economy of education reforms in Peru through an analysis of the recent history of education policies in the country. Starting in 1995, arguably the inception point for quality-oriented reforms, we follow policy developments in three selected areas – curriculum, teachers and assessment – up to 2020, the year when the study was conducted. Through a detailed reconstruction of policies and policy changes that was based on documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, we analyse the changing nature of agendas throughout this period and the factors that may explain changes and continuities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we explore the political economy of education reforms in Peru through an analysis of the recent history of education policies in the country. Starting in 1995, arguably the inception point for quality-oriented reforms, we follow policy developments in three selected areas – curriculum, teachers and assessment – up to 2020, the year when the study was conducted. Through a detailed reconstruction of policies and policy changes that was based on documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, we analyse the changing nature of agendas throughout this period and the factors that may explain changes and continuities.

Studying the political economy of education policies in Peru poses a paradox that we will attempt to address. While many important improvements can be identified during the period, especially when read through assessment data and other quantitative indicators, many questions emerge as to the causal link between improvements and reforms; the sustainability of reform efforts in view of the country's institutional weakness and increasing political instability; and the often reductionist way in which learning has come to be understood.

One of the main points that emerges from our analysis is that studying the political economy of education reforms in contexts with weak states and institutions raises somewhat different questions than those that emerge in political economy analysis in countries with more developed institutions. This is so because some of the elements and processes that traditional political economy analyses take for granted – i.e. more or less functioning systems of representation and interest mediation – may be absent. This is the case in Peru.

Through the study we show how quality and learning oriented policies have been marked by a transformation in the policy process, which has gone from being highly idiosyncratic and based on the personal views and whims of policy makers, to a more technocratic and institutionalized model of policy-making that is more evidence-based. While this is positive in that there is greater accountability and somewhat greater continuity in policies, the efforts made by technocratic elites and has not been accompanied by broader institutional reforms nor by processes of political negotiation and settlement conducive to policy learning, necessary continuities and the consolidation of reforms over time. Corruption in particular has been rife throughout the period and has had a very marked impact on the pace and direction of education policies. At the same time, and partly due to the technocratic take-over of political processes, the predominant understanding of learning and quality improvement has been narrowed down and largely equated with results in standardized tests. This, we argue, is problematic in that it has happened at the expense of other important aims of education, including those of developing richer pedagogies and promoting inclusion.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WEAK STATES: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Our conceptual starting point for explaining the *why* of learning reforms in Peru – and how reform intentions have shifted throughout the period under study – is the theory of political settlements. The latter can be defined as ‘the set of institutional arrangements through which a country addresses the most fundamental of governance challenges’ (Levy 2014 p.17). They

result from political processes of negotiation, (dis)agreement and contestation, and they are a basic condition for reforms to thrive. Settlements crystalize and shape different countries' commitment to certain courses of action, such as making learning a central policy goal.

One of our main points is that we need to understand the nature of settlements and the role they play in different countries in view of the institutional context in which they take place. Broadly speaking, we could distinguish certain kinds of settlement regimes that are more typical of low and middle-income countries, where some of the conditions that settlements theory might take for granted – such as functioning political party systems, fairly independent and stable bureaucracies, or even the rule of law – may be weak or altogether absent. This leads to policy making processes in such contexts to be 'highly charged and politicized' to the extent that 'what gets implemented – and its impact – depends much or more on the politics of the reform process as the technical design of the reform' (Bruns & Schneider, 2016).

As Levitsky and Murillo (2014) propose that while 'formal institutions are not uniformly weak in developing countries (nor uniformly strong in developed ones)' (p. 2), in regions such as Latin America, 'the vast differences in the enforcement and stability of rules (...) suggests that institutional strength should be treated as a variable, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption.' (p. 2).

We take this to mean, that the conditions under which the politics of education tends to operate – e.g. the existence of fairly stable and well organized political parties that develop and pursue fairly clear political and policy agendas, which are the basis for negotiations and settlements; the existence of fairly stable mid-level civil servants and bureaucrats that do not change with each governmental crisis or change of government; a certain degree of regulation in the extent that private interests and corruption can influence the definition and implementation of policies, among others – do not always (or maybe rarely) hold in developing countries. In weak institutional contexts, the margin of action that policy makers have to make changes at which is considerably larger than in those contexts in which existing rules bind decision making so that even changes must cohere with previously agreed paths. This is in line with what one of us has previously argued about the Peruvian case, when exploring the nature of reform processes in weak states (Balarin, 2008).

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF QUALITY ORIENTED EDUCATION REFORMS: POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1995-2020 PERIOD

The years between 1995 and 2021 were a period of several education reform attempts in Peru, some more comprehensive than others. With some exceptions, it was also a period of great change in the conduction of the education sector, with 20 ministers in 25 years, who often redefined policy goals at will. One of the most salient features of the period is the length of time that it has taken for key reforms to coalesce. The urgency of reforming teaching practices, the teaching career and the curriculum has been at the center of policy debates since the very beginning of the period, but reforms have only concluded in recent years and in some cases remain partial and still susceptible to discontinuation.

In the case of the curriculum, it took approximately 20 years for a consistent and well-articulated version of the national curriculum to emerge. While, from early on, there has been a certain degree of consensus around the need to move away from a prescriptive, content-focused curriculum, the alternative, a curriculum focused on developing competencies, was, for a long time, much less clearly defined and operationalized. Throughout the period we see

an unresolved tension in relation to the balance between curricular content and the development of competencies, which has given rise to various different curriculum versions, and which has, unexpectedly, led to a hollowing out of the knowledge base and focus of educational practice. The tensions, between an abstractly defined competencies-oriented curriculum and the need to provide greater guidance to teachers and schools with regards to how to operationalize the new approach has also been at the heart of various changes in curricular policy; as has been the introduction of a 'gender perspective' as one of the transversal approaches to the curriculum, which led to a strong backlash from organized conservative groups opposed to the use of terms such as 'gender identity' or 'sex' in the curriculum, and led a legal petition to eliminate the gender perspective from the curriculum.

In the case of teaching practices, reforms have also taken an unusually long time to coalesce, but they are still partial. While it took a long time to get a coherent teacher's career law, the latter has not been accompanied by a consistent reform of teacher's professional development, one that includes both pre-service teacher training, and a coherent in-service professional development portfolio. It seems like in the search for silver bullets to improve test results, coherent and long-term investments to improve teaching practice may have been deemed untenable. Within this area a key contested issue is the nature of teacher training, especially in-service training: while some argue that its focus should be on teaching methodologies, others contend that it should focus on curricular content. This dichotomy, which is arguably a fallacy, has been at the heart of many changes that have acted against the consolidation of reforms.

Learning assessment, of the standardized variety, has been one of the most consistent areas of policy making throughout the period, but our discussion in the paper suggests that the way in which learning has been conceptualized, merely as results in rather narrow standardized tests that assess knowledge and skills in just two curricular areas, and the way in which assessment results have been used to guide policy decisions – especially after 2006 – may have been counter to the goal of actually improving teaching practices and learning. On one hand, there is evidence that teachers are teaching to the test and often narrowing down the curriculum. On the other hand, as policy makers, especially those in the strategic planning and budget allocation offices of the MoE, and their counterparts in the MoF, search for recipes to improve results in the short term, they often sideline programmes that might contribute to more long-lasting transformations of teaching and learning practices.

While between 1995 and 2020 Peru has made notable improvements in key variables related to educational quality – such as test results and schooling trajectories indicators (Rivas & Scasso, 2020) – the link between such improvements and learning reforms is not entirely evident. Recent studies point to a very discontinuous policy process, where ministerial teams as well as those working at the regional and local levels, have changed constantly, and while key aspects of certain reforms may have been implemented, others have not. If anything, there have been lengthy and discontinuous paths to achieve reform goals, what leads us to characterize the education policy process as one of *protracted incrementalism*, in which small incremental gains have been made over long periods of time, in a process characterized by many forwards and backwards movements, in which many key elements have got lost in the way (Balarin & Rodriguez, 2020). What is clear, is that contextual variables, such as the country's economic growth and the consequent improvement in people's livelihoods, may have played at least an equally important role to education reforms.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LEARNING AND QUALITY REFORMS

What is the political economy behind the highly discontinuous and protracted way in which learning reforms have been pursued in Peru? Our answer considers four key elements: (1) the macro political settlement and its influence on education reform; (2) the high political instability and its impact on the education sector; (3) the establishment of a highly technocratic model of policy-making in education and the competition between efficient management and pedagogical change; and (4) the role corruption and private interests have played in the development of policies and the instability in the sector.

Our analysis of the political economy of the education reform in Peru shows that policy discontinuities and their influence on reforms can be explained by the general fragility of state institutions and the weakness of broad policy orientations and discourses guiding policy decisions. While state and institutional weakness is a historical phenomenon, in the recent decades of economic restructuring and growth, they can be related to the dominance of a broad political settlement which has prioritized market development and macro-economic stability, rather than social investment and institutional reforms.

We argue that the absence of institutional reforms has led the endurance of what sociologist Julio Cotler rightly described as the 'colloidal' nature of the Peruvian Republic, in which the state 'is like an emulsion that never reaches solidity', a country with a 'moderate anarchy', 'a state of disorder which is only controlled at times' (quoted by McEvoy 2021). In Peru, politics thus affects reforms not simply, and maybe not so much because substantive matters become politically contested, but because of the precarious nature of institutions and political processes, which hinder the formation of political projects and discourses, and the establishment of binding agreements and settlements with regards to key goals and how to achieve them.

The learning agenda in Peru has a clear starting date, which coincides with a large-scale World Bank funded quality improvement program in the second half of the 1990s. This agenda, with its focus on curriculum reform, teacher training and assessment, however, has followed a sinuous path, marked by frequent discontinuities, that have made the achievement of key policy goals extremely slow – a protracted and partial incrementalism.

The initial impulse that the learning agenda received in the second half of the 1990s took place amidst an increasingly authoritarian and corrupt government, and without efforts to establish agreements or settlements with key groups (civil society, teachers, etc.). These reforms were also marked by serious implementation problems, being more discursively than practically clear. The political context in which such reforms took place led to their wholesale dismissal and replacement by an agenda that focused on the system's governance and management more than on learning.

When the learning agenda was reestablished, it did so in a new guise, that of measurable indicators and standardized test results. This new focus has given rise to a new technocratic model of policy making and to what we describe as a technocratic settlement in education. The latter has been influenced by international agencies, such as the World Bank, which played a key role in the establishment of yearly census evaluations as a central policy to raise achievement. In this context, the Ministry of Finance, through its results-based budgeting, and through its influence on the MoE's Strategic Planning Secretariat, has become a key player in the definition of education policies. This technocratic settlement, and the leadership of groups of technocrats in the education and finance sectors can certainly be credited with many of the

improvements we find in Peruvian education. They have aligned policy processes with desired goals and have pushed forward reforms in important areas, especially in terms of first order changes (Cuban, 1990).

Technocrats, however, have not been immune to impact of politics and corruption, and as the years since 2020 – or since 2016 – have shown, even the technically soundest reforms can be fairly-easily dismantled or dented through ministerial discontinuities and the anti-reformist interests that are now well established in Congress – the curriculum, as well as the teachers' reform and the higher education reform have all suffered from this and are at risk.

Political and sectoral instability caused by the general weakness of the country's political and institutional system, as well as by corruption, have had a profound influence on the nature and especially on the pace of reforms during this period. The education sector has been led by 20 ministers in 25 years – a figure that in and of itself is illustrative of the radical degrees of discontinuity in policy making, especially when considering that the country does not have a stable civil service.

While successful in many respects, technocrats are often averse to engaging in the politics of “selling” reforms, of opening their proposals to public debate and contestation in order to ensure necessary levels of understanding, legitimacy and support. This may have worked against their aims.

A final point we make in relation to the technocratic settlement is that in their emphasis on efficiency and their reductionist understanding of quality and learning as equal to standardized test results in a small number of areas, technocrats may have elided crucial questions about pedagogy and educational practice, about learning in its broadest sense. The latter are therefore still in need of reform lost in the way (Balarin & Rodriguez, 2020).

LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE FUTURE

Various lessons can be extracted from the political economy of learning reforms in Peru:

- The study shows that politics can have both direct and indirect effects on education policy making. While there may be certain domains of contestation that are amenable to more traditional forms of political dispute and settlement, in developing contexts like Peru, it is the weak nature of the state and its institutions that define the politics of education policy making in its unconsolidated, fragmented, discontinuous and protracted path towards reform.
- In the Peruvian case we have seen how periods of general political instability have impacted on the development – continuity/discontinuity – of education policy agendas, without necessarily implying a form of contestation over the content of those agendas.
- Political instability, paired with the general institutional weakness that is often characteristic of developing countries, acts against the consolidation and sustainability of policy agendas over time. It acts against, that is, the formation of clear policy discourses able to endure the whims of different administrations.
- Approaches that claim to be a-political, such as technocratic and narrowly understood evidence-based approaches to policy making, are in and of themselves political and can contribute to shape policy agendas in very specific ways. One of their weaknesses, however, is that they tend to be averse to open debate, making policy the exclusive terrain

of experts, rather than citizens, and this may act against the consolidation and continuity of policy agendas.

- Corruption is another political dynamic that may directly or indirectly impact on the development and consolidation of education policy agendas, especially in contexts with weak institutions and weak regulatory capacity.
- In contexts with weak states and institutions, and where political party politics is also unstable, there need to be other mechanisms to establish policy discourses able to guide learning policy agendas. Such processes should include the promotion of broad-based public debate in order to established shared ideas as to the nature and overall direction of education policies. Open, transparent and sustained debate around key policy issues might be the only way to promote sustainable settlements to guide learning improvement policies. The international and donor community, together with civil society organizations, can play a key role in promoting open debate around key policy issues, helping settle policy agendas and maintain them over time and in spite of general political instability. In Peru, such organizations have been fundamental in the establishment and progress made in key education reforms. While their role has not always been one of impositions, there have been cases in which they appear to have promoted their own views too harshly, unduly influencing the course of policy agendas.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational quality and the question of learning have been at the centre of much educational research in the past decades. From school-effectiveness research attempting to identify the factors that make good education work, to more sociologically minded approaches to schooling that highlight how social, cultural and economic dynamics affect school practices and learning, to attempts at bridging the two, and yet others concerned with the scaling-up of good practice (Fullan, 2010; Pritchett, 2015), comparatively little attention has been paid to the political economy of education reform. And it is precisely here – in the nature and interests of state elites, in their capacity for negotiation and for ensuring necessary degrees of legitimacy for reforms to work, as well as in the nature and strength of institutions – that the sustainability of educational improvement hinges on (Gershberg, 2020).

In this paper, we explore the political economy of education reforms in Peru through an analysis of the recent history of education policies in the country. Starting in 1995, arguably the inception-point for quality-oriented reforms, we follow policy developments in three selected areas – curriculum, teachers and assessment – up to 2020, the year when the study was conducted.

Through a detailed reconstruction of policies and policy changes developed that was based on documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, we analyse the changing nature of agendas throughout this period and the factors that may explain changes and continuities.

Studying the political economy of education policies in Peru poses a paradox that we will attempt to address. At the beginning of the 1990s, Peruvian education faced a major systemic crisis, which was the product of a great expansion in access that happened at the same time as a very marked contraction in the public budget for education – itself the product of a long and severe political and economic crisis that the country went through, especially during the 1980s. The crisis left the state bankrupt and its ability to provide the most basic services collapsed. At the beginning of the 1990s, Peruvian teachers were among the worst paid in the region, school infrastructure was crumbling and learning materials were largely unavailable. It's no wonder, then, that when the results of the first national and international student assessments were published in the early 2000s, the country's results were extremely poor.

From that point on, if we follow the evolution of assessment results and key progression indicators up to the start of the covid pandemic – as we do in this paper – Peru appears to be in a sustained improvement course, quite unlike other countries in the region. The story of this apparent success can be told in different ways. Or, to put it differently, there are different facets to that story that when put together provide a complex picture of the politics of education policy making in countries with weak states and institutions. This is one of our main points: that studying the political economy of education reforms in such contexts raises somewhat different questions than those that emerge in political economy analysis in countries with more developed institutions. This is so because some of the elements and processes that traditional political economy analyses take for granted – such as the existence of more or less functioning systems of representation and interest mediation – may be absent. This is the case in Peru.

Through the study we show how quality and learning oriented policies have been marked by a transformation in the policy process, which has gone from being highly idiosyncratic and based on the personal views and whims of policy makers, to a more technocratic and institutionalized model of policy-making that is more evidence-based. While this is positive in

that there is greater accountability and somewhat greater continuity in policies, the efforts made by technocratic elites and has not been accompanied by broader institutional reforms nor by processes of political negotiation and settlement conducive to policy learning, necessary continuities and the consolidation of reforms over time. Corruption in particular has been rife throughout the period and has had a very marked impact on the pace and direction of education policies. At the same time, and partly due to the technocratic take-over of political processes, the predominant understanding of learning and quality improvement has been narrowed down and largely equated with results in standardized tests. This, we argue, is problematic in that it has happened at the expense of other important aims of education, including those of developing richer pedagogies and promoting inclusion.

The paper is organized into five sections. The first section presents our conceptual approach and methodology. In it, we engage with the literature on political economy analyses of education policies and reforms, making the case for a specific understanding of political economy dynamics in countries with weak states and institutions. In the second section we present a series of key education indicators – assessment results, progression indicators, etc. – that should help situate the reader in the recent trajectory of Peruvian education. The third section offers a discussion about the broader political processes that have characterized the period, their impact on state and institutional weakness and on the feasibility of reforms. While not strictly focused on educational issues, we believe this section is important for understanding the broader political economy of reforms. The core findings of our study are presented in the fourth and fifth sections. The first of these provides a detailed account of some of the main education policy developments that have taken place during the period, with an emphasis on understanding changes and continuities, the key forces and actors that have shaped them and some of the main areas of contestation in the learning policy agenda. The fifth section analyses these education reform trends through a specific focus on the political economy dynamics that help explain them. We conclude with a set of reflections and lessons learned for the future.

1. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WEAK STATES: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The definition and implementation of education policies is 'a highly charged and politicized process' (Hossain & Hickey, 2019, p. 2) in which the interests of different stakeholders, as well as the characteristics of the political and institutional context, have a clear bearing on what gets done and how. As Levy argues, however, political economy analyses need to go beyond the idea that 'politics matter' and explain the 'specific causal mechanisms through which specific political drivers exert their influence' (Levy et al., 2018, p. 5).

Analyses of the political economy of policy making tend to focus 'mostly on strategy and policy design and implementation once the overall policy goals have been set' (Gershberg, 2020, p. 3). Their aim is to understand how politics influences the design, implementation and consolidation of reforms over time. Less attention has been paid in the literature to what Gershberg describes as 'the origin of intent', that is, to the reasons *why* certain courses of action were chosen, rather than to *what* policies propose (p. 3). While the two are clearly important, the political economy of policy and reform intentions is at least equally worthy of attention. It is here where this paper focuses.

Our analysis covers, roughly, a 25 year period beginning in the mid-1990s, when learning reforms began in Peru. This period follows the almost collapse of the Peruvian state apparatus in the previous decade, under the pressure of poor governance and internal violence and corruption. We follow the shifts and turns in education policy orientations throughout the period, analysing the role of various actors and processes in the definition and redefinition of policy intentions.

Our conceptual starting point for explaining the *why* of learning reforms in Peru – and how reform intentions have shifted throughout the period under study – is the theory of political settlements. Political settlements can be defined as 'the set of institutional arrangements through which a country addresses the most fundamental of governance challenges' (p.17). They result from political processes of negotiation, (dis)agreement and contestation, and they are a basic condition for reforms to thrive. Settlements crystallize and shape different countries' commitment to certain courses of action, such as making learning a central policy goal. While specific policies, or policy elements, may change as adjustments are made in view of new evidence and demands, settlements imply that, at a general level, certain courses of action will be pursued.

Our inquiry will focus on the settlements, or lack thereof, surrounding quality and learning improvement reforms in Peru on the nature of those settlements as well as on the role played by key stakeholders in defining or contesting existing settlements. We will also focus on how the institutional context in which reforms were pursued may have influenced their course.

One of our main points is that we need to understand the nature of settlements and the role they play in different countries in view of the institutional context in which they take place. Available literature shows various at characterizing different settlement types or regimes as Levy (2014) calls them. The author proposed a typology that considers the extent of inclusion (or exclusion) of dominant elites, and their degree of cohesion; the configuration of power and the balance between institutions and politics; as well as the nature of existing institutions, especially whether they are 'personalized, clientelist, and/or corrupt, on the one hand, or impersonal, rule-based and/or meritocratic, on the other' (Levy 2018 quoted in Gershberg, 2020, p. 6)

If we apply these criteria, we could, broadly speaking, also distinguish certain kinds of settlement regimes that are more typical of low and middle-income countries, where some of the conditions that settlements theory might take for granted – such as functioning political party systems, fairly independent and stable bureaucracies, or even the rule of law – may be weak or altogether absent. This leads to policy making processes in such contexts to be ‘highly charged and politicized’ to the extent that ‘what gets implemented – and its impact – depends much or more on the politics of the reform process as the technical design of the reform’ (Bruns & Schneider, 2016).

Following from this idea, Hickey and Hossain (2019) analysis of the politics of education reforms in developing countries focuses on understanding how politics ‘shapes the commitment and capacity of elites and governments in developing countries to promote reforms’ (p. 3). In their discussion of different political factors that influence the prospects of reform – which include the role and strength of different stake holders, as well as the fact that influencing what actually happens in classroom is hard – the authors suggest that given the very charged political processes in development countries it is easier, in these contexts, to

‘design and implement top-down command-and-control responses (...) than to devise workable solutions to the ‘craft’ challenge of the interpersonal, transactional nature of effective teaching and learning’ (3).

The differences between these types of reforms could also be described using Cuban’s (Cuban, 1990) distinction between first and second order reforms. While the former focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of what is done by schools, second order reforms seek to fundamentally alter the way in which schools perform their educational role, and are clearly more difficult. This point, as we shall see, is especially relevant in the Peruvian case, where we find much progress in terms of first order changes, but less progress in terms of classroom practices.

The reasons behind Hickey and Hossain’s points about the politics of education in developing countries is strongly related to the nature of institutions and governance capacities in such contexts. While some level of governance weakness and corruption can be found in most countries, they tend to be stronger in low and middle income countries, which are often characterized by weaker institutions and a greater prevalence of clientelist relations (Wood & Gough, 2006)¹. This raises serious questions with regards to common assumptions in political economy analyses, about institutional stability and strength and the role these play in supporting reform processes.

Levitsky and Murillo (2014) propose that while ‘formal institutions are not uniformly weak in developing countries (nor uniformly strong in developed ones)’ (p. 2), in regions such as Latin America,

‘the vast differences in the enforcement and stability of rules (...) suggests that institutional strength should be treated as a variable, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption.’ (p. 2)

¹ As Wood & Gough (2006: 1696) point out: “In many poor developing countries, by contrast [to more developed ones], both states and markets are sufficiently problematic to the pursuit of livelihoods that people have to rely to a greater extent upon informal relationships. These can be reciprocal within small scale communities, but in the wider society, these relationships are more likely to be hierarchical and thus clientelist, reflecting severe inequalities in the control over resources and institutions (UNDP, 2002).”

In the context of this study, we take this to mean, that the conditions in which the politics of education tends to operate – e.g. the existence of fairly stable and well organized political parties that develop and pursue fairly clear political and policy agendas, which are the basis for negotiations and settlements; the existence of fairly stable mid-level civil servants and bureaucrats that do not change with each governmental crisis or change of government; a certain degree of regulation in the extent that private interests and corruption can influence the definition and implementation of policies, among others – do not always (or maybe rarely) hold in developing countries. In weak institutional contexts, the margin of action that policy makers have to make changes at whim is considerably larger than in those contexts in which existing rules bind decision making so that even changes must cohere with previously agreed paths. This is in line with what one of us has previously argued about the Peruvian case, when exploring the nature of reform processes in weak states (Balarin, 2008). This paper revises and takes some of those ideas forward by looking at a longer period that yields a more complex understanding of the politics of education reforms in Peru.

During the period under study, Peru seems to have moved in somewhat contradictory directions. It started in the 1990s as a clearly dominant/personalized/clientelist and increasingly corrupt regime and moved towards a greater influence of the rule of law in decision making. This movement was led by technocratic elites, who lean against competitive decision making, and it took place at the same time as the corrupt and personalistic currents continued to pervade the political system, influencing not only decisions, but also the general stability of governments. While Peru is characterized by the highly unsettled nature of policy discourses, which are prone to discontinuity, the period under study has seen the emergence and consolidation of technocratic elites and technocratic mechanisms – such as long-term results-oriented budgetary agreements – that have enabled a greater degree of continuity and have allowed to important learning-focused reforms to progress incrementally. As Bruns et al. (2019) argues, ‘education reforms are often designed by a relatively small group of technocrats at the top rungs of leadership’ (p. 30). These technocrats, as argued by Dargent (2011), ‘have a strong degree of ‘technocratic autonomy’, and exert a kind of ‘bureaucratic authoritarianism’² (p. 315).

Through the paper we discuss how such technocratic leadership has worked in Peruvian education reforms, its achievements but also the limits it has faced. We focus not only on the broader institutional context and political dynamics, but also on the limits of technocratic policy making in terms of the scope and definition of reforms and their possibility to endure.

The main objective of our study was to understand the political economy of education reforms in Peru by analysing policy trajectories in key areas – teaching, curriculum and assessment – between 1995 and 2020. The period begins with what is arguably the start of the learning agenda in the country and has a long-enough duration to explore political economy trends that analysed during shorter spans could appear in a different light.

The study was conducted using a qualitative design that combined documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. We began the study by preparing a detailed reconstruction of policy developments in the three selected areas, mainly based on documentary analysis (including official documents, available research and some press coverage), which also helped us identify key events and actors. We then conducted a series

² A term that the author borrows from O'Donnell (1973).

of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including former MoE (Ministry of Education) officials, union representatives, educational experts, and representatives from non-governmental and international organizations (a full list can be found in Annex 1). The focus of these interviews was to understand the political dynamics behind identifiable changes and continuities in the learning agenda.

This work, and the possibility of discussing a fairly long-term period of education policy making in Peru, was also possible given previous work conducted by one of us into this area (Balarin, 2006). The current study draws on and further develops many ideas contained in these papers in more partial form. The cited papers may also provide readers with a closer look into certain periods or areas of reform that we cover somewhat more superficially in this work as we favour the longer-term account of policy developments.

2. SITUATING IMPROVEMENTS IN LEARNING

The period under study (1995-2020) has been intensive in terms of reforms to improve learning. It begins with education quality at an extremely low point. Towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the education system appears to have embarked on a solid path of improvement, including in learning as measured by standardized tests. Such improvements, however, are accompanied by persistent and sometimes deepening inequalities, as well as by other forms of evidence showing that schools often promote superficial and uncritical forms of learning. This raises important questions about the fairness of the system, as well as about the dominant understanding of learning that has taken hold of policy makers' imaginations. This point is central to our analysis of the politics of education reform in Peru, and to the 'technocratic settlement' that we describe in the following sections.

An important point to note when reading the following pages is how difficult it is to establish the causal chain of events, from reforms to improved outcomes. As we shall see, reforms have followed a very discontinuous path and have often been dismantled or reinvented before they could have achieved their aims. At the same time, improvements in test results predate many reforms in areas crucial to learning (i.e. teaching, curriculum) and are in more clear coincidence with the country's overall economic improvement. The latter might then be at least as important to improvements in learning as educational reforms.

In what follows we provide a general overview of some of the key educational trends and developments in Peruvian education during the period under study. While we will not yet explore the political economy of reforms, this overview provides the necessary context for understanding political dynamics in education. We use data from key official sources to show changes in key indicators and, drawing from available literature and some of our previous research, we offer some general explanations as to how such changes might have come about.

In 1992 a comprehensive General Diagnosis of the state of the education system, conducted by the MoE, UNESCO, UNDP, GTZ and the World Bank, and which counted with the participation of a broad set of key civil society actors and organizations, painted a bleak picture of the state of the education system after more than a decade of economic decline and the near complete collapse of the state in the latter part of the 1980s, under the combined effects of hyperinflation and the internal armed conflict that devastated vast areas of the country (Ministerio de Educación, 1993)³.

The Diagnosis revealed that while Peru had greatly expanded access to education, especially at the primary level, this had happened without any concomitant increase in the public budget for education. On the contrary, per pupil public investment had been steadily diminishing since the 1950s, reaching an all-time low at beginning of the 1990s, when yearly per pupil investment was only around 162 USD dollars, and teachers' salaries were less than 155 USD

³ The last major educational reform, which was progressive in spirit, had been that of the 1970s military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado, which focused mostly on widening access and alphabetization. Velasco's reform, however, was never properly implemented as the president was replaced by another military leader. The two governments of the 1980s, though progressive in spirit, did very little in the educational arena (Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education).

dollars per month – around 17% of what they earned In 1945 (See more: Bing Wu, 2001; Saavedra & Suárez, 2002).

The Diagnosis also highlighted problems in various key areas. It showed that there was an almost total lack of educational resources in public schools and that educational infrastructure was inadequate and insufficient; it pointed to the existence of a rigid and self-serving bureaucracy, as well as cumbersome legislative frameworks, which hindered functional governance and educational change; and it showed the prevalence of inadequate instructional methods in schools that focused on rote learning of highly disconnected subject matter. The Diagnosis also exposed very serious problems in the teaching career, from low salaries to a very poor initial training system and almost no in-service training (for a detailed summary and discussion of the General Diagnosis see Hunt, 2001, pp. 6-8; Hunt, 2004, pp. 21-24).

These problems had serious consequences for the quality of education. While the country had no educational evaluations until later in the decade, the Diagnosis evidenced serious limitations in school practices, as well as serious problems in progression indicators, including high rates of repetition, school drop-outs and overage children (see also Hunt 2001, 2004).

The main proposal that emerged from the General Diagnosis was to work on improving teacher training and the provision of school materials. One interviewee who has been part of several ministerial teams during the period under study pointed to the fact that the document said next to nothing about the curriculum or learning assessment – both of which would become central aspects of reforms in the following years. Summarizing the Diagnosis' proposals, the interviewee said that their aim was to train teachers to use the new materials 'in order to produce some improvement in something that was only then beginning to be [defined] and measured as "learning"'⁴.

Before discussing how this initially vague concept of learning become the central objective of educational reforms, and the political economy dynamics behind the latter, we present some of the key improvements and problems that can be found during the period under study.

The year 1995 inaugurated an era of learning-focused policies and reforms. It marked the beginning of the Educational Quality Improvement Program (MECEP, for its name in Spanish). Initially funded by the World Bank and later by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), the MECEP programme followed a similar reform template as other quality improvement programmes in the region that were promoted and funded by those same institutions⁵. MECEP focused on four key components: teaching, infrastructure, administrative modernization and, later, learning quality assessment. While not an integral part of the programme, during the MECEP years the MoE's pedagogical teams also worked on reforming the curriculum and classroom pedagogy, and aligned the goals and content of teacher training to such changes.

As part of MECEP's efforts to modernize the educational administration, the MoE created a Learning Quality Assessment Unit (UMC), tasked with conducting national evaluations of learners' achievement, as well as with leading the country's participation in international

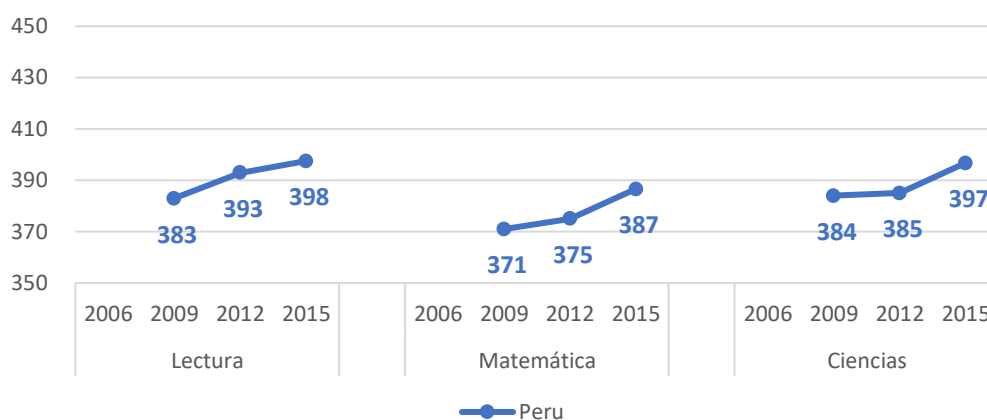
⁴ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education

⁵ Such as the MECES program in Paraguay, MECE in Chile (Ferrer, 2004)

assessment programs such as PISA⁶ and LLECE⁷. Data emerging from evaluations conducted by the UMC from its creation up to the present, together with other key indicators, provide a picture of Peru's learning improvement trajectory during the years that followed.

Between 1995 and 2020, Peru, like most of the Latin American region, showed a significant and positive evolution in many key educational indicators (Rivas & Scasso, 2020).⁸ The positive evolution in student performance can be seen through the country's results both in international assessments (mainly PISA), and in the National Census Evaluation (ECE). In the case of PISA, Peru, which has continuously participated in the assessment since 2009⁹, shows a very significant improvement in all of the assessed areas (language, math, science).

Figure 1. PISA results in Language, Mathematics, and Science. Years 2006-2015



Source: Balarin (2021)

Results from the National Census Evaluation (ECE), which has been conducted yearly since 2007 and assesses 2nd grade students' language and math skills show a similar improvement scenario, especially between 2007 and 2015¹⁰.

⁶ OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment

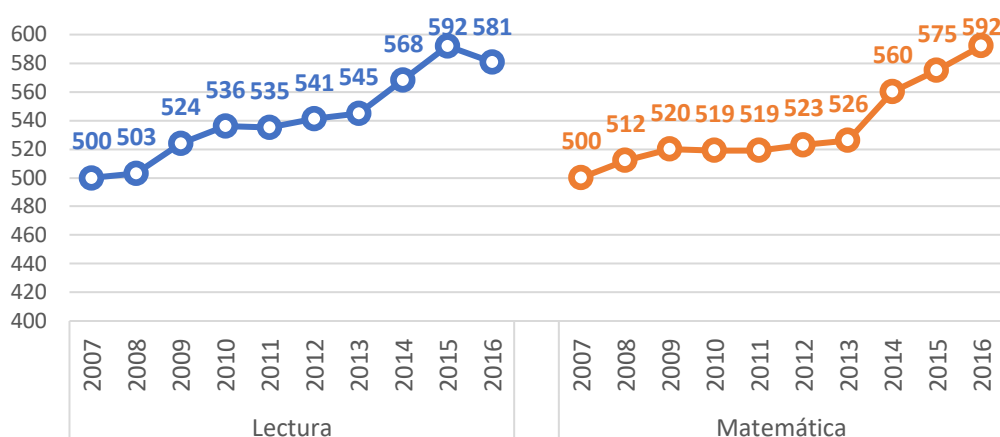
⁷ UNESCO's Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education, created in 1994 by its Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean or OREALC.

⁸ The indicators presented are drawn from a revision of education statistics elaborated by Balarin (2021).

⁹ The country participated also in PISA 2004, but dropped out for a number of years.

¹⁰ According to Balarin (2021), these differences are very significant, on a scale with a standard deviation of 100 points.

Figure 2. National ECE test results. Language and Mathematics. 2nd grade. Years 2007-2016.



Source: Balarin (2021)

Progression indicators also experienced very marked improvements. Between the year 2000 and 2016, the percentage of children who repeated on or more years of school in both primary and lower secondary showed a consistent downward trend; and the percentage of repeaters in primary education went from 10.7% to 4.0%, while in lower secondary it went from 6.3% to 2.9%¹¹.

During this period there was also a marked reduction in the number of overage students in the primary years, with the overall percentage moving from 33% in 2007 to 16% in 2017¹²; while the percentage of overage students in years 7 to 9 went from 40% to 22%¹³. If in 2007, one third of the total number of students had at least one year of over-age, by 2017, this proportion dropped to one in six.

Completion rates¹⁴ also improved notably between 2001 and 2016, going from around 70% to 89% in primary and from 60% to 82% in lower secondary¹⁵, making Peru the country with the second-highest completion rates in Latin American, only after Chile¹⁶. Such an improvement can be explained as a consequence of the expansion in secondary education coverage as well as of improvements in the conditions for students' transit through the education system (Balarin, 2021).

Despite these improvements, various inequality gaps have persisted or even deepened during this period. Children living in poverty or in rural areas, as well as those with a mother tongue other than Spanish perform considerably less well in most of the indicators presented above (Guadalupe et al., 2017, pp. 86-102, 182-208). Likewise, various studies have drawn attention

¹¹ See Annex 4, Figure 3

¹² See Annex 4, Figure 4

¹³ See Annex 4, Figure 5

¹⁴ Equivalent to "the percentage of the population in a given age range - usually 3 to 5 years above the theoretical age of completion of the level - that reached completion" (Balarin, 2021).

¹⁵ See Annex 4, Figure 6

¹⁶ Chile, as of 2016, had a completion rate of 95.1% for lower secondary and 84.5% for upper secondary (Rivas & Scasso, 2020).

to the growing socioeconomic segregation within public and private sector schools in Peru (Balarin & Escudero, 2018; Benavides et al., 2014; Cueto et al., 2016).

There is no easy explanation for the many positive changes identified during the period under study. Recent studies point to a very discontinuous policy process, where ministerial teams as well as those working at the regional and local levels, have changed constantly, and while key aspects of certain reforms may have been implemented, others have not. If anything, as we shall see, the definition and implementation of reforms has been sketchy, leading to a kind of protracted and discontinuous incrementalism, in which many key aspects of reforms have been lost in the way (Balarin & Rodriguez, 2020).

When trying to explain improvements, the country's rate of economic growth and poverty reduction may be a contextual factor just as important as education reforms. Between the 2002 and 2013, Peru's economy grew at an average annual rate of 6.1%, making it one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America (Balarin, 2020; World Bank, 2021), and its GDP per capita grew by 261.4%. During this time, the rate of extreme and moderate poverty went down by 11.2 and 27 percentage points respectively – with overall poverty moving from 52.2% in 2005 to 20.7% in 2017 (Balarin, 2020; Rivas, 2015). This was primarily the product of a favorable international environment, characterized by a global commodity super-cycle and the adoption of macroeconomic policies that contributed towards "a scenario of high growth and low inflation" (World Bank, 2021).

GDP growth enabled the more progressive governments of the period to implement several large-scale programmes that helped tackle poverty, and improve children's education¹⁷ and health – the percentage of undernourished children under 5 years of age went from 33% of the age group in the year 2000 to 12% in 2019. Between 2000-2013 Peru's social evolution was one of the most notable in the region (Rivas, 2015, p. 46)

The story of this improvement process has included many contradictions. While economic indicators paint a very positive picture, social and economic inequalities remain deep. Families from rural areas and indigenous backgrounds, as well as afro-Peruvians and people with disabilities, and the poor, perform consistently worse in most social and economic indicators. The model of development, based largely on extractive industries, while increasing the country's GDP has not led to proportional local development, and has often damaged people's livelihoods through its effects on the environment – thus also increasing the number of social conflicts. While the economy has grown, 72,7% of the economically active population is informally employed, without social protection (INEI, 2021). Moreover, economic development has not led to relevant institutional reforms, thus limiting the state's governance capacity and giving rise to very high levels of corruption (Dammert & Sarmiento, 2019; Mujica, 2015; Quiroz, 2014).

Such contradictions have become starker and clearer in the last presidential period (2016-2021), and especially so in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. Peru was one of the hardest hit countries in the world in terms of contagion and death rates, as well as in the impact of the

¹⁷ The Juntos Programme, for instance, provides cash transfers to poor families under the condition that their children attend school and undergo regular health checks (Perova & Vakis, 2010).

pandemic on the economy, labour and families' food security (Faiola, 2021). The education system suffered greatly, with one of the longest school closures in the world (2 complete years)¹⁸, and the deepening of the so-called 'learning crisis' (Saavedra & Di Gropello, 2021). The pandemic has also revealed the weakness of the Peruvian development model and has contributed to one of the deepest political crises since the fall of Fujimori's government in the year 2000.

The following section discusses key issues in the country's political orientations during the period under study. A necessary context for understanding the political economy of learning reforms.

¹⁸ See: <https://es.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

3. THE POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT IN WHICH EDUCATION REFORMS HAVE BEEN PURSUED

While the education sector is a relatively autonomous field, with its own political economy, it needs to be understood in the context of the country's broader political and institutional regime. During the period under study, sectoral policy developments in the country have been framed by a broad political settlement which is often referred to as the 'Lima Consensus', a national, more radical and pervasive version of the 'Washington Consensus' – the set of free-market economic policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank during the 1990s (Orihuela, 2020), that have often been synonymous with the establishment of neoliberal regimes in the region (Jessop, 2013)¹⁹. The Lima Consensus can be said to be a more radical version of this because it has promoted liberalization with only a minimal, and often ineffective, degree of state regulation (Ruiz-Torres, 2005)²⁰ or institutional strengthening, and is a more pervasive version of the model, because unlike what happened in most of Latin America during the early 2000s, in the so called 'pink wave' that led to the rise of various left-wing governments, it has had no effective political challenges since its establishment at the beginning of the 1990s.

The continuity of this model of development over the past thirty years is not just reflected in the general institutional arrangements inaugurated during the 1990s – deregulation, privatization, marketisation–, but also in the 'practices and common sense that have prospered under that institutional continuity' (Vergara, 2012, p. 3). As Orihuela (2020) argues, 'The consensus among the circles of economic and political power in Lima has been and continues to be that national economic progress requires little state intervention' (p. 97). The hegemonic and ideological nature of this broad political settlement is crucial to understand the configuration of political power in the country, and the overall orientation of education policies and the political processes that have shaped them.

Any discussion of this broad political settlement would be incomplete without reference to some of the key characteristics of the country's institutional landscape, such as its political fragmentation, its institutional weakness and the pervasiveness of corruption, all of which have made reforms almost impossible (Dargent, 2021). While we cannot delve into each of these topics in depth here, they will emerge as constants that shape policy discourses and their continuity over time.

In what follows we provide a brief historical overview of how this tacit political settlement was established and endured over time, and how it has interplayed with other political and institutional dynamics, including those of corruption and informality – which now outweigh any overt political commitment – to shape the grounds on which education and other reforms have been pursued.

¹⁹ While there is no single definition of neoliberalism, we understand it as 'a political project that is justified on philosophical grounds and seeks to extend competitive market forces, consolidate a market-friendly constitution and promote individual freedom.' (Jessop, 2012: 1). This political project translates into a 'distinctive set of economic policies intended to extend market forces, including into areas once regarded extra-economic, with different instantiations in advanced economies, transitional economies, and emerging markets – in the latter two sites, it is associated with the Washington Consensus' (Jessop, 2012: 2).

²⁰ The lack of appropriate regulation was both a matter of conviction – a belief in the self-regulatory capacity of markets – and the outcome of the country's weak institutional capacity.

In 1990 Alberto Fujimori, a somewhat unknown university professor and independent candidate, beat his contender, writer Mario Vargas Llosa (now a Nobel prize winner), in a second round of presidential elections. Vargas Llosa was adamant about the need for a structural adjustment program in order to stabilize the economy after more than a decade of economic decline that resulted in deep recession and one of the highest degrees of hyperinflation ever experimented in the world. Fujimori had opposed Vargas Llosa's proposals on the grounds that they would negatively impact on people's livelihoods (Pedraglio, 2018; Stokes, 1997), but once in office he adopted the same package of structural reform and austerity that went beyond what the IMF demanded and which came to be known as the Fujishock (Roberts, 1995; Stokes, 1997, 1999).

Fujimori's structural reforms included a fiscal adjustment package that precipitated the devaluation of Peruvian currency, the privatization of public companies and a radical opening of commercial borders, as well as the deregulation of labor, which initially led to massive unemployment and then to the precarization of both formal and informal employment that evident to this day (Roberts, 1995). Arguing that the country was facing the 'most profound crisis of its Republican history' (Fujimori quoted by CIDOB, 2007-2020), Fujimori 're-implanted the kind of economic growth strategy based on primary goods' exports that had predominated during most of the country's economic history' (Dancourt, 1997).

The first two years of Fujimori's government were extremely turbulent. The country was at the height of the internal war with Sendero Luminoso and the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, a war – as is well documented in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission– in which all contenders (state security agents and terrorist organizations) incurred in flagrant human rights abuses against ordinary citizens (Comisión de Entrega de la CVR, 2008; Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003); the government also faced strong opposition in Congress; and in 1992 a cholera epidemic further ravaged the country. In April of that same year, Fujimori closed the Congress in a move that has since been described by the media and the academic literature as an auto-coup (Conaghan, 2005), and called elections for a new Congress (the *Congreso Constituyente Democrático*)²¹, which was immediately installed and charged with elaborating a new constitution to replace the one drafted in 1979 (Degregori, 2016; Levitsky & Cameron, 2003).

Just a few days before the election, Fujimori announced that Abimael Guzman, the leader of Sendero Luminoso, had been captured. Fujimori's popularity rocketed, and when the elections for the new Congress took place, his party won a landslide victory. The new 1993 Constitution contributed to a further enhancement of the president's power: it considerably strengthened the powers of the Executive, and limited those of the Legislative, which was reduced to one chamber.

²¹ The OAS meeting of foreign ministers in Washington immediately rejected the auto-coup and called for the re-establishment of democratic constitutional order in the country. In the face of international pressure, Fujimori called for elections for a new Constituent Congress and promised, at the 22nd OAS General Assembly in 1992, that there would be citizen and opposition participation in the drafting of the new Constitution, as well as a referendum process for its approval (Degregori, 2016). Civil society organizations and parties that had already opposed the coup (APRA, AP, IU) tried to boycott the elections for the establishment of the Democratic Constitutional Congress. However, this boycott failed and indirectly led to 85% of the vote going to pro-Fujimori and independent candidates (Levitsky & Cameron, 2003).

From 1992 until his fall in the year 2000, Fujimori led an increasingly authoritarian style of government, corruptly coopting various institutions (such as the judiciary, the national magistrates council in charge of ruling on constitutional matters, and the press). Fujimori's government also paired neoliberal economic policies with various populist programs that ensured continued widespread support for his government (Roberts, 1995; Schady, 2000). In 1995 Fujimori was re-elected, and plans soon emerged for a second, unconstitutional reelection in the year 2000 (Levitsky & Cameron, 2003). The years between 1995 and 2000 went seamlessly for many branches of the Executive, including the education branch, which could proceed with their policy and reform plans without much contestation and which often governed by decree, largely bypassing Congress (Sartori, 1994). Politically unchallenged, with the economy stabilized and terrorism under control, reforms could proceed with some ease.

The new 1993 Constitution consecrated the subsidiary role of the state, which was expected to participate only in those economic activities in which the private sector could not lead. It put an end to the previous two decades of failed attempts to establish more progressive, developmentalist policies –failed because even though some fundamental changes took place in the country, especially after the Agrarian Reform of the 1970s, many reforms were truncated in the face of weak governmental practices and the limited availability of funds that resulted from the 1980's international debt crisis and from the inadequate economic policies of that decade – which included overspending and a disregard for keeping inflation within reasonable rates (Dancourt, 1997)²².

Fujimori portrayed himself as a kind of savior and claimed to be the bearer of progress and modernization. His populist policies (Roberts, 1995; Schady, 2000) and manipulative PR campaign²³ helped cement this image (Balbi, 2001; Cotler & Grompone, 2000; Degregori, 2016). Meanwhile, civil society organizations denounced human rights abuses, and evidence of corruption, manipulation of the press, and the president's will to perpetuate himself in power mounted – countless videos recorded by Fujimori's right-hand man, Vladimiro Montesinos, that showed him bribing a broad spectrum of public and private figures, from politicians to media moguls and local businessmen, would later be leaked to the media (Biblioteca anticorrupción del Congreso de la República & Zapata, 2004; Jochamowitz, 2002)²⁴.

²² The annual inflation rate by the end of 1990 was 7,649%.

²³ In the context of Fujimori's decision to run for a third unconstitutional term in office, the National Intelligence Service (SIN) led by Fujimori's right-hand man Vladimiro Montesinos, started a campaign against the opposition via the yellow press. As Cotler and Grompone (2000) state: "The SIN's control of the yellow press ('prensa chicha') and the obscene harassment of Fujimori's rivals, which resulted in the dissemination of a perverse political and cultural style, as well as the regime's monopoly of information in open television channels, contributed to the majority of the population having partial and distorted information about the candidates and the electoral process. These actions were crowned with success, as they led to a drop in the votes forecast for some of Fujimori's different opponents" (p. 53). Both Fujimori and Montesinos would go to trial years later for the "diarios chicha" case.

²⁴ Vladimiro Montesinos kept videotape recordings of his meetings with businessmen, media figures, state officials, and congressmen in his personal office in the National Intelligence Service. These homemade videotapes show Montesinos bribing these characters for their support for the regime and the execution of "favors" such as the last-minute change of a vote in Congress or the adoption of a government-friendly editorial line. The first "vladivideos" were leaked on television in 2000, an event that began the fall of Alberto Fujimori's regime. Since 2016, more than 150 vladivideos are publicly exhibited on the Youtube internet platform. Transcripts of all the videos found after the fall of the regime have been published in six volumes by the national Congress (Biblioteca anticorrupción del Congreso de la República & Zapata, 2004).

While Fujimori inaugurated the political settlement often described as the Lima Consensus, some authors convincingly argue that this ultra-liberal, laissez-faire model of primary-exports based growth was predominant throughout most of Peru's economic history (Orihuela, 2020). Fujimori thus tapped into a widespread aversion, especially amongst Lima's social and economic elites, towards any kind of state intervention. The pervasiveness of this consensus was such that even the more progressive-minded governments of the following decades – especially that of Ollanta Humala, but also that of Alejandro Toledo, which purported to be reformist – were strapped back into its doctrine soon after being elected, leaving popular demands unattended and increasingly being expressed in anti-system voting every five years²⁵ (Adrianzén, 2014; Avilés & Rosas, 2017; Dargent, 2015; Durand, 2016; Eaton, 2015; Vergara & Encinas, 2016).

In the year 2000, Fujimori won what is widely known to have been a rigged election (Schmidt, 2005)²⁶. Soon after this victory, widespread opposition and evidence of corruption led to the collapse of the government: the president fled to Japan and resigned by fax – he would later face charges and a lifelong prison sentence for human rights abuses. A one-year transition government was formed and was charged with conducting a new electoral process. In 2001 Alejandro Toledo, who had led the protests against Fujimori, won the presidency, claiming that he would lead a 'social market economy' and the fight against corruption. Toledo did little to change the social and economic landscape of the country, being a believer of the 'trickle down' effect – a term that the president himself regularly used–, that would automatically redistribute the fruits of economic growth. His various cabinets were mostly led by technocrats whose policies were in line with those of the previous decade, focusing on strengthening macroeconomic stability and growth but with little emphasis on responding the social demands of various groups. Analysts coincide in that Toledo's government was a great disillusionment, explained in part as the consequence of the 'profound crisis of legitimacy faced by the set of institutions that constitute the political regime' (Tanaka, 2004).

One of Toledo's main (but partial) reforms was the decentralization processes that started in 2002, which created 25 new fairly autonomous regional governments. While in practical (not formal) terms, this process would be reversed in the following decades, it created the conditions under which the various sectors of the Executive – the education sector included – would have to operate in the years to come. Decentralization was seen by many as a necessary move towards the greater democratization of government – a pressing need after the years of Fujimori's authoritarian regime.

²⁵ The term 'anti-system' voting is widely used in the country to refer to voters who choose a candidate that is against the predominant system or model – the Lima Consensus in this case. This was very clear in the case of Ollanta Humala, a leftist who won on the basis of a very radical reform agenda, which was soon washed down by pressure from powerful economical elites. The fact that reformist governments turned away from significant social and institutional reforms has been at the centre of the very polarized 2021 presidential election in the country, which sees Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of Alberto Fujimori, run against Pedro Castillo, a teacher and union leader claiming to represent popular demands and offering a very radical reform agenda including nationalizations and stronger state intervention in the economy.

²⁶ The general secretary of Transparency International in Peru denounced at the time that the electoral process was rigged and called it a "structural fraud" (Schmidt, 2005). The same office has recently defended this position against Keiko Fujimori's the claim had since been retracted (See: <https://twitter.com/ACTransparencia/status/1366473766138707970>)

Toledo did little, too, with regard to the deep prevalence of corruption in the country – himself being involved, as would become clear in later years, in a major corruption scandal which has him in custody awaiting to be extradited from the USA, where he currently resides.

The second half of Toledo's presidential term saw the beginning of a period of steady economic growth that turned the country into 'the star' of the region – a description explicitly used by institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank²⁷. This was possible thanks to the booming prices of primary export commodities, especially mining goods, that followed the growth of the Chinese economy. It was growth without much effort or significant institutional reforms, resulting in the country moving on what is often described as an 'autopilot' mode.

The following government was led by Alan García (2006-2011), the former president of the second half of the 1980's who had led the country towards economic collapse, and exiled himself to avoid the corruption charges being dealt against him. García returned in a new guise, not that of the progressive and highly populist leader of the 1980s, but that of a mature statesman who would consolidate the Peruvian economic miracle. García embraced the primary-exports oriented growth and easily dismissed social protests and demands for greater redistribution (García Llorens, 2008).

While some (mostly on the political right) saw García as the true savior of Peru's economy, others denounced that he was just surfing the wave of high international commodity prices and conducting none of the institutional reforms (political, judicial, etc.) that the country required (Drinot, 2011; Seoane, 2012). Increasingly, García would be implicated in new corruption scandals, from the pardoning of hundreds of drug-related criminals to claims of overpriced public purchases (Zysman-Quirós, 2019). In 2019, amidst revelations from the regional mega-corruption scandal known as *Lava Jato*²⁸, García, probably fearful that he might have to face a long prison sentence, killed himself just as a team of prosecutors entered his home to arrest him.

The 2011 presidential race began a series of electoral contests that were to become increasingly polarized between the left and right. In that year, Ollanta Humala, the leader of the leftist Nationalist Movement, often likened to other leftist political parties in the region (from Chavez's in Venezuela to Lula's in Brazil), became the presidential hopeful and then winner, proposing a 'Great Transformation' for the country. His government plan was soon watered down through pressures from powerful economic groups who sought the continuity of the economic model (Adrianzén, 2014; Avilés & Rosas, 2017; Dargent, 2015; Durand, 2016; Eaton, 2015; Vergara & Encinas, 2016). While Humala's government may not have fully responded to the social demands that took him to power, it could still be qualified as the more progressive government in decades, establishing comprehensive social assistance programmes for the poorest.

²⁷ See: <https://www.imf.org/es/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/socar022213d> and <https://www.americaeconomia.com/economia-mercados/finanzas/banco-mundial-peru-es-una-de-las-estrellas-del-crecimiento-en-la-region>; also <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2013/02/02/hold-on-tight>

²⁸ Also known as 'operation carwash', Lava Jato is a public investigation that uncovered a massive corruption scheme among state and privately-owned companies and high-level government officials. While it began in Brazil, it reached several Latin American countries, including Peru.

The country's political polarization, as would become evident in later years, was not just between the traditional left and right, but between an extreme right allied to very conservative and often corrupt interests (and whose political incarnation is Keiko Fujimori, Alberto Fujimori's daughter), and a left which, though radical in some factions, is certainly not as radical as its counterpart suggests. Any kind of progressive proposal (i.e., for improved workers' rights, greater redistribution, etc.) is immediately portrayed as radical, associated with the ghost of terrorist movements and economic collapse (Dunlap, 2019).

In the 2016-2020 presidential period this polarization reached extreme levels. While Keiko Fujimori lost the presidential race to also rightist Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, her party won an overwhelming majority in Congress. An outright battle between the two branches of government soon began, with Congress blocking various reforms in a series of moves that ended with Kuczynski's resignation amidst corruption claims.

As we will discuss in the following section, the education sector became one of the main areas of dispute during this period. Kuczynski's first education minister, Jaime Saavedra, had remained in office from the previous government and had been the main promoter of a new Higher Education Law. The law, which was approved in 2014, was the first step in a reform process that sought to regulate a higher education market that had seen the proliferation of private universities, many of dubious quality, after the approval in 1995 (during Fujimori's government) of a legal decree that liberalized private for-profit education without including any mechanisms to regulate the market and ensure basic levels of quality (Benavides et al., 2019; Benavides et al., 2016). Over the years, the Peruvian Congress had become populated by representatives with close links to private universities who staunchly opposed these reforms. Saavedra was censored by Congress on the basis of very spurious claims of corruption which in the end did not hold; the minister, however, was dismissed. For many, this was the beginning of the saga that ended not only with Kuczynski's own resignation –after evidence leaked to the press showing his under-the-table negotiations with a Congressional group to free Alberto Fujimori in exchange for a favourable vote– but with the removal of his successor, Martin Vizcarra, under the same claims of 'permanent moral incapacity', as had been used to oust Kuczynski (The Guardian, 2020). Two more presidents in office followed (a total of four in one presidential term). In the education sector, the number is higher: eight ministers in just over four years.

It could be argued that during the period under study, the country has developed along two parallel, though highly interconnected, lines, one formal and the other informal. Not only is 70 percent of the country's workforce employed informally, in precarious jobs with no stability or social protection, but informal relations, often bordering or crossing into the realm of the illegal, prevail (Cisneros-Acevedo, 2021). While informality in the country is a long-standing phenomenon, it can be argued that the Fujimori years strengthened it. The economic crisis of the 1980s and the structural adjustment measures left vast swathes of unemployed citizens, often described as entrepreneurs, who resorted to various forms of precarious self-employment to survive,²⁹ and as the economy was deregulated, various areas of economic

²⁹ This has influenced the highly individualistic and un-solidarian nature of the country's citizenship regime (Balarin, 2011), where citizens have moved away from the public sphere, to solve their necessities by themselves. In the case of education, this may be at the root of many families – including those from poor backgrounds – move to the private sector.

informality, from informal public transport to illegal mining, developed behind the gaze of the state. Today, the country's tax base is around 14 percent of GDP, one of the lowest in the region and well below the regional average (of around 22% of GDP) – something that clearly limits the state's spending capacity.

The internal violence of the 1980s, led by the ultra-leftist Maoist terrorist movement Sendero Luminoso, helped consolidate the Lima Consensus and gave rise to an anti-progressive movement in the country which has opposed institutional reforms, the strengthening of public services and moves towards greater redistribution. At the same time, the deregulated opening of markets has led to the emergence of important private markets in areas such as education, where the new private interests have often opposed reforms aiming to improve the quality of education and learning.

This period is also one of pervasive and increasing corruption, another institutional ailment, with public officials, including presidents, magistrates, members of congress, as well as business leaders, involved in various corruption scandals, some facing prosecution or serving prison sentences. This, as we shall see in the following section, has also had a strong impact on educational policies and reforms.

The twenty-five years that are the focus of this study have seen the establishment and staunch endurance of the Lima Consensus, whose main expression is a specific set of economic policies, which have brought macroeconomic stability, growth, and poverty reduction, but which has also failed in terms of redistribution, employment quality, and institutional strengthening and reform – something that has become starkly clear in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating consequences both for the country's health and economic resilience.

The narrative presented in the previous pages is particularly relevant when it comes to understanding the precarity and lack of sustainability of policy discourses and reforms in the country – something that we will see clearly in our analysis of education reforms. The institutional weaknesses that have enabled the pervasiveness of informal and corrupt practices account for what McEvoy (2021), following Peruvian sociologist Julio Cotler, describes as a 'colloidal Republic', one in which the state 'is like an emulsion that never reaches solidity', a country with a 'moderate anarchy', 'a state of disorder which is only controlled at times'.

The education sector, as we discuss in the following section, certainly fits this image, as quality reforms – with some notable exceptions – have been pursued over very lengthy periods, acquiring and losing their shape in the process, as ministerial teams have come and gone, sometimes at a very fast pace. In this process, which we describe as a kind of protracted incrementalism, there have been many achievements, but many important elements of reforms have also been lost in the way. The sustainability of reforms, as we will see, has not only been affected by political dynamics, but also by the weak nature of the institutions that hold policies and reforms together.

4. TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF QUALITY ORIENTED EDUCATION REFORMS: POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1995-2020 PERIOD

Beyond the story told by educational, social and economic indicators, the years between 1995 and 2021 were a period of several education reform attempts, some more comprehensive than others, that sought to remedy many of the problems identified in the 1993 General Diagnosis and in later similar efforts, and to improve the quality of education. With some exceptions, it was a fairly turbulent period in terms of ministerial changes, with 20 ministers in 25 years.

In the following pages we present an overview of key policy developments during this period. The analysis is based on the policy mapping conducted in three key policy areas: curriculum, teacher professional development, and learning assessment, as well as from the documentary analysis, available literature and key informant interviews conducted as part of the study. This discussion is the basis for the more specific analysis of the political economy of reforms which we present in the following section.

The section is organized into five subsections, one for each of the main governmental periods found between 1995 and 2020, in which we provide details on the development of reforms in the three key areas – curriculum, teaching and learning assessment – and locate them in the context of the broader sectoral priorities established during different ministerial administrations. The following timeline provides a general overview of the various ministerial periods and their policy priorities and key achievements of different administrations.

Timeline 1995-2020

1995 2000-2001 2006 2011 2016 2020



<p>President: - Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000)</p>	<p>President: - Valentin Paniagua (2000-2001) - Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006)</p>	<p>President: - Alan Garcia (2006-2011)</p>	<p>President: - Ollanta Humala (2016-2020)</p>	<p>President: - Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016-2018) - Martin Vizcarra (2018-2020) - Manuel Merino (2020) - Francisco Sagasti (2020-2021)</p>
<p>Ministers: - Dante Córdoba (Jul '95-Apr '96) - Domingo Palermo (Apr '96-Jan '99) - Felipe García Escudero (Jan '99-Jul '00) - Federico Salas Guevara (Jul '00-Nov '00)</p>	<p>Ministers: - Marcial Rubio (Nov '00-Jul '01) - Nicolás Lynch (Jul '01-Jul '02) - Gerardo Ayzanoa (Jul '02-Jun '03) - Carlos Malpica (Jun '03-Feb '04) - Javier Sota (Feb '04-Jul '06)</p>	<p>Ministers: - José Antonio Chang (Jul '06-Mar '11) - Víctor Raúl Díaz (Mar '11-Jul '11)</p>	<p>Ministers: - Patricia Salas (Jul '11-Oct '13) - Jaime Saavedra (Oct '13-Jul '16)</p>	<p>Ministers: - Jaime Saavedra (Jul '16-Dic '16) - Marilú Martens Dic '16-Sep '17) - Idel Vexler (Sep '17-Apr '18) - Daniel Alfaro (Apr '18-Mar '19) - Flor Pablo (Mar '19-Feb '20) - Martín Benavides (Feb '20-Nov '20) - Fernando D'Alessio (Nov '20) - Ricardo Cuenca (Nov '20-2021)</p>
<p>Broad orientation: Beginning of the educational quality reform agenda - truncated by the fall of the autocratic and corrupt regime</p>	<p>Broad orientation: Reforming the system's management through decentralization and participation</p>	<p>Broad orientation: Teacher reform and standardized assessments as the main driver for policies</p>	<p>Broad orientation: Achieving results and reforming the pedagogical core</p>	<p>Broad orientation: Extreme political turbulence and Covid-19 hinder substantial reforms</p>
<p>Key Policies: -1995: Start of MECEP and the implementation of a New Pedagogical Model (NEP) -1995: Launch of PLANCAD -1995: Creation of UMC -1996: Beginning of sample-based student assessment, by UMC -1997-1998: New basic curriculum structures for primary and secondary education -1999: Start of the pilot for the Baccalaureate Program of secondary education</p>	<p>Key Policies: -2001: National Consultation for Education -2001: Shutdown of the Baccalaureate Program -2001-2005: "Curricular rain", implementation of 4 different versions of the curriculum for secondary education -2002: Start of the national decentralization process -2003: General Law of Education -2003: Creation of the National Council for Education (CNE) -2005: National Teacher Training Program and Amauta Centres pilot plan</p>	<p>Key Policies: -2006: National Curriculum Design (DCN), readjusted in 2008 -2006: Beginning of ECE national standardized tests, census-based student assessment, by UMC -2007: National Education Plan 2007-2021 (PEN), issued by the CNE -2007: failed Census Teachers' Assessment -2007: Beginning of PRONAFCAP -2007: Enactment of the new Teachers' Career Law- LCPM N° 29062 -2008: Start of PELA -2010: Start of the elaboration of the learning standards (later "Progress Maps"), by Ipeba-SINEACE</p>	<p>Key Policies: -2011: Learning Routes -2012: Teacher Reform Law - LRM N° 29944 -2013: Redesign of PELA -2013: Introduction of Bono Escuela, Compromisos de Desempeño, and Semaforo Escuela -2016: new National Curriculum for Basic Education (CN)</p>	<p>Key Policies: -2019: National Curriculum is formally implemented in all modalities, levels, and cycles of schools and educational programs of Basic Education -2020: Guidelines for In-Service Teacher Education -2020: PEN 2020-2036, issued by the CNE</p>

4.1 1995-2000 The beginning of the educational quality improvement agenda

The year 1995 marked a clear beginning for educational quality improvement agenda. It was the year when a first large-scale loan agreement was signed with the World Bank which initiated the Educational Quality Improvement Program (MECEP). MECEP would concentrate most policy initiatives during the second half of the decade as national public funds were scarce. The first years of Alberto Fujimori's presidency – which would last for two consecutive periods, until the year 2000 – were of intense political turmoil. After closing Congress in 1992, in what is commonly described as an auto-coup (Conaghan, 2005; Levitsky & Cameron, 2003)³⁰, Fujimori consolidated his power and moved on to establish many of the key reforms that would shape the country to this day.

Fujimori's government embraced a very diligent version of neoliberal structural adjustment reforms (Ruiz-Torres, 2005), with swift moves towards the privatization of public companies, the deregulation of labor and the privatization of public services. In the education sector, although the government had attempted to privatize public education along the same lines as the country's neighboring Chile, such reforms were met with very strong opposition from the Teachers' Union, civil society groups and even the Catholic church and were subsequently abandoned – while these reforms fall beyond the scope of this study they are discussed by (Arregui, 2000; Balarin, 2015; Balarin, 2017). In the second half of the 1990s, however, a very different kind of privatization was set in motion through the liberalization (or deregulation) of private for-profit education. This set in motion a process of 'default privatization' (Balarin, 2015) which led to the exponential growth in the supply and demand for private education in the country. Between 1995 and 2019, private education enrollments for the primary level went from 12% to 26%, and, for the secondary level, from 16% to 24% (ESCALE, 2020; Marcos & Vásquez, 2018)³¹. A highly stratified education market emerged in this scenario, that includes a small percentage of so called 'elite' schools, and very large percentage of low-fee (and often low quality) schools that operate with close to no state supervision (Balarin et al., 2019; Balarin et al., 2018). While these reforms left public education formally untouched, they have had a profound impact on public schooling. On one hand the logic of the market has clearly permeated the public education sector, where school choice has become the norm³² and

³⁰ By closing Congress, Fujimori broke the democratic institutionalism, effectively removing one of the key powers in the democratic balance. It was a coup conducted by Fujimori against the legislative, which helped him consolidate his power and govern in an increasingly authoritarian way, and even going against the constitutional mandate – e.g. by running for a third unconstitutional election.

³¹ In Lima, the country's capital, private education enrollments in 2019 represented 49% and 45% of total enrollments for primary level and secondary levels, respectively.

³² While explicit school choice policies have not been implemented in the country, the logic of choice is *de facto* well established throughout the education system (Balarin & Escudero, 2018; Rodriguez & Saavedra, 2020). Balarin and Escudero (2018) point to three factors that show how school choice works in the case of the national state-run system. First, public school intakes are not constrained by catchment areas; thus, parental choice is well established and only limited by families' capacity to afford the transport, time, and other costs. Second, although schools are prohibited from conditioning enrollment to tests or payments, existing norms do not place any constraints on the criteria that oversubscribed public schools may apply when selecting students, so that "it is to be expected that the more desirable public schools will give preference to families from certain social backgrounds who present themselves as more committed to their children's education, or even to parents who make greater voluntary economic contributions to the school" (2018, p. 17). Third, these voluntary family contributions, although not compulsory for enrollment, are, in fact, a well-established practice in the system -linked to the history of deterioration of the public budget for education during the second half of the twentieth century-, and, over time,

socio-economic school segregation has deepened; on the other public education now 'competes' with private schools and is often seen as an education for those who cannot afford private schooling. Some interviewees considered that this was synonymous with the state having abdicated its responsibility towards universal public education³³. But its biggest impact, as Bruns et al. (2019, p. 30) suggests, might be on 'the missing pressure from the middle class' for quality reforms.

In the years following the publication of the General Diagnosis, then minister Alberto Varillas was adamant that the way to address the problems it identified was to 'call in the banks [i.e. the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank]³⁴. This move led to the creation of the MECEP Program in 1995, with three main objectives: to improve the quality of teaching; to modernize the system's administration; and to substitute and rehabilitate the country's educational infrastructure (Du Bois, 2004). In terms of improving learning, the program's theory of change was well aligned to the General Diagnosis, and, as highlighted by one interviewee, it proposed that 'learning would improve if teachers adopted strategies, methods... it was very focused on methodology, on active teaching methodologies'³⁵. A key addition to this, was the program's emphasis on standardized testing and on the generation and use of statistical data as a driver for policy making and the system's modernization. This, as highlighted by a key informant in the following quote, entailed a major change in the conduction of the education system:

In my view, what made a difference is [the idea of] trying to align the system around the objective of achieving results in tests, results that translated into tests. I think this helped align the [policy] efforts of 90's, even if we didn't know it then. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education)

The emphasis on testing entailed a shift in discussions about educational quality, which went from being focused on inputs - infrastructure, educational materials, teacher training - to emphasizing students' academic outcomes" (Guadalupe et al., 2017, p. 211). Student assessment, as we shall see in the following pages, became one of the policy areas with the most sustained progress during the period under study (Rivas, 2015).

Student assessment

The first milestone in this policy area was the creation of the Educational Quality Measurement Unit (UMC) in 1996, as part of the MECEP program, which included measuring school performance as a key element in the modernization of educational management. The UMC became Ministerial body in charge of developing and implementing a hitherto non-existent national system for learning assessment (Hunt, 2001, p. 8).

they have favored the appropriate functioning and desirability of certain schools, and reinforced the impoverishment of others.

³³ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education

³⁴ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education

³⁵ Interview: University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education

The first standardized learning assessments – named "Crece con Calidad y Equidad en el Rendimiento" (CRECER) - were conducted in 1996 and 1998. They initiated a cycle of national assessments which that have continued to this day, albeit with readjustments in terms of assessment models, coverage, etc. This initial tests included mainly multiple-choice questions, they adopted a norm-referenced model (in line with the region's trend at the time ³⁶), and were applied to a sample of schools (Cueto, 2007, p. 408; Hunt, 2001, p. 12).

The interpretation and later publication of the CRECER test results was a politically charged issue. While the tests were norms-based tests, and could therefore only be used to make broad comparisons between groups of students in relation to average results, their results were interpreted as though they referred to criteria, leading authorities to assume, wrongly, that most students had failed (Cueto (2007). The government, fearful of its image, decided not to disclose the results, which had already included in a printed report and were ready for distribution. While not broadly publicized, test results were used to develop language and mathematics manuals, which included technical-pedagogical recommendations aimed at improving teaching practices; and the UMC organized a series of teacher training workshops based on these materials.

During this initial stage, the UMC's main funding body was the WB, through the MECEP Program (Cueto, 2007, p. 408), so the first national evaluations carried out in the country were entirely financed by external cooperation sources, which, in the case of the secondary school evaluations, also included the IDB (Cueto, 2007, p. 408; Guadalupe et al., 2017, p. 223).

Curriculum

Although 'the Banks' and the General Diagnosis had not placed any emphasis whatsoever on the curriculum, by 1995, the MoE's pedagogical team had established the urgent need for a reformed curriculum. The main objective of this reform would be to transform teaching and learning practices from a passive to a more active model based on constructivist theories or learning, in which students would be at the center of the learning process. The new approach became known as the "New Pedagogical Model" (NEP), and entailed a shift from a vertical, rote memory and teacher-centered pedagogy based on a very prescriptive curriculum, to a pupil-centered pedagogy, with teacher acting as facilitators of learning, and the curriculum providing a basic structure that that teachers should would need to adapt to the school and classroom needs (Balarin, 2006).

The first major curricular change was the shift from subjects to curricular areas. Curricular contents were grouped into five core areas of student development: communication, personal and social (development), logic and mathematics, science and environment, and religious formation. This attempted to overcome the traditional division of knowledge into formal disciplines of study (Benavides et al., 2004, p. 10).

³⁶ "Norm-referenced tests are necessary for obtaining reliable and valid normative results for a comparison of the students tested. They are standardized tests that only allow us to know how a student or a group of students is doing in relation to a defined average for the population [...] Norm-referenced tests compare and classify the knowledge of students with average academic performance levels" (Arancibia, 1997, p. 23).

The idea of integrating knowledge entailed a move towards a competencies based curriculum, in line with what was happening in other countries in the region (Ferrer, 2004). This meant an emphasis on promoting learning that could “be applied in diverse contexts of daily life (the curriculum refers to this as “know-how”)” (Cueto & Secada, 2004, pp. 316-317), as opposed to learning centered on the mechanical memorization of content taught by teachers (Balarin, 2006, pp. 133-134). The new competency-based curriculum sought to promote meaningful learning aimed at “the formation of healthy and integral individuals, who participate actively and constructively in their social environment and the world” (Ferrer, 2004, p. 56)³⁷.

What exactly a competency is and how it should be operationalized in the curriculum and in classroom practices became a key area of contention in the following years. Discussing this point, one interviewee suggests that the idea of developing pupils’ competencies was fraught with misunderstandings.

[It is] not a very clear concept. It seems that it was very difficult for them, with their previous theoretical frameworks, to understand what a competency was... For me this is incredible, but these are the kinds of discussions that curriculum people have. I mean, it’s a problem because it also shapes what teachers discuss. Teachers end up discussing what meaning to give to the term, it’s horrible. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education)

Beyond these conceptual difficulties, curricular changes introduced during this period created a greater demand for pedagogical leadership in schools, which was not easy to attain; and the idea of teachers as facilitators of learning with the capacity to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the classroom, posed many challenges. One unintended consequence of these changes was the displacement of curricular content, which many teachers ended up considering unimportant (Balarin & Benavides, 2010).

In relation to secondary education, efforts to reform the curriculum were initiated after the revisions were carried out at the primary level. This reform had a series of difficulties and discontinuities in its elaboration and implementation process – which was conducted through a pilot program in a limited number of schools. For example, the experimental structure approved in 1997 had only been designed for the first two grades of secondary school, in a scenario in which, unlike primary school, secondary school teachers were divided by teaching areas and not by grade (Neira & Rodrich, 2008). This meant that teachers in charge of several grades had to work “with the experimental structure for the first and second grades, while for the other grades they had to rely on the curricular programs [from previous years]” (p. 44). Subsequently, the curriculum proposal approved for secondary education in 1998 was developed for all areas and grades (from first through fourth). It also worked in parallel with a

³⁷ The achievement of these goals requires the definition of a different student profile. In theory, a competent learner or human being is one who effectively combines four types of knowledge: conceptual knowledge (or simply “knowing”), procedural knowledge (knowing how to do), attitudinal knowledge (knowing how to be), and, finally, metacognitive knowledge (knowing how to learn). Thus, a person demonstrates competence when he/she decides to put conceptual knowledge at his/her service and at that of the environment in which he/she lives in an effective and efficient way. In addition, he/she is able to reflect on this process and thus reproduce and improve his/her performance in new situations or contexts. It is affirmed that the competencies thus proposed, and centered on knowledge of social and affective relevance and pertinence for students, make education a meaningful learning process, another of the epistemological notions that are the protagonists of the current curricular proposal. (Ferrer, 2004, pp. 56-57).

pilot baccalaureate program implemented since 1999, which proposed "the reduction of the secondary level from five to four years and the transition to two years of specialization in different areas" (p. 40). Regarding the articulated implementation of this curricular structure, Ferrer points out:

In 1997 and 1998, a whole new curricular structure was developed to homogenize criteria between middle and upper-middle education, or baccalaureate. The baccalaureate program was applied experimentally for two years but was later discontinued due to the change of political authorities in the sector. On the other hand, the secondary education plan was applied in more schools and had a longer duration, but [as of 2001] its curricular structure is again under review, and a new program will soon be implemented. (Ferrer, 2004, p. 58)

Although the 1998 secondary school curriculum structure was also based on a constructivist and competence development paradigm, "the lack of time and effort dedicated to this new program, and consequently the high level of unresolved dissent regarding the epistemological approach and the disciplinary contents [to be followed by secondary education in the country]" (Ferrer, 2004, p. 58) greatly affected its institutionalization over time³⁸.

Teaching reform

One of the main policy initiatives during this period was a large-scale in-service teacher training program, PLANCAD, for its name in Spanish. PLANCAD was developed from the assumption that teachers lacked basic capacities and needed to be trained in pedagogical methods¹. It was a very narrow approach to reforming the teaching profession, that did not take into account the various structural factors that had led to such an outcome (i.e. low salaries, a teachers' career law in which progression was based on years of service rather than on merit, a poor pre-service training system, etc.).

According to Hunt (2004), PLANCAD grew out of MECEP's initial need to "plan the training of all primary teachers in non-bilingual programs³⁹ in the country so that they could use the new curriculum and school texts " (p. 26). It was primarily a mass teacher training strategy with the overall objective of bringing about changes in pedagogical practices in public schools in line with the NEP⁴⁰ (Cuenca, 2003, p. 173; Cuenca & Stojnic, 2008, p. 28). Subsequently, it also included pre-school and secondary school teachers⁴¹.

³⁸ Ferrer (2004) adds that in none of the curriculum reform processes, whether primary or secondary, was there a systematic practice of consultation processes "with the educational community or with civil society that would allow for an authentic validation of the curriculum or of the implementation elements that would make its delivery possible" (p. 61). This reportedly mainly affected the reform of secondary education: "The debate within the Ministry, government after government, continues to drag on and on about what type of secondary education is desired and what type of curriculum it should contain. This is a discussion that, had it been properly conducted in time and with greater social and professional participation, could have been settled many years ago" (p. 62).

³⁹ Although many multigrade teachers were included in the PLANCAD training, teachers' training in single-teacher schools was not carried out (Hunt, 2004). This meant that the disparity in access to training increased in relation to teachers in rural areas (Balarin & Benavides 2010).

⁴⁰ See section on the curriculum.

⁴¹ The program began with training in primary schools in 1995 and extended to kindergartens in 1997 and secondary schools in 1998. In its last years, it also included "orientation and training, in technical-pedagogical and educational management aspects, to hierarchical personnel, headmasters of public schools, as well as to specialists of the regional and local education administrations" (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 7).

PLANCAD's annual training exercises focused on individual teachers, rather than on school-level work, and involved approximately 200 chronological hours for each teacher (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 7). They were structured in two main stages: the first consisted of face-to-face workshops during the summer and mid-term holidays, and a later stage of reinforcement and follow-up through classroom visits, tutoring, and meetings between peers in inter-learning nuclei (Hunt, 2004, p. 26; PREAL, 2001, p. 19; Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 7). The latter reflects PLANCAD's interest in giving rise in the long term to a "continuous program of teacher training after the program had ended" (Hunt, 2004, p. 26).

While the program sought to transform teaching practices into more active methodologies, the way in which such aims were pursued and measured was somewhat limited, and it 'was hard to translate the will to have new ideas into a concrete set of proposals.'⁴² According to some authors, the priority given to new pedagogical skills led to neglect of much-needed training in disciplinary content (Cuenca & Stojnic, 2008, pp. 34, 64-65). Moreover, the fact that training was conducted on a massive and individual basis, and not at the level of schools and classrooms, limited the incorporation and sustainability of new practices in schools (Balarin, 2019, p. 4; Cuenca, 2003; González et al., 2014). Likewise, Hunt (2004, p. 26) draws attention to the distance between the training proposal and the capacities of teachers, who, given their precarious initial training, had to be additionally trained on lesson planning or class sequences, the school day, formative assessment, among others. There were also important inconsistencies, such as those between the proposed new pedagogical methods and classroom assessment practices, which remained unchanged⁴³. Finally, the outsourcing model chosen for the program implementation generated a series of problems, given the dissimilar and often unsuitable capacities of the implementing institutions (Balarin, 2019, p. 4; Balarin & Benavides, 2010, p. 315; Ferrer, 2004, p. 65; Hunt, 2004, pp. 27-28).

Such implementation problems, together with the lack of clarity in relation to key concepts as left teachers often confused and performing 'active methodologies' in highly ritualistic ways. The emphasis on new teaching methodologies was often taken to mean that subject matter knowledge was now irrelevant. Changes, then, unintendedly led to a 'hollowing out' of the curriculum, whereby content knowledge came to be considered secondary or even irrelevant and was replaced by often vacuous notions of active pedagogical methods (Balarin & Benavides, 2010).

While the limitations of the 1990s reforms are clear, this period was a key moment in the development of a 'learning agenda', as it inaugurated an era of learning focused policies. It was also the first attempt to form a technocracy within the MoE. The team leading MECEP was closely linked to the Strategic Planning and Educational Quality Assessment Office (PLANMED) of the MoE. That office was the intellectual powerhouse from which many reforms emanated and was behind much of the conceptual renewal that supported many of the proposed policies and reforms.

⁴² Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education

⁴³ Interview: Former SUTEP high-ranking official and current counsellor at the National Council for Education

As explained by one interviewee, however, such a renewal was more conceptual than practical, because ‘the investment made by MECEP was very very small’⁴⁴. As the government approached the 2000 election it decided to concentrate most of that investment on educational infrastructure, which was deemed more politically profitable. This emphasis on building schools as a means to gain votes, is clearly reflective of the dominant-clientelistic nature of Fujimori’s political regime (Hickey & Hossain, 2019).

As we shall see, the increasingly authoritarian and highly corrupt nature of Fujimori’s government would later lead to the dismissal of many of the reforms proposed during the MECEP era. Such a dismissal, however, can also be attributed to the lack of broad base consensus building strategies during this period that is typical of authoritarian regimes. Ideas and reforms were largely developed by the MoEs technocrats, without much regard for engaging teachers or other key stakeholder groups (Balarin, 2006). A notable exclusion, for instance, was that of Foro Educativo, a civil society organization still active today, which gathered academics and education experts, and which had proposals of its own that often competed with those of the MoE, but which could be easily dismissed (instead of engaged in an open debate) in a context in which the government had almost total control not only of the Executive and the Legislative, but also –through corrupt means– of the judiciary and the press (Cotler & Grompone, 2000; Degregori, 2016; Levitsky & Cameron, 2003).

While the end of Fujimori’s government may be seen as the end of the dominant-clientelistic/corrupt settlement, the broader consensus around the model of development – largely reliant on primary exports, with low market regulation and weak redistributive policies, privileging macroeconomic stability to public investment – prevailed.

4.2 2000-2006 – Instability, new legislative frameworks and a change of focus, from learning to the system’s governance and administration

In July 2000, Alberto Fujimori initiated a third term in office, after an unconstitutional and clearly rigged election (Schmidt, 2005). Popular mobilizations and flagrant evidence of corruption in the administration led to the fall of the regime. The head of Congress, Valentín Paniagua, led a one-year transition government charged with conducting an orderly national election in 2001.

The conditions under which Fujimori’s government ended – rampant corruption, abuse of power, the manipulation of public opinion and the complete disregard of dissenting voices (Balbi, 2001; Biblioteca anticorrupción del Congreso de la República & Zapata, 2004; Conaghan, 2005; Cotler & Grompone, 2000; Degregori, 2016; Jochamowitz, 2002; Levitsky & Cameron, 2003; Schmidt, 2005) – led the transition government to focus its efforts on reestablishing democracy and, to a somewhat lesser extent, on fighting corruption. In this context, most of the policy initiatives of the previous decade, which were identified with Fujimori’s government, were abandoned.

⁴⁴ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education

While a number of technocrats from the MECEP era remained in the MoE, the transition government inaugurated a new period in which the focus of reforms shifted from pedagogy and learning, to the reorganization and management of the education system⁴⁵.

One of the key contributions made by the transition government was a National Consultation process which was to be the basis for the definition of educational priorities and reforms (Ministerio de Educación, 2002). The consultation process also sought to mobilize society around the idea of education as a matter of public concern. This process contrasted markedly with the way in which policies had been conducted in the previous decade, during which the MoE's technocrats, well insulated by the political dominance of Fujimori's regime, were able to define the course of policies and reforms often behind closed doors, on a largely unnegotiated manner⁴⁶ (Balarin, 2006).

The National Consultation included nation-wide discussions, in schools and with civil society organizations, and concluded with the publication of three large volumes of ideas and recommendations which were handed over to the new democratically elected government of Alejandro Toledo in 2001. While these recommendations were meant to guide the government's education policies, the following quote suggests that this did not really happen:

I remember when [that document] was handed to Toledo's government... it [was received] almost with disgust, not just with indifference... Toledo was disgusted by the idea of being told what should be done in education, when he was a doctor in educational economics and he knew what needed to be done...⁴⁷ (University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education)

Toledo's first minister, Nicolás Lynch opted for calling his own group of experts to draft a five-year plan for the education sector. He established a commission to work on the higher education reform, and another one to work on basic education, which produced a short volume with key policy proposals. As the following quote illustrates, however, the latter were once again dismissed in next ministerial change:

When the document was ready, Toledo sacked Lynch and the document went 'to the archives' (University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education)

These processes, whereby there is an effort to establish durable policy priorities through national consultations and special commissions, but which are later dismissed when there is a change in ministerial teams, highlight the discontinuous nature of the policy process in Peru and difficulties in establishing binding policy agreements. While each new policy team seems to have almost complete freedom to redefine policies and priorities at their will, they often end up with redefinitions or reinventions of what was already being done, creating new terminology rather than new policies, but considerably delaying policy implementation and often generating confusion among key actors (teachers, headteacher, local administrators).

⁴⁵ Interview: University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education

⁴⁶ Interviews: Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education; and University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education

⁴⁷ The interviewee means that the document was never published or used.

During the early years of Toledo's government there was a lot of instability in the MoE, with three ministers in office during the first three years. This rapid turnover of ministers responded to the political weakness of Toledo's government, the fact that his public approval was low and weaker as the year passed, and to several political crises that the government attempted to repair by reshuffling the cabinet. The problem with such changes was that the government's party was weak, a mere alliance established to win an election and, like many governments afterwards, it did not have a clear programmatic agenda (Tanaka, 2005, 2006). This made it difficult to advance towards any significant reform. Perhaps the key educational contribution of Toledo's government was the passing of the new General Law of Education in 2003. The Law's main emphasis was set on the decentralization and participative governance of the education system. As mentioned, the authoritarianism and corruption of the Fujimori years had led to a clear view that the country had a democratic deficit which needed to be remedied. In 2002, the country had embarked on a national decentralization process, which sought to put an end to a long history of highly centralized government. New autonomous regional governments were created and were charged with conducting educational policies in the region, leaving the MoE with a loosely defined leadership and a slimmer spending capacity.

The decentralization process in education – and in the country as a whole – was highly flawed. The institutional design and the very fast way in which attributions were transferred to the newly created regional governments, most of which lacked the capacity to perform their new tasks, led to the emergence of a 'frankenstinian model' which some argued was "destined to fail" (Ballón, 2017).

Something similar happened in the education sector. The new General Law of Education defined the attributions of regional and local governments and charged the former with developing Regional Education Plans (PER), a potentially important exercise for establishing formal policy orientations. The plans were elaborated from the basis of participative discussion processes, which gathered a broad base of stakeholders. Once finalized, however, the regional education plans were little more than declarations of intent, and they did not really help to guide policy actions at the regional level, where governance and management capacities remained weak.

In terms of policy orientations, another important contribution of the new General Law of Education, was the creation of the National Council for Education (CNE), charged with developing a National Education Plan (PEN) – a long term plan establishing key policy orientations.

Various interviewed actors coincide in that the decentralization process and the various participative mechanisms it established were developed as a kind of ideological reaction to the authoritarianism of the previous decade –'there was a conviction that democracy could only be resolved through decentralization'⁴⁸. But the real impact of those participative processes was low. The model was to create various participatory councils, from the national to the local/school level, tasked with defining policies and actions. According to a key informant, the problem with this model was that the focus of was set on publishing documents

⁴⁸ Interview: University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education

and establishing protocols for the operation of such participatory councils that were non-binding, often inadequate and monitored in highly ritualistic ways⁴⁹.

As the following quotes illustrate, the General Law of Education is problematic because it focuses more on the education system's organization and on participatory decision-making than on school organization and educational practice. One interviewee suggested that it is:

a very bad law. Because general issues are lyrical, and at the practical level it focuses on things like the organization of a provincial council, of a regional council... this kind of participation that gets no one to participate. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education)

Another interviewee questioned the Law's understanding of participatory decision making as something that can be legally prescribed, and its view of schools as homogeneous entities:

while in the 90s you had the installation of [pedagogical change] processes, and surely there was a need for a more habilitating normative framework, in the General Law of Education they got way too prescriptive... for me the General Law of Education, with the advantages it may have, assumes that all schools, that all the country has just a single way of working. It has some nuances, but it ends up being too prescriptive, too focused on protocols. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

Establishing participatory decision-making processes and developing a National Education Plan were both strategies to promote consensus building and to foster the establishment of binding agreements and settlements around key issues and policy directions – they were strategies in sum, to manage the politics of education policy making. As the discussion suggests, however, in practice these mechanisms were weak or unable to contain the redefinition of priorities on the part of ministers and governments.

Teacher reform

The need for a comprehensive reform of the teaching career was one of the central elements in policy debates of this period. A diagnosis conducted during Lynch's term in office (Rivero, 2003), proposed the need for a new merit-based Teacher's Career Law, which should be based on regular performance assessments and should be accompanied by coherent formative strategies as well as by regular salary increments. Lynch, who came from the political left, had a highly confrontational approach towards the national Teachers' Union (SUTEP), which he publicly accused of being conservative and self-serving (Lynch, 2004). He soon moved to establish a national teachers' assessment, which was arguably badly designed – it only evaluated general knowledge not even specifically related to teachers' areas of work (Cuenca, 2020). The evaluation was a complete failure, and it generated a staunch refusal on the part of teachers towards any kind of assessment - something that would last well into the

⁴⁹ Interview: University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education

following government. In practice, no significant teacher reforms were defined or implemented during this period.

One important milestone, however, was the transition of teacher professional development from a "training" approach (remedial, punctual, discontinuous, focused on updates) to one of "continuous training" (comprehensive, reflective process, with teachers as autonomous and active agents in their training (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 38). In 2001, the MoE approved the "National In-Service Training Plan", a pilot project that sought to redesign the strategy for teacher professional development based on the lessons learned from the implementation of PLANCAD; and in 2002, it proposed a "Continuous Training System for Human Resources in Education". The "National Teacher Training Program", officialized in 2005, consisted of a "set of guidelines for the participatory design of Training Plans in each of the country's regions, to promote comprehensive teacher training, in accordance with the potential, needs and educational demands of the area", and which sought to "raise the level of training and professional performance", contribute "to personal and social development", "improve the quality of educational service" and guarantee "student learning" (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 39). This program was aimed at all basic education teachers, and its implementation was managed, advised, and evaluated by DINFOCAD⁵⁰. Finally, in 2005, the Amauta Centres pilot plan was implemented, which sought to consolidate the in-service training model described above in the regions⁵¹.

The implementation of this decentralized model of teacher professional development, however, was progressively abandoned in subsequent years as the following administration established its own views on the matter. Moreover, the tremendous political instability in the government and the Ministry itself during this period, meant that no progress was made towards structural reforms in the teaching career during this period (Cuenca, 2011).

Learning Assessment

In 2001, well into Toledo's government, the UMC conducted the first "National Evaluation of Student Achievement", which was then repeated in 2004. These tests continued to be sample-based, but they were now truly nationally representative, since they included both multi-grade and multi-teacher schools. Unlike the first evaluations, these tests followed a criterion-referenced model. The assessments had a higher level of complexity, with a broader range of questions in addition to multiple-choice ones. They also tested students with an indigenous mother tongue in their own language (Cueto, 2007, p. 408). Finally, although both tests assessed primary and secondary students, they were administered to different grades in each

⁵⁰ Some important changes with respect to PLANCAD were the following: (i) from a single training proposal designed in MoE to diversified Training Plans, which addressed the particular demands and needs of schools; (ii) from implementation by "Executing Entities" to "In-Service Training Institutions", which, although they continued to be public and private institutions selected by public tender or bidding, were now to be in charge of elaborating, together with DINFOCAD's UCAD, proposals for Training Plans; (iii) from attention to teachers by Grades to attention by Educational Institutions, which not only solved design problems previously identified but also allowed for collaborative and democratic work in schools (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, pp. 45-50).

⁵¹ These regional institutions had the function of "advising and monitoring the Initial Training provided by the Pedagogical Institutes; planning, managing, monitoring and evaluating the In-Service Training plans", all within the framework of national and regional educational policy guidelines (Sánchez Moreno, 2006, p. 59).

edition: fourth and sixth grades of primary school and fourth grade of secondary school in 2001, and second and sixth grades of primary school and third and fifth grades of secondary school in 2004. Both tests assessed language and mathematics, but 2004 also saw the first effort to assess some citizenship competencies in sixth and fifth grades.

While some interviewees suggest that during this time the UMC's role in the MoE was weakened – as the MoE's pedagogical offices were often suspicious of its role, believing that it was meant to monitor and assess them – and test results were scarcely used to guide policy decisions (Cueto, 2007, p. 431), test results became prominent in public debate.

At the same time as the MoE focused its attention on the system's governance and administration, it was during this period that, through the evidence emanating from international assessments such as the OECD's PISA and from national assessments conducted at the end of the 1990, that the urgency of an educational quality reform became entrenched in public debate. Peru participated in PISA on 2001 and 2004, and achieved extremely low results which led to an awareness that the country was the last in education, as it was at the very end of the list of countries that participated in PISA. This led then Minister Carlos Malpica to declare a 'State of Emergency' for the education system – another largely declarative gesture which lacked a plan and concrete proposals, and which was 'faced without any additional funds, something that hindered any transcendent action or any essential change' (Rivero, 2007)

During this period, then, there was very little advancement in terms of the quality and learning agenda. The conceptual basis for a reform of the teachers' career were established, but little headway was made – on the contrary, the flawed evaluation attempt had generated a marked animosity among the teaching profession towards any kind of reform.

Curriculum

The National Consultation on Education carried out in 2001 included the collection of information on the population's perceptions of the curriculum. Although the results were not really used for curriculum reform, this experience contrasts with the lack of systematic mechanisms for consulting civil society that were typical of curriculum developments during the 1990s (Ferrer, 2004)⁵².

During the Toledo administration, curricular changes were constant, especially at the secondary level, which Neira and Rodrich (2008) call a period of "curricular rain": between 1997 and 2006, up to 7 different versions of a curriculum were implemented at this level. Thus, the problems in establishing and generalizing a basic curriculum design for this level, detected

⁵² The National Consultation for Education was an important milestone in the history of education in the country, given the efforts to involve civil society in the establishment of the public policy agenda and, specifically, the educational and curricular reform. In this regard, the commission in charge points out: "The fragility of educational changes is due to the fragility of the State-civil society relations that tinge our history, and that unfortunately draws gaps between families and educational plans, between students and curriculum definitions, between citizens and educational authorities" (Ministerio de Educación, 2002, p. 42).

at the end of the 1990s, remained, mainly due to the constant changes in ministerial leadership after the transition to democracy.

In 2001, at the beginning of Toledo's government, education minister Nicolas Lynch stopped the implementation of the Baccalaureate plan in 2001. With the elimination of this "upper secondary education" level, the structure in place prior to the changes proposed since 1997 was restored (Balarin, 2006, p. 136). The secondary curriculum was also modified to include the five years of secondary education instead of the four previously established (Balarin, 2006, p. 136). Lynch's successor in office, Gerardo Ayzanoa, reviewed the changes proposed by his predecessor's team in the secondary curriculum and consolidated them in a 2004 version of the curriculum, which was characterized by its return to the traditional emphasis on content, rather than competencies. According to Eguren et al. (2004, p. 39), this shift had already been expressed in the textbooks approved by the MoE for the year 2004, which relegated the competencies approach, apparently in response to the MECEP reform.

The constant curricular changes and the coexistence of several versions of the curriculum generated confusion, especially among teachers, who often preferred to use the old and outdated curriculum that they knew better.

4.3 2006-2011 A new focus on learning as results and partial progress in teaching reform

Early in 2007, education minister José Antonio Chang signed and endorsed the National Plan for Education, prepared by the National Council for Education, and which was meant to guide and organize the education policy agenda. He soon, though, moved in a different direction, introducing his own set of often disconnected policies. There was a clear break-up between the National Council for Education and the MoE when the former decided not to back up the proposed teachers' assessment. In one specific area, that of decentralization, García specifically opted to move in a direction which directly contradicted not only the National Plan, but also the 2003 New Law of Education and promoted a municipalized model of educational governance – something for which his administration was often criticized. This shows not only the weakness of the Law of the Plan as binding or even orienting mechanisms, but also the highly idiosyncratic nature of Garcia's government, which was not prone to public deliberation of policy decisions, not to give reasons for the latter.

Unlike his predecessor, Garcia was a seasoned politician with the backing of a strong political party and with a well known capacity for political discourse. Meléndez and León (2009) argue that the government's strength was based on its playing 'a simultaneous chess game' in many flanks (p. 592). The strong economic growth of the period, largely driven by international demand for minerals, constituted a strong backing, but the author claims that Garcia strengthened his legitimacy by attributing such improvements exclusively to his government's action, and by de-legitimizing other powers, like the Congress. At the same time, the government managed to control the social conflicts that had weakened his predecessor's government through greater deployment of the military. In a context of 'institutional fragility

and low popular support' such strategies enabled the government to maintain a relatively high level of power and control.

Following the literature review and interviews with key stakeholders around this governmental period, it could be said that García's government made two major contributions to the learning and quality agenda. One was the establishment of a new, very different style of policy-making in education, what we shall later describe as narrowly technocratic, and less focused on participatory and decentralized decision making. This is illustrated in the following quote,

[the government] began to play maybe in opposition to that other [participationist, decentralizing] current of the previous years, and redefined educational policy in a technocratic key. (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

The other was the passing of a new teachers' career law, that, while largely ineffective, managed to break the gridlock and establish a meritocratic teachers' career with regular performance evaluations.

Learning assessment

With regards to the new style of policy making, García's government gave a new meaning to the role of learning assessments as a driver of policies. According interviewees who were close to the ministerial administration at the moment, Immediately after assuming the presidency García met with the World Bank representative for education, who 'floated'⁵³ the idea of using national assessment data as a means for running the education system. The same interviewee explains that the World Bank representative was mainly referring to the implementation of reading tests in second grade. The interviewee explained that this was an attractive idea, because they were basically arguing:

"this is the way of measuring things, now we finally have a dependent variable for economists to use" and all the economists bought this idea from the Bank. And this is what the WB representative brought in... the logic that he sold to Alan García is very simple: you produce census information, schools are obliged to publish their bad results, and parents will nag teachers and headteachers in order to get them to work well. (...) And this [logic] becomes installed and it matched perfectly well with the MoF. It is the moment in which the MoF begins to adopt the logic of results based budgeting. (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

Furthering this view, another interviewee said:

I feel it [the World Bank] was.. an actor that... put too much pressure [on the government], and I feel it went beyond the role it was meant to have as an international organization... (Former MoE high-ranking official and current researcher at a local institution)

⁵³ Interview: University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education

The pressure mentioned by the interviewee refers to the fact that, according to this narrative, the World Bank officials pushed the government towards the establishment of yearly standardized tests as a means for guiding improvement, thus derailing the educational assessment agenda that had, up to then, been more focused on generating rich information to inform policy decisions. Moving towards a yearly census evaluation was a very difficult endeavour which meant that the UMCs energies were more focused on the logistics of the process and moved away from the richer assessments of previous years, which had included the collection of data on factors associated with learning.

As argued by another interviewee, this agenda of making test standardized test results the main driver for educational improvement coincided with the fact that during this time the McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) – which, among other things highlighted the role of testing as a driver of educational improvements – ‘was the Bible’ for Minister Chang⁵⁴, the longest lasting minister in all the period under study. Chang was soon to introduce the Census Learning Assessment (ECE) which evaluated all second grade students in math and language. While the initial argument was that this would strengthen accountability, the ECE, much more than a tool for families to exert pressure for improvement, became the main tool for guiding decision making in the system. This new mode of approaching education policy-making was crystalized in the signing of the first Learning Achievement Educational Program (PELA), in 2008, which marked the way in which public investment in education would be made in the following years.

In its first version (2008-2012), PELA focused on the distribution and use of school materials, and on improving teaching practices through a strategy of teacher mentoring. These strategies were implemented in parallel to another in-service teacher training program named PRONAFCAP. In time, teacher mentoring would become one of the central strategies of the MoE for improving learning results. PELA was negotiated directly with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), which had the last word on what investments could be made. This inaugurated an era in which the MoF, through the model of results-based budgeting – that in the case of education focused on results in the second grade math and language tests – would become one of the key protagonists in the definition of education policies. From this moment on, nothing that did not have a direct impact on those narrowly defined learning results would be funded. This also gave rise to an era in which impact and other evaluations would acquire a central role in education policy-making.

The involvement of the MoF in this context is worth highlighting. Through the introduction of results based budgeting, and its ties to the standardized assessment system, the MoF effectively became an education policy actor in a way in which it had not been in previous years. While, of course, it had always had control of the budget, test results – or the lack thereof – gave it a tool to influence decisions on which programs to maintain or cut, without it having the knowledge of educational processes to understand how programs might be contributing to real improvements in teaching and learning and the length of time this might take.

⁵⁴ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official and current researcher at a local institution

Studies that have addressed this period and the commitment to ECE testing have drawn attention to the effect that the focus on learning assessment is having on a narrower and more pragmatic view of education reform (Guerrero, 2009, p. 18), which increasingly places at the center of the discussion on educational quality "learning achievements as measured by performance assessments, leaving somewhat aside the need to generate changes in the core of educational practice - an emphasis, in other words, on outcomes rather than processes" (Balarin, 2019, p. 5). In this vein, Guadalupe et al. consider that the introduction of ECE tests, "given their nature, coverage and frequency, (...) may have distanced the assessment process from its initial purpose - to generate evidence for policy decision-making [in terms of their formulation and readjustment]" (2017, p. 223). Furthermore, the political context in which they were introduced would have led to the fact that, since their origin, the ECEs have served, in practice, as a measurement instrument with other orientations, such as the control and punishment orientation detected during the García government. This technical debate about the convenience of census tests opposes their limitations, mainly logistical and concerning the scope of the information they collect, to the potential of the previous model of sample evaluations to "generate very rich information that not only allows verification of achievement levels but also makes it possible to do so in a more profound way and with the capacity to generate policy recommendations and for pedagogical practice" (Guadalupe et al., 2017, p. 92).

Teacher reform

The other main area through which the García government affected the learning and quality agenda was the reform of the teaching career. García took it to himself to win the battle against the teachers' union and, in 2007, managed to introduce a new teachers' career law (Ley de Carrera Pública Magisterial – LCPM-29062). The Law was approved by Congress amid protests from the teachers' union and after truncated technical discussions on the draft bills (Balarin, 2020, p. 11; Cuenca, 2011, p. 22). This law sought to reform the teaching career, which since 1984 had been governed by Teachers' Law No. 24029, which protected teachers' positions and based career progression on years of experience, thus, preventing the creation of incentives based on performance, "in addition to not allowing teacher mobility according to the needs of the system and the disciplinary powers of the headteachers" (Cueto et al., 2008, p. 9; see also Instituto Apoyo, 2002). On the contrary, the new LCPM-29062 aimed at introducing a meritocratic structure in the teaching career by establishing performance in teacher assessment as the main mechanism for promotion and access to better salaries (Balarin, 2020, p. 11). Nevertheless, while it financially incentivized good performance, teachers who obtained negative results three times in a row were sanctioned with dismissal (Cueto et al., 2008, p. 9).

While the law was an important milestone in the road to establish a meritocratic career, the confrontational way in which the government related to the Teachers' Union, the characteristics of the Law itself, and the nature of the teachers' assessments made it difficult to achieve real changes (Guerrero, 2009). The main problem that the new law faced was that instead of establishing a new career regime for all teachers, the government proposed that the new regime should operate in parallel to the previous one, and that migration from the old to the new career regime would be a voluntary process. This entailed that towards the end of García's government only one out of every four teachers had migrated into the new

meritocratic law (Guerrero, 2009). This could be explained because career progression in the new law was not accompanied by salary increases, but also because of the technical quality of teacher evaluations. The latter focused on evaluating basic knowledge, and they reproduced a very traditional idea of 'education as instruction', which focused on a kind of 'minimal curriculum', as they evaluated just two areas (math and language) (Guerrero, 2009, p. 35)⁵⁵. This contributed to deepen teachers' animosity towards performance assessments and made it difficult for later administrations to legitimize this mechanism.

Why exactly the government chose this strategy for reform is not entirely clear. A broad political reading would suggest that in taking this route the government scored an important political goal – it reformed the teachers career – without actually having to face the political mobilization that a more thorough reform might have entailed. While Garcia's law was limited, it is clear that it opened the way for the more comprehensive reforms of his successors.

Another measure introduced by Alan García's government with regard to the teaching career was the Continuing Education and Training Program (PRONAFCAP). This program has been operating since 2007 under the responsibility of the MoE's DESP. Its objective was to "improve classroom teaching, reinforcing language and maths skills, in addition to mastery of the school curriculum and of the content areas according to the educational level" (Benavides & Mena, 2010, p. 23), thus returning to a content-based in-service training approach. The program consisted of 50 hours of teaching support in educational institutions, 30 hours of distance education and information and communication technologies. In addition, the outsourcing of the implementation was once again a priority. However, unlike PLANCAD, it was only outsourced to public and private universities and public higher education institutes. While ambitious in scope, only 26% of teachers nationwide were trained (Balarin, 2020, p. 11), since, much of the time the program was in operation, only teachers who had participated in the Census Teachers' Assessment could participate in it⁵⁶.

A report commissioned by the MEF to evaluate the program (Orihuela & Diaz, 2008) analyses PRONAFCAP's various design problems. One of the main observations was that the quality of the training offered "was not homogeneous and, in many cases, [was] quite precarious, as [it] was essentially provided by the same institutions responsible for the deficient professional preparation of the current teaching profession" (Guerrero, 2009, p. 31). A second observation draws attention to the excessive centralization of the program's design and implementation, which reduced the regions' participation, and contrasted with the decentralized model of in-service training promoted by the previous government. On the other hand, the report drew attention to the weak link between the content of the training and the results of the 2007 Census Teachers' Assessment, which, according to the Ministry itself, was intended as a baseline for the program (Orihuela & Diaz, 2008, p. 89). In practice, the program favored extending its coverage to the regions with highest participation in the census assessment,

⁵⁵ Concerning the assessment applied in 2008, "181,118 teachers were assessed for appointment and hiring purposes, although only 151 managed to pass with a score of 14 or higher, amidst serious, forceful and widespread questioning of the technical validity of the test" (Guerrero, 2009, p. 21).

⁵⁶ In fact, the program was designed with the objective of "correcting the deficiencies identified in the teachers' census test applied at the beginning of that year [2007], mainly in the mastery of skills and curricular content in the areas of communication and mathematics" (Guerrero, 2009, p. 30). In this sense, the punitive character with which this administration approached the teacher issue continued (Cuenca, 2017).

instead of focusing on those regions whose teachers presented the most significant difficulties and, therefore, the greatest need for training (Guerrero, 2009, p. 33).

Curriculum

After the disorder of the first half of the decade, 2006 saw the generalization of the first National Curriculum Design (DCN) ⁵⁷, also called "articulated curriculum", whose main achievement was that, unlike the way in which the previous curricular structures were officialized and generalized, it considered all grades of regular basic education (pre-school, primary and secondary). Thus, there was a move from a multiplicity of curriculum versions, partially implemented in some schools, to a national curriculum design valid for all schools (Balarin, 2014, p. 5).

The National Curriculum Design underwent a modification process two years after the beginning of its implementation. In 2008, the DIGEBR of the MoE began its revision and updating, which finally resulted in the "readjusted" DCN, approved by Supreme Decree No. 066-2008-ED, and generalized since 2009. According to Guerrero (2013), this readjustment, far from repairing the shortcomings identified in the original DCN, continued and even deepened them, which in later years would lead the National Education Council to include in the PEN a proposal to address a new National Curriculum Framework (p. 5).

The DCN continued the changes already established with the curricular reforms carried out for primary education at the end of the 1990s: a flexible curriculum design, oriented to the development of competencies, centered on the student and his or her active involvement in learning. Likewise, the requirement for the mechanism of diversifying the curriculum to meet the particular needs of local contexts and students was maintained. The concept of cycles was also continued, covering two grades and establishing longer terms for the achievement of the established learning (Balarin, 2014, pp. 10-11). Thus, Guerrero (2013) argues that the DCN closes "a difficult period of marches and countermarches, fundamentally reaffirming the spirit of the changes with which the curricular reform began in the second half of the 1990s" (p. 5).

On the other hand, according to Neira and Rodrich (2008), among the most significant changes with respect to previous curricular documents was "the shift from competencies to capacities as the organizing axis of learning" and "the modification of the organization of teaching contents from being disaggregated in detail [...] to being listed accompanied by a taxonomy in which the requirements are progressively presented in a cognitive manner" (pp. 41-42). In relation to this, Tapia and Cueto (2017) point out that "the fragmented description of competencies - in terms of skills, knowledge, and attitudes - made it very difficult to recognize learning expectations" (p. 13).

With the separation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, it was then erroneously conveyed that competencies had three elements that "developed separately resulted in the achievement of the competency (in other words, the competency seen as a sum of parts)" (Guerrero, 2018, p. 22). It is revealing in this sense that the DCN included a total of 151 competencies, with

⁵⁷ Approved in November 2005 by Ministerial Resolution No. 0667-2005-ED, under the name "National Curriculum Design for Regular Basic Education--Articulation Process".

565 associated learnings. This situation led to a series of problems in the implementation of the curriculum by teachers and its diversification by decentralized instances, given the scenario of lack of clarity in the proposal of learning to be developed, of excessively dense, ambiguous, and inconsistent terminology, and problems in the sequence and progression of learning (Guerrero, 2018; Tapia & Cueto, 2017).

4.4 2011-2016 Strengthening the pedagogical core of education

The two ministerial administrations that were in office during this period, while different in many regards, shared a common desire to approach education policies in a more coherent and structured way, rather than as a set of idiosyncratic occurrences or a collection of high impact but fairly disconnected actions –something that had characterized the two previous periods. This can be partly explained by the profile of ministerial teams during this period. In the case of Salas, officials had been involved in several key processes and institutions, such as the National Council for Education, the drafting of the General Law of Education, and many had been part of academic and civil society organizations who had led debates on educational policy priorities over the previous decades. Saavedra’s administration was also characterized by the academic excellency of its ministerial teams. While different, both were clearly open to evidence and knowledge as key drivers of education policy, as well as to giving reasons for their actions. Both ministerial administrations also shared an emphasis on placing pedagogical practice at the center of education policy and on, as one interviewee explains, on making ‘the curriculum as the heart of everything’. The interviewee developed the idea as follows:

(...) Before, this pedagogy was at the service of educational management, now it was the other way round: [the question was] what do you want to achieve, pedagogically, with your students in your classroom? And then put everything else at the service of this. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor)

The Salas administration

Since the beginning Patricia Salas’ administration made a point to re-establish the route set by the General Law of Education and by the National Plan for Education, and which had been abandoned by García’s government. She placed a strong emphasis on furthering the decentralization process by developing greater capacities and the regional and local levels, and had a strong commitment towards rural and bilingual education – two areas in which key steps were taken.

Sala’s highlighted the importance of pedagogical change as the key process for improving learning and established a series of measures to improve pedagogical practice.

Curriculum

A first area of change was the curriculum. During the Salas administration, while developing school materials, ministry officials noticed the disconnect between the different levels of the curriculum. Proposals for the primary and secondary levels were not well articulated. It was also clear that teachers were having difficulties in implementing a curriculum that was very open and which required a high degree of adaptation in order to be applicable in classrooms

Salas began a process of curricular reform that would last several years. While it maintained the competencies approach, it placed a greater emphasis on operationalizing it through the development of a series of complementary instruments, such as Learning Routes, that showed teachers how to advance through the different curricular stages and themes. The aim was to develop a 'curricular system' in which a new guiding curricular instrument, called the Curricular Framework, would be the central axis to which the Maps, Routes, among other pedagogical resources, would be articulated. Subsequently, each instrument's functions and the way they should complement each other to ensure the internal coherence of the curriculum policy were defined (Tapia & Gysling, 2016).

This idea of a coherent curricular system, however did not fully "crystallize in the instruments themselves" (Tapia & Gysling, 2016, p. 33), possibly due to the challenges posed by the differences in approach that were increasingly evident between the key offices in charge of the process – the Peruvian Institute for the Evaluation, Accreditation, and Certification of Basic Education Quality (IPEBA) and the UMC, on the one hand, and the new curricular teams of the MoE's Direction for Basic Education (DIGEBR).

Teacher reform

Salas' administration took two key steps in the improvement of teachers' capacities. One was the approval of a new Teacher's career law, which while reaffirming the commitment to meritocracy and teacher assessment, sought to revalue the teachers' career through concrete measures such as salary improvements; and the other was the cessation of PRONAFCAP, the introduction of pedagogical support programs and development of a series of frameworks to guide teacher's practice.

One of Salas' main achievements was the passing of a new teachers' career reform Law (Ley de Reforma Magisterial – LRM No. 29944) in 2012, which established a single, mandatory regime for all teachers, in which assessments were also made mandatory and which proposed a progressive salary structure. Teacher evaluations are periodic and provide two opportunities for training and extra-ordinary evaluation for those teachers who fail to pass the evaluations in the first instance (Rivas, 2015). In addition to raising the salary floor for all teachers, a progressive salary structure and clear criteria for promotion between bands and career levels were established⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ This salary policy also included salary bonuses for teachers working in prioritized areas (rural areas, border areas, in the Apurimac, Ene, and Mantaro River Valley (VRAEM), in single-teacher or bilingual, intercultural schools). In addition, the new law establishes public and merit-based competitive examinations for access to positions in the area of institutional management in the DREs and UGELs, as part of the teaching career.

Minister Salas' administration also promoted the redesign of the PELA program in 2012, which involved the introduction of teacher mentoring strategies with a pedagogical framework with a higher level of consolidation compared to the previous version of the program.

Although the original program had been developing pedagogical mentoring activities for teachers in targeted schools throughout the country, it suffered from a number of problems, including the absence of a conceptual framework and a design that would allow for incorporating the diversity of different territorial contexts, and the lack of a clear implementation strategy that would facilitate regional and local education administrations (Rodríguez et al., 2016). The redesign of the PELA involved the introduction of a series of strategies that sought to provide pedagogical support to schools of different educational modalities through pedagogical mentoring strategies guided by the curriculum system and the Framework for Good Teaching Performance (Balarin & Escudero, 2018)⁵⁹ (Balarin, 2020, p. 16, footnote added).

As a former MoE official explains,

We thought we should empower teachers, because the curricular reform will not become a reality once the new curriculum is ready, it will become a reality when teachers are empowered in this new vision that is the competencies approach, this vision of working in an articulate way through the different areas, through projects. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

The Salas administration also worked on developing various instruments that would complement in-service teacher training strategies, such as a Good Teaching Performance Framework (Marco del Buen Desempeño Docente), which clearly defines a series of areas, competencies and performance indicators that characterize good teaching practice, and which have guided teacher assessments, and the Good Headteachers' Performance Framework, that sought to guide headteachers' pedagogical leadership.

Learning assessment

Salas continued the drive to put the issue of learning on the national and local agenda through the ECE evaluations and made it a priority. Thus, her administration coined the term "National Mobilization for Learning" to refer to a strategy that articulated a series of actions around the ECE.

The changes that we wanted to achieve in what was prioritized, which at that time was, above all, communication and mathematics, required articulating a series of actions that... were not necessarily articulated, and generating what I have called a virtuous

⁵⁹ As indicated, this redesign and strengthening of in-service teacher training strategies were accompanied by developing pedagogical guidelines in the sector. One of these was the approval of the Good Teaching Performance Framework in 2012, which "clearly defines the domains, competencies, and performances that characterize good teaching" (Balarin, 2020, p. 15), and which, in addition to guiding the pedagogical accompaniment strategies for teachers established since then, also served as a guide for teacher assessment processes.

circle in the school, right? [...] For us, at that time, the census evaluations were important, there was still not so much training, let's say, to the test, right? But, no... only the data [of the results of the evaluations] was sent to the school. So [as part of the strategy] a whole series of materials were produced, both by the EBR and the UMC, to see how to achieve these results, I define some... let's say, some actions and goals to achieve in my school, in the middle of the year I do an achievement day, right, where the students show what they have been doing; there I identify the students with difficulties, right, and the second semester I try to adjust so that "no one is left behind". And at the end of the year there was an accountability, right? That happened in the school, that happened in each regional government, because each regional government defined learning goals and key actions. And we are looking for the Ministry of Education to do the same, which had accountabilities. (University professor and former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

So while the Salas administration wanted a thorough transformation of pedagogical practices, aligned to the new curriculum, the national evaluations continued to set the target for school change and improvement and in time led to a narrowing down of the curriculum in schools, where teachers increasingly began to teach to the test (León Zamora, 2018).

In time, as one interviewee argues, Salas' 'political capital was exhausted'⁶⁰. Critics claimed that her administration was inefficient, both in terms of spending and in terms of learning results measured by the national assessments. Some interviewees, however, suggested that Salas was associated with the more progressive side of Humala's government, which was the target of many attacks from the political right. One interviewee explained how critics of her administration thought of her as a left-winger and suggested that she was 'flirting with SUTEP' (the left-wing teachers' union), they even criticized her personal image and her looks, which they likened to that of former terrorists; she was thought of as being against private education⁶¹. There was, as the interviewee suggests, a strong 'ideological lack of trust' from groups which had a strong representation in Congress. Some interviewees argued that the view of her administration being inefficient and ineffective was merely a 'way of weakening her administration's legitimacy'⁶² – although evidence shows that while overall spending followed the trend of previous years, that of investment projects was actually lower than in the preceding administration (SIAF, 2020).

The Saavedra administration

Salas was replaced with Jaime Saavedra in 2013, one of the most charismatic ministers of the period under study – he enjoyed widespread public approval and was broadly perceived

⁶⁰ Interview: University professor and former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education

⁶¹ Interviews: Former MoE high-ranking official, university professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education; and University professor and former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education

⁶² Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official, university professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education

as a first-class technocrat who could not only implement reforms, but who could understand the needs of teachers and schools. This perception rested on Saavedra's academic and professional trajectory, which had led him to become a chief economist for the World Bank, and which was expected to translate into his capacity for public administration; but it could also be attributed to his personal style and capacity for dialogue. Saavedra arrived at the MoE with a discourse that emphasized efficiency and learning results. While his administration is now often criticized for its somewhat weaker emphasis on pedagogical change, Saavedra put in place several large scale interventions which sought precisely to improve pedagogical practice and the curriculum reform process. One interviewee emphasizes this balance between results and pedagogical improvement, arguing that:

Although it is true that he was very focused on results, that is on what we achieve and where we are going, because this was what marked the pace of things... ok, this is the goal and we are going towards that goal. But, how do we get there? The how was the centrality of pedagogical processes, because otherwise Soporte Pedagógico would not have existed. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor)

Teacher reform

The policy area which coalesced during the Salas-Saavedra administrations was the reform of the teachers' career. While Salas had managed to approve a new universal law to regulate the teacher's career, Saavedra focused on developing the reform through a series of strategies to improve teachers' professional development. The work was led by the newly created Office for Teacher Professional Development (DIGEDD) in the MoE, and included a series of strategies and incentives, both to attract and train new teachers, as well as for the professional development of in-service teachers. The strength of this work was that it followed the new career structure, so that promotion would be linked to training strategies as well as performance in national evaluations. The creation of the 'teacher training system' was almost ready, with a legal decree and all when Saavedra was ousted from office. The next minister did not carry the reform forward.

Soporte Pedagógico was one of the most emblematic "interventions" which sought to generate changes in pedagogical practice. It worked in four main components: teacher mentoring, school materials, remedial support for children lagging behind, and parental involvement. It was, in sum, a comprehensive intervention, which acted simultaneously on several flanks in order to generate changes in schools and classroom practices. Like Soporte Pedagógico, there were other large-scale interventions, like the Jornada Escolar Completa, a program that extended the working times for secondary schools, but which also included a series of components that sought to improve school practice. Various other versions of Soporte Pedagógico were also set in motion, for different modalities of schooling, such as bilingual and intercultural schools, multigrade rural schools and others.

Curriculum

Saavedra, inherited the disorganized set of curricular instruments that his predecessor had attempted to develop as part of a new curricular system. Saavedra decided to "accelerate the process of developing all these instruments in order to validate them and to try to officialize the system as a whole as soon as possible (i.e., by December 2015)" (Tapia & Gysling, 2016, p. 40). Simultaneously, however, his administration implemented the so-called Learning Sessions, which would increase the challenges regarding the alignment between instruments. This situation led the MoE to request an international consultancy to provide basic guidelines for the elaboration of a new curriculum design that would take as a starting point the instruments developed in the previous years, i.e., the Curriculum Framework, the Maps, the Routes, and the Sessions. One of the recommendations of this consultancy was to include the Progress Maps in the new national curriculum that was to be developed. Thus, the DGEBR began this process in mid-2015, and incorporated part of the technical team and advisors from SINEACE (formerly IPEBA) who participated in the development of the learning standards.

In June 2016, one month before the change of government (although Minister Saavedra later remained in office), the MoE approved the National Curriculum for Basic Education (RM-281-2016-MINEDU), which left the 2008 adjusted DCN without effect. This was in part due to the political support for the process, but also thanks for the efforts made during the previous years to develop a consistent and well aligned curriculum.

According to the norm that approved it, this curriculum was to be implemented in all schools in the country starting on 2017. However, its implementation process had a series of changes. In 2016, RM N° 649-2016-MINEDU stated that this implementation should not be immediate but gradual and progressive. In this sense, it was stipulated that the implementation of the new curriculum would begin in 2017 with its application in a set of 12,000 targeted primary full-grade schools in urban areas, while the other levels and non-targeted primary schools would continue implementing the 2009 DCN.

Following Tapia and Cueto (2017, pp. 12-17) and Guerrero (2018, pp. 22-23), the new National Curriculum has among its main characteristics:

- a "greater emphasis on learning", because of its articulation with the Maps as a resource to operationalize the transition from a curriculum centered on teaching to one centered on learning;
- "better communication about what a competency is and what it implies to work by competencies in the classroom", since it proposes competencies are the result of the deployment of a set of resources that must operate in an integrated manner, with a specific purpose, and in a defined situation;
- a "greater emphasis on the progression and continuity of learning", again due to its articulation with the Maps, which, with greater clarity, guide the definition of the performances to be expected in each cycle and to be successively deepened and articulated throughout the different educational levels.
- includes a "reinforcement of the formative approach to classroom evaluation", which ceased to emphasize only grading and became part of teacher's planning, so that they

can conduct feedback practices together with the students and design adequate improvement strategies with more evidence to dynamize learning processes.

The new curriculum also proposed 7 transversal approaches, such as the use of ICTs, interculturality, and gender equality.

The New National Curriculum was an important step towards a coherent curriculum, which was part of a broader curricular system that included the so-called Learning Routes as well as the Learning Standards that had been developed as part of the National Educational Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification System (SINEACE).

This final reform could be seen as the end-point of a twenty year process, that began with MECCEP, when the first idea of a reformed curriculum, focusing on developing competencies, was introduced. That such a crucial reform would take such a long time to finally coalesce into a coherent document speaks of the difficulty that reforms face, even when they are not politically contentious (such as in the case of the curriculum). The discontinuities between different ministerial administrations, which want to imprint their own views onto reforms, as well as the Ministry's internal organization, that does not foster collaboration, but where, on the contrary, offices often work as series of distinct feuds may explain this case of 'protracted incrementalism'.

Learning and quality assessment

The ECE, as a way of aligning all actors in the sector and their practices towards achieving better results was the centrepiece of Minister Saavedra's administration. Saavedra introduced to key interventions in this respect: (i) the publication of technical norms for the school year that set out school management commitments of the schools associated with student results in the assessments, and (ii) the elaboration of guides for teachers to make use of the results of the 2nd-grade assessment (Vegas & Paredes, 2016, p. 18). The former was an essential aspect of Minister Jaime Saavedra's administration: the introduction of incentive mechanisms to incentivize teaching and school practices to achieve results. For example, the Bono de Incentivo el Desempeño Escolar (BDE), or "Bono Escuela"⁶³ implemented since 2014, provides an annual monetary incentive to teachers and principals based on the performance of their students in ECE. This program continues to date. Also, since 2015 the ECE has started to be applied to students in the second year of secondary school and, since 2016, to students in the fourth year of primary school (Guadalupe et al., 2017, p. 94)⁶⁴.

Saavedra's emphasis on the quality of schooling also translated into the creation of the General Office for the Quality of School Management (DIGC) at the MoE – which was legally sanctioned in a formal revision of the MoE's structure and is still in operation -, that was charged with leading a series of initiatives for improving school management quality. Among

⁶³ Created through Emergency Decree 002-2014.

⁶⁴ The emphasis on school performance evaluations in this minister's administration also led to implementing sample evaluations. One was carried out in 2013 to students in the sixth grade of primary school to know their performance at the end of primary school. In addition to the areas of reading comprehension and mathematics, it evaluated the area of citizenship.

the latter was the introduction of Semaforo Escuela (School Streetlight), a system that used a set of key indicators to measure schools' performance on a regular basis and reported on their performance using a streetlight model. One of Saavedra's main achievements was an increase in the national budget for education, which went from 2.8% in 2011 to 3.9% of GDP in 2016. This was partly possible because of the country's economic growth, but also because Saavedra was considered an efficient policy maker who be able to allocate and spend the budget in a timely manner. While the real budget for education had been increasing in parallel to the country's economic growth (Guadalupe et al., 2018), this was a major change that enabled the sector to invest more on infrastructure, pedagogical change and the reform of teachers' career.

4.5 2016-2020 A period of political and ministerial turbulence

This final period, is characterized, first and foremost, by a very high degree of political instability. In only four years Peru had four presidents: Kuczynski, followed by his vice-President Martin Vizcarra, followed by Manuel Merino, the president of the Congress that ousted Vizcarra (and whose government lasted only 5 days), followed by Francisco Sagasti, the president of the Congress to which Merino renounced after heavy popular protests that led to the killing of two young men at the end of 2020 (The Guardian, 2020).

During this four-year period there were eight education ministers in total. While the MoE remained the target of various questionings from Congress –focusing on what highly conservative groups described as the 'gender ideology' in the curriculum, on the management of various crisis with the national teachers' union (SUTEP), and on the higher education reform– the instability in ministerial administrations may have responded more clearly to the general instability in government and the confrontational stance of the Fujimorist majority in Congress.

The arrival of the covid-19 pandemic and the closure of schools meant that all efforts focused on the development of a distance learning programme to ensure the continuity of educational services. It is difficult, therefore, to organize the narrative around the structure used for the previous periods, with a clear description of developments in the key areas of curriculum, learning assessment and teacher reform. What we provide is an overview of some of the key developments of the period.

Saavedra's high political approval led to his continuity into the new presidential period, inaugurated in 2016, and led by Pedro Pablo Kuczynski. While his popular approval was high, Saavedra had become the enemy of various interest groups, especially those related to higher education who were against the HE reform⁶⁵. During the early years of his administration Saavedra initiated a higher education reform that sought to reign in the market that had developed, with little supervision, after Fujimori liberalized for-profit private investment in education. Since then, a number of private universities, many of very dubious quality, came

⁶⁵ After the education privatization process carried out during the 1990's, several private universities directories and corporate groups emerged and had strong vested interests in keeping regulations unchanged. Many of these groups have direct representation in Congress (Benavides et al., 2019; Benavides et al., 2016).

into being. Saavedra's reform created a new autonomous supervisory body, SUNEDU, charged with licensing all universities, private and public, after a thorough evaluation process, in order to ensure that they all met basic quality conditions (Benavides et al., 2019; Benavides et al., 2016).

Many higher education institutions, especially private universities created in the second half of the 1990s, under the auspices of a Legal Decree to Promote Private Investment in Education, also known as DL 882 (Congreso de la República del Perú, 1996), were linked to political parties in Congress, and often contributed to fund their campaigns (Durand & Salcedo, 2020). Many of these institutions had amassed important fortunes, and their owners had founded, and funded, their own political parties, which were averse to attempts at regulating service provision (Benavides, 2021; Benavides et al., 2019; Mora Zevallos, 2015)⁶⁶. Within Congress however, the reform also had important champions. Since the new Higher Education Law, and SUNEDU were created during Saavedra's administration, this led to what amounted to a dirty war against the minister that culminated in his removal. Various congressional groups claimed that there had been a corrupt usage of public funds, which was later shown to be false, and used this against the minister. The president, fearing confrontation with a Congress in which the Fujimorist opposition had a majority, did not support the minister.

With hindsight, Saavedra's removal from the MoE is seen by many as the beginning of Kuczynski's downfall a year later (Paredes & Encinas, 2020). Congress continued to make a radical, almost abusive, use of power, continuously censoring the government's ministers (Ponce de León & García Ayala, 2019). During this period, the balance of power, especially between Congress and the Executive faced several challenges. The Congress was dominated by a Fujimorist majority that resented the president's narrow victory over their presidential candidate, Keiko Fujimori. This led it to continuously make use of its constitutional capacity to formally question ministers actions, and to, somewhat arbitrarily make use of a constitutional clause that enables it to remove presidents on the basis of their 'moral incapacity'. The education sector, while not the only blank of attacks, was at the center of political skirmishes, partly because of the links of several congress representatives with higher education businesses (El Comercio, 2017a), and also through their links to highly politicised anti-gender education and anti-choice groups (Corrales, 2018).

Marilú Martens, who followed Saavedra as education minister, faced protests from highly organized ultra-conservative groups, with strong connections in Congress, who mobilized against the gender perspective in the curriculum (El País, 2017)⁶⁷; she also faced a long teachers' strike that demanded the derogation of the New Teachers' Career Law, as well as salary increases and the incorporation of contract teachers to the teaching career. The minister deemed such changes technically unfeasible (El Comercio, 2017b). Congress threatened to remove her from her post; the Prime Minister asked Congress to renew its trust

⁶⁶ In the words of the head of SUNEDU himself: "Some private universities generated huge margins [of profit] and very little of this money was used to improve their quality. Bad practices were widespread. We had some universities that, in practice, functioned as "petty cash" for political parties, and many others where the authorities and their close associates freely disposed of economic resources, as if they were their own. The situation was even more serious in some private universities of an associative nature (i.e., supposedly non-profit)" (Benavides, 2021: 57).

⁶⁷ Part of a greater conservative movement in the region (Corrales, 2018)

in his cabinet; Congress refused and this led to a crisis of the entire Cabinet, which had to be replaced with a new one.

The following minister, Idel Vexler, who had been García's education vice-minister marked the greatest rupture with the lines of work established and followed, with changes in an overall context of continuity, since Patricia Salas' ministerial administration. Vexler halted existing policies to support the teachers' career reform, stopped the large pedagogical support programs, and generally re-instated a highly idiosyncratic mode of policy-making, not prone to giving reasons or to justifying policy changes with existing evidence. Vexler lasted in his post for around seven months. He left when president Kuczynski resigned to the presidency after a series of leaked videos showed how he had negotiated the liberation of Alberto Fujimori, for a marginally favorable vote in Congress during an attempt to oust him. Kuczynski was also involved in the regional mega-corruption scandal known as Lava Jato, and is now serving house arrest.

After the fall of Kuczynski, his vice-President, Martín Vizcarra took over the presidency. During his time in office there were three more education ministers in place, Daniel Alfaro, Flor Pablo and Martín Benavides. All of them stayed in office for less than a year. Again, they faced various threats from Congress, both for the gender perspective in the curriculum (the case of Flor Pablo), and for the higher education reform. These two themes, which have marked the period are, on one hand, an expression of the vested interests in Congress against the HE reform; opposition to the gender perspective, is an expression of the increasing influence of well funded and politically linked conservative evangelical groups in the country and the region (Corrales, 2018). Again, all of them left office due to broader governmental instability in a period marked by the all-out confrontation between Congress and the Executive. While Pablo, who had been close to both the Salas and Saavedra administrations, attempted to reinstate some continuity with the policy lines established by those ministers, her time in office was short and much energy had to be dedicated to defending the curriculum from the attacks from Congress and from conservative civil society groups.

The period of political instability that followed included the ousting of president Vizcarra, the establishment of a new government led by the president of Congress, his resignation and the establishment of yet another government charged with conducting a new electoral process and with containing the covid-19 crisis. In the education sector most energies were set on responding to the covid-19 crisis through distance learning strategies.

4.6 Key features, areas of contestation and actors in the learning and quality reforms 1995-2020

As the previous discussion shows, one of the most salient features of the period under study is the length of time that it has taken for key reforms to coalesce. The urgency of reforming teaching practices, the teaching career and the curriculum has been at the center of policy debates since the very beginning of the period, but reforms have only concluded in recent years and in some cases remain partial and still susceptible to discontinuation. The timelines – right of the text– for each of these reform areas illustrate this.

In the case of the curriculum it took approximately 20 years for a consistent and well-articulated version of the national curriculum to emerge – one with a clear and well operationalized definition of competencies capable of guiding teaching practices. And there is still some way to go in the implementation of the new curriculum and its translation into learning materials.

In the case of teaching practices, reforms have also taken an unusually long time to coalesce, but they are still partial, as advances in key areas such as the teachers' career, have not been accompanied by a necessary reform of pre-service teacher training, or by a consistent approach to teachers' professional development, consisting not only of remedial and scattered actions, but by a continuous formative supply that is adaptive to the diverse needs of teachers in different locations and stages of their career, and responsive to changing curricular guidelines.

Learning assessment, of the standardized variety, has been one of the most consistent areas of policy making throughout the period, but the discussion above suggests that the way in which learning has been conceptualized, merely as results in rather narrow standardized tests that assess knowledge and skills in just two curricular areas, and the way in which assessment results have been used to guide policy decisions – especially after 2006 – may have been counter to the goal of actually improving teaching practices

Curriculum

Fujimori	1995	Start of MECEP and the implementation of a New Pedagogical Model (NEP)
	1997-1998	New basic curriculum structures for primary and secondary education
	1999	Start of the pilot for the Baccalaureate Program of secondary education
Toledo	2001	Shutdown of the Baccalaureate Program and restoration of the secondary structure in place prior to 1997
	2001-2005	"Curricular rain": implementation of 4 different versions of the curriculum for secondary education
García	2006	National Curriculum Design (DCN), also called "articulated curriculum", later readjusted in 2008
	2007	The National Education Plan 2007-2021 (PEN), issued by the CNE, includes a proposal to address a new National Curriculum Framework
	2010	Start of the elaboration of the learning standards (later "Progress Maps"), by Ipeba-SINEACE
Humala	2011	Development of the "Learning Routes" as a complementary instrument for pedagogical use
	2012	Salas administration decides to initiate the transition to a new "curricular system"
	2013-2015	Saavedra administration addresses the coexistence of various curricular instruments under development and the ongoing validity of the DCN, and continues the elaboration of a new curriculum design
Kuczynski-Vizcarra	2016	New National Curriculum for Basic Education (CN)
	2017	Controversy on the gender equality approach: the beginning of the Curriculum as a matter of dispute in the public sphere
	2019	National Curriculum is formally implemented in all modalities, levels and cycles of schools and educational programs of Basic Education

and learning. On one hand, there is evidence that teachers are teaching to the test and often narrowing down the curriculum. On the other hand, as policy makers, especially those in the strategic planning and budget allocation offices of the MoE, and their counterparts in the MoF, search for recipes to improve results in the short term, they often sideline programmes that might contribute to more long-lasting transformations of teaching and learning practices.

The curriculum has been a major area of contestation throughout this period. Having started in the second half of the 1990s curriculum reform finally concluded in 2016 with the publication of the new National Curriculum (Curriculo Nacional para la Educación Básica). While, from early on, there has been a certain degree of consensus around the need to move away from a prescriptive, content-focused curriculum, the alternative, a curriculum focused on developing competencies, was, for a long time, much less clearly defined and operationalized. Throughout the period we see an unresolved tension in relation to the balance between curricular content and the development of competencies, which has given rise to various different curriculum versions, and which has unintentionally led to a hollowing out of the knowledge base and focus of educational practice.

The tensions, between an abstractly defined competencies-oriented curriculum and the need to provide greater guidance to teachers and schools with regards to how to operationalize the new approach has also been at the heart of various changes in curricular policy; as has been the introduction of a 'gender perspective' as one of the transversal approaches to the curriculum, which led to a strong backlash from organized conservative groups opposed to the use of terms such as 'gender identity' or 'sex' in the curriculum, and led a legal petition to eliminate the gender perspective from the curriculum. While, in the end, the petition was dismissed in court, the matter contributed strongly to the demise of two education ministers, Marilú Martens and Flor Pablo, as the aforementioned conservative groups had a strong representation in Congress.

Teacher training and careers

Fujimori	<p>1995 Start of MECEP and launch of PLANCAD, mass teacher training strategy related to the implementation of the NEP in classroom practice</p>
Paniagua - Toledo	<p>2001 National Agreement for Education, which included the reform and revaluing of the teaching career as one of its main objectives</p> <p>2001 Lynch administration fails to initiate structural reforms in the teaching career</p> <p>2005 Transition of teacher professional development from a "training" approach to one of "continuous training": National Teacher Training Program and Amauta Centres pilot plan</p> <p>2006 Chang administration dictates learning improvement policy based primarily in teacher performance evaluation</p>
García	<p>2007 Failed Census Teachers' Assessment</p> <p>2007 Beginning of PRONAFCAP, Continuing Education and Training Program</p> <p>2007 Enactment of the new Teachers' Career Law - LCPM N° 29062, amid protests from the teachers' union</p> <p>2007 National Education Plan 2007-2021 (PEN), issued by the CNE, proposed a new logic for in-service teacher training</p> <p>2008 Start of the first version of the PELA and its pedagogical support strategy to achieve learning outcomes</p>
Humala	<p>2012 Salas administration passes a New Teacher Reform Law (LRM) - Law N° 29944, and extends the pedagogical support program in its redesign of the PELA Program</p> <p>2013 Saavedra administration implements the redesigned PELA and introduces incentive mechanisms to improve teacher performance, such as Bono Escuela, monetary award to teachers from schools with satisfactory results in standardized tests</p>
Kuczynski - Vizcarra	<p>2017 Martens administration amends Teacher Reform Law, by Law N° 30541, in response to teachers' strikes</p> <p>2017-2019 Vexler and Alfaro administrations deal with pressures from teachers' unions and the Congress to improve salaries and reinstate principales and teachers that had failed evaluations</p> <p>2020 Pablo administration approves Guidelines for In-Service Teacher Education</p>

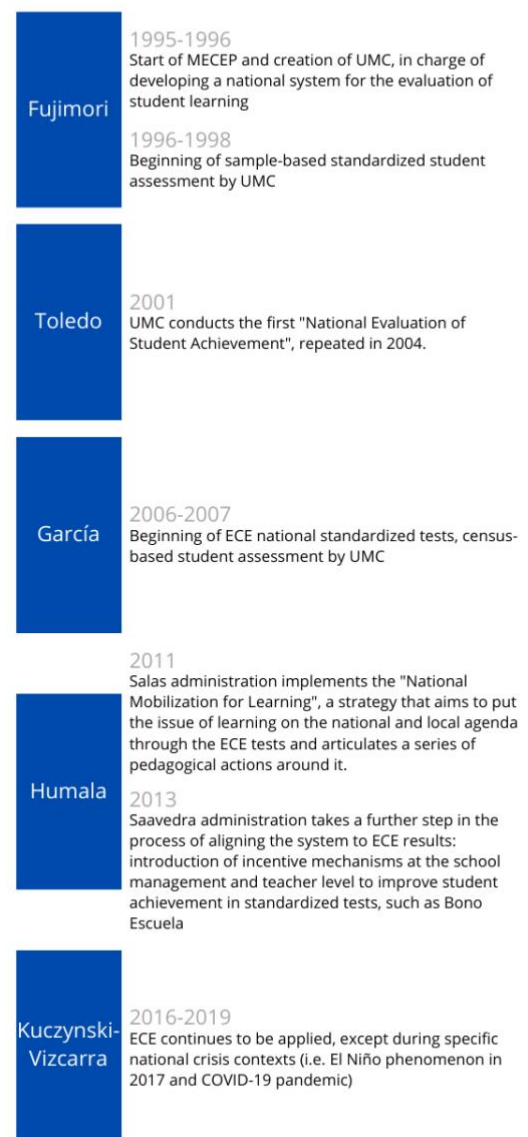
The reform of the teaching career has been another major area of contestation, in which change has been extremely protracted and piecemeal. Since the General Diagnosis of 1993, there was clarity about the serious problems affecting the teaching profession and the need for a comprehensive reform has been clear at least since the early 2000s. However, the reform of the teaching career has been approached in a very fragmented way. While it took a long time to get a coherent teacher's career law, the latter has not been accompanied by a consistent reform of teacher's professional development, one that includes both pre-service teacher training, and a coherent in-service professional development portfolio. It seems like in the search for silver bullets to improve test results, coherent and long-term investments to improve teaching practice may have been deemed untenable.

Within this area a key contested issue is the nature of teacher training, especially in-service training. While some argue that its focus should be on teaching methodologies, others contend that it should focus on curricular content (see Balarin & Escudero, 2019, p. for a discussion of such debates in relation to teacher training; Balarin et al., 2016)⁶⁸. This dichotomy, which is arguably a fallacy, has been at the heart of many changes that have acted against the consolidation of reforms.

One final matter has been the way in which reforms have been approached. Rather than working with teachers and involving them during policy design and implementation processes, most reform efforts have followed a top-down approach and have often taken an overtly confrontational stance towards teachers, frequently disqualifying them and seeking to neutralize their demands. Many teachers have felt relegated by the idea of becoming "facilitators of learning", and they feel they have lost their authority in the classroom⁶⁹.

The lengthy and discontinuous paths to achieve reform goals is what leads us to characterize the education policy process as one of *protracted incrementalism*, in which small incremental gains have been made over long periods of time, in a

Learning assessment



⁶⁸ The reports cited, especially Balarin & Escudero 2019 include ref around these matters.

⁶⁹ Interview: Former SUTEP high-ranking official and current couns

process characterized by many forwards and backwards movements, in which many key elements have got lost in the way.

Throughout the period we find a series of key actors influencing the development of reforms. International agencies, especially the World Bank, and the International Development Bank, have played a key role in the setting and development of reform agendas. This influence, more than a form of imposition, seems to have resulted from the poor capacity at the national level to establish and support the development of reform agendas. In the way, the professional capacity of local actors has also developed, and policy agendas, for instance through the work of the National Council for Education, but also through the stronger capacity of the MoE's teams, have become stronger and less reflective of international agencies' priorities. One line of thought, however, which has become profoundly entrenched in education policy makers' views, and which is traceable to the agendas of international agencies, is that of making standardized assessments the main guiding element for reforms, and of assuming that results in such tests are the sole and sufficient measure of quality.

Civil society organizations – NGOs, universities, think tanks and research centers – have also played a key role in defining policy agendas, from the early General Diagnosis of 1993, to the national consultation for education and the drafting of the 2004 General Law of Education, up to their role – either direct or indirect – in drafting the National Education Projects led by the National Council for Education, these actors have played a key role in the development of education policies and reforms. Though not always able to contain either technocrats' and other policy makers, they have certainly contributed to the continuity of agendas and to the advancement, through piecemeal, of reforms.

Throughout the period under study, but especially so in recent years, private and corrupt interests, many of which have links and even representation in Congress, have also exerted a major influence over the course of reforms. While not explicitly targeted at the quality reforms we have discussed, private interests acting against the development of the HE reform, have frequently jeopardized the advancement towards key goals through their impact on ministerial crises that have led to sweeping changes of key policy teams. On the other hand, corruption has also affected the course and continuity of education reforms, especially in recent years, as politicians' involvement in large-scale corruption scandals, has impacted on political stability, governmental crises and ministerial change, all of which have had a major effect on the course of reforms.

In the following section we discuss the political economy dynamics that have influenced the definition of reform agendas and the progress that has been made in achieving improvements in teaching and learning.

5. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LEARNING AND QUALITY REFORMS

What is the political economy behind the highly discontinuous and protracted way in which learning reforms have been pursued in Peru? Our main answer is that it has to do with the general fragility of state institutions and with the weakness of broad policy orientations and discourses guiding policy decisions; and while technocratic elites have played an important role in promoting first order reforms, they have not addressed that basic problem, nor have they contributed to create a broader agreements or settlements around necessary reforms capable of withstanding political discontinuities or the influence of corruption and private interests. While state and institutional weaknesses are a historical phenomenon, the more recent macroeconomic consensus established in the country during the 1990s has not been conducive to necessary reforms to strengthen the country's institutions. Moreover, the technocratic consensus around quality and learning, that narrowly equates them with standardized test results in a small number of areas, has missed key components of pedagogy and school practice that are (should be) central to any conception of quality.

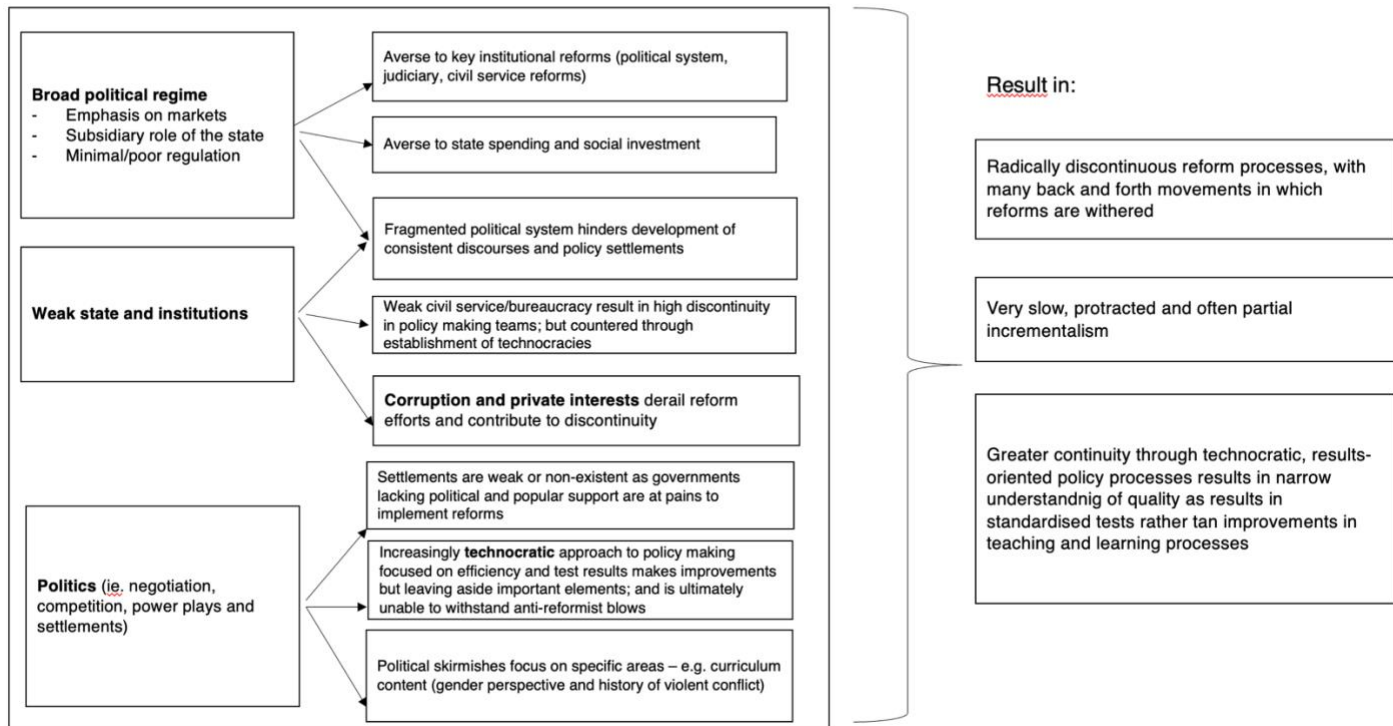
In Peru, politics affect reforms not just because substantive matters become politically contested, but because of the precarious nature of institutions and political processes that hinder the formation of political projects and discourses, and the establishment of binding agreements and settlements with regards to key goals and how to achieve them. If, as Guillermo O'Donnell (discussed in Levitsky & Murillo, 2014) showed in his various studies of Latin American politics, state and institutional weakness shape the region's democracies, this brief history of quality reforms in Peru suggests that such weaknesses can also shape the nature and destiny of education reforms.

In recent decades, the emergence of a technocracy in the education sector has played a key role in promoting first order reforms and has helped grant a greater degree of technical soundness and continuity in policy making. However, technocratic elites have elided the politics of reform in ways that may have weakened their sustainability over time. At the same time they have shaped the prevalent conception of education quality in ways that may run counter to the achievement of necessary and more substantive changes in teaching and learning.

The weakness of state institutions, which among other things translates into weak regulatory capacity, has allowed for corruption and private interests to influence the course of reforms, often against the public interest.

The following graph, summarizes the key political economy dynamics affecting education reforms that can be identified through the preceding discussion, and which are the subject of the final analysis presented in the following pages:

Key elements in the political economy of education reforms in Peru



5.1 The macro political settlement and its influence on education reform

At the broadest level, the unusually slow and discontinuous pace of education reforms, can be traced back to the influence of the country's dominant macro-political settlement, which has contributed to the prevalence of state and institutional weaknesses. Such weaknesses set the ground on which policies are pursued, both discursively and in terms of the state's capacity to pursue reforms. Here it is worth remembering McEvoy's (2021) description of Peru as a 'colloidal Republic' in which the state 'is like an emulsion that never reaches solidity', a country with a 'moderate anarchy', 'a state of disorder which is only controlled at times'.

While the origins of state and institutional weaknesses are certainly historical, their prevalence during the last few decades of economic growth and broad democratic stability can also be attributed to an approach to development in which deregulation and market development have clearly taken precedence over state strengthening – although market development could have also benefited from stronger institutions. As Dargent (2012) argues

'[structural] adjustment reformers were very good in destroying many bad things about the old state, but they also ended positive aspects' and 'if we want to break with the limits to development that Peru faces today, we need a profound regard and transformation of the state' (p. 57)

This statement, made in 2012, still largely holds today. The crisis of this model of development is now more evident than ever, as the pandemic has fully revealed the various cracks in Peru's state architecture and its capacity to address the most basic of human needs.

This model of development has affected education reforms through its negative influence on the reform of key institutions, such as the political party system, the civil service and the judiciary. While the urgency of reforming these institutions has been clear for decades, they have only been the target of unsuccessful or partial reform attempts (Dargent, 2021).

The weakness of the political party system in Peru has played a key role in the definition and development of reform agendas, while the weakness of the civil service means that there is a very high turnaround of ministerial officials, even at the middle or bottom echelons of ministerial bureaucracy, every time that there is a change of minister and especially so when there is a change of government (Balarin, 2006). But even the judiciary may be seen to play a role in the course of education reforms, through its influence on the high levels of corruption in the country, which, as discussed, have impacted the continuity of ministerial and governmental teams and reform agendas.

The dominant model of development may also be said to have affected education reforms through its influence on public investment and on the priority given to public education and other key public services. The deregulation of the private education market has also influenced the establishment of new trends, such as that in socioeconomic school segregation, which no doubt have an impact on quality – especially when the latter is understood in a broad sense, which encompasses equity (Balarin & Escudero, 2018).

5.2. High political instability and its impact on the education sector

The high levels of political instability, especially during some presidential administrations, and the way in which some governments have ended (e.g. amid crises and corruption scandals) has been one of the main factors affecting the development of key quality improvement reforms. Political instability has had a very negative impact on the continuity of policies and on the establishment of broad political settlements and of policy discourses and orientations.

Such instability has been evident not only during periods of deep political crisis – such as at the end of Fujimori's government and during the turbulent presidential period beginning in 2006 – but also within fairly stable, though often weak, presidential periods – notably that of Toledo (2001-2006). Reflecting on one of these turbulent periods, one interviewee discusses the impact of ministerial changes on reforms:

... changes were constant. I mean, there were five ministers in three years. (...) what [Ministerial] team could have had any clarity as to where it was going in the context of so many and such quick changes? (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor)

The impact of political instability on education policies is deepened by the country's general institutional weakness, which makes it easier for new ministerial administrations to change the course of policies. As one interviewee argues '... biographies weigh more the less institutions

you have'⁷⁰, by which he intends to highlight that specific personalities may have more weight and control over policy agendas than in more institutionalized contexts.

In recent decades there have been several attempts to strengthen institutions and processes that may lead to greater sectoral policy coherence. In the early 2000s, for instance, in the context of the transition to democracy, a national forum called the *Acuerdo Nacional* (National Agreement), was created to establish agreed routes for policy development. In education, the National Council for Education, and the National Plan for Education, are meant to provide such settlements as to desired objectives and routes to achieve them. These mechanisms, however, have not been very successful in a country where informal relations are the rule, and, agreements such as the National Plan for Education are often ignored by ministerial administrations and political parties. Reflecting on this, one interviewee says that

‘there’s a structural problem in our state, in the way of doing policy. There’s a kind of schizophrenia... between an area of reflection, discussion, elaboration and proposals – because that’s the case with the *Acuerdo Nacional*, or the Education for all Plan...’ and a more improvised approach to policy making, which he suggests is ‘a chronic structural problem’ (University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education)

In recent years one mechanism that has generated some broad level of continuity has been the Learning Achievement Education Plan (PELA), which grants investment funding for long periods that may span several ministerial administrations. However, as one interviewee suggests, this continuity is mostly ‘formal’, and PELA is ‘like a skeleton that supports things, but the contents (of policies) vary a lot from one minister to the next’.⁷¹

When ministerial changes are constant, the course of policies can be erratic, as is illustrated in the following quote by an interviewee who reflects on the first years of the Toledo government:

Lynch, Malpica y Ayzanoa are three [characters] who think they know what to do. And in that regard they are completely destructive, because in the end they begin to re-do things and since they fail and leave, they just leave the debris, and they never have the time to build something, good or bad. (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

Adding to this, the MoE’s organizational culture, characterized by divisions among offices that should work towards common goals, may also act against the development of clear policy discourses and guidelines. One interviewee discusses this in the following quote:

In the Ministry, as far as I have been able to see, there’s a lot of... there’s a lot of territorial disputes between the main offices. (...) So, I know there’s some work to articulate the work of different teams, but... if the official ministerial organization doesn’t stimulate this, then those efforts can stagger.

⁷⁰ Interview: University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education

⁷¹ Interview: Former MoE high-ranking official, university professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education

it's sometimes very hard to reach agreements between various offices. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor)

Ministerial discontinuity, as well as the MoE's internal organization and work culture – which is certainly influenced by the high turnaround in authorities – hinder the consolidation of reforms and the advancement towards key goals.

5.3 The establishment of a highly technocratic model of policy-making in education and the competition between efficient management and pedagogical change

One of the main elements in the political economy of quality and learning reforms during the period under study has been the gradual transformation of the Ministry of Education and of the education policy arena in general. It has gone from a model of policy-making in which individual figures ruled, more or less freely, imposing their views and decisions regardless of the need for some level of policy coherence and continuity, to a much more technocratic model of policy-making, in which decisions fall in the hands of technocrats, many of them economists, whose main goals are to control spending and to ensure improvements in learning results as measured by standardized tests, but who may have a limited understanding of both the purpose and nature of desirable changes in school and classroom practices. This change has been gradual, with a degree of alternation between these two models of policy-making until recently, and it can be described as part of a broader, though slow, transformation and 'modernization' of the public sector. As one interviewee suggests

This perspective has taken hold of the Ministry of Education... we can call it technocratic, in the sense that the only thing that matters is management and results... the meanings, the purposes, do not matter (University professor and former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

The emergence of a technocracy in the education sector, especially in the Strategic Planning Office of the MoE, with links to the technocracy of the MoF, has enabled the development of greater degrees of continuity in certain policy actions, for instance, through the establishment of large-scale investment programmes or interventions under a model of results-oriented budgeting. While positive in many regards, especially in containing the more whimsical, idiosyncratic, non-evidence based and non-results-oriented policy styles of previous decades, this new technocratic mode of policy making – based on a narrow conception of educational quality as equal to standardized test results – has ended up hindering the establishment of quality improvement policies more conducive to real changes in teaching and learning practices in schools.

There is a politics behind this narrowly technocratic model of approaching education reforms that seems to run counter with the views of educational experts (those specializing in curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, etc.) who may have a deeper understanding of the complex, often time-consuming processes required to develop teachers' professional capacities and generate fundamental changes in teaching and learning.

The emergence of a technocracy in the MoE has its roots at the beginning of the period under study, with the establishment of PLANMED, the Strategic Planning and Educational Quality Measurement office of the Ministry of Education, which would later become the Strategic Planning Secretariat. PLANMED, which was largely funded with resources from the World Bank and later the Interamerican Development Bank as part of the MECEP program, was the first attempt at establishing a technocracy within the MoE, an institution that, like much of the Peruvian public sector at that time, was run by often self-serving officials, many of whom had acquired their posts through personal favors (Hunt, 2001; Hunt, 2004; Ministerio de Educación, 1993). PLANMED became the main 'power house' from which proposals such as the New Pedagogical Model (NEP), the new Baccalaureate, and the rural education project came out. It also gave rise to a more data-driven style of policy-making, through the establishment of the UMC, and the modernization of the Educational Statistics Unit at the MoE. While PLANMED is often criticized for its weak capacity to translate broad ideas into concrete, implementable and monitorable policies, it sought to combine an emphasis on pedagogical change, with a more 'modern' style of policy-making. One interviewee reflects on this moment and on the effects it has had throughout the rest of the period:

The 1990s are the foundational years of the current Peruvian technocracy... when people talk about us [moving forward in a kind of] autopilot, in reality no pilot is automatic, our auto-pilot is that technocracy which has been circling around all ministries for the past twenty years. (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

The broader political context in which PLANMED came to life as well as the MoE's general disregard for dialogue in favor of a more autonomous or autocratic style of policy-making were key factors in the wholesale dismissal of that period's policies (Balarin, 2006). Fujimori's increasingly autocratic government, his attempt at perpetuating himself in power through an unconstitutional reelection, and the evidence of pervasive corruption gave rise to a backlash, after the government's downfall, against most policies from that period.

The period that followed was marked by political instability and by an initial period of constant change in the MoEs leadership. During this time, however, a transformation began to take place in the Ministry of Finance that would mark a lasting change in the model of education policy-making. This transformation began with the establishment of the National Public Investment System (SNIP), through which all public investment projects needed to go through. The system established a set of common and transparent rules to assign and monitor public investment resources, in a move to curb ministerial discretionality. In parallel, the Ministry of Finance embarked on a public spending reform that led to the introduction of Results Based Budgeting as the central tool to guide and monitor budgetary decisions.

One interviewee suggests that there was a degree of discrepancy within the MoF as to the purpose of this tool. Some officials thought of it as a tool to foster deliberation among policy makers, while others conceived it as a mechanism to exert control over spending decisions. As the interviewee explained:

My vision is that results-based budgeting is nothing other than... trying to debate the budget on the basis... of information, of evaluations, that allow you to know if what you have been doing is working or not. That's it in essence. [...] The other version

emphasizes [policy] design (...) where results-based budgeting is synonymous with making an evidence-based program. (University professor and former MoE and MoF high-ranking official)

In one view the purpose of the tool is deliberation and discussion, while in the other it's 'control'. The latter took hold. One added problem with this model, as one interviewee explained is that the MoF began to play a role in the definition of policies:

If you begin to participate in the design of what you will later evaluate, you break the model, because you end up being judge and party; what you need to define, if you want, is the priorities, but on how to achieve this... there you don't get involved. (University professor and former MoE and MoF high-ranking official)

The Ministry of Finance has, then, become a key player in the definition of policies, often sidelining proposals from the MoE's pedagogical teams. One complicating factor in this is that the MoFs understanding of educational goals and processes is a rather restricted notion of 'what works', which is a sum of spending efficiency and improvement in standardized test results.

One interviewee illustrated the complications this brings to education policy-making by referring to a program that sought to offer additional educational support for children lagging behind. The MoF rejected the MoE's proposals and did not grant the money for a much-needed program. Something similar happened with Soporte Pedagógico, the ambitious teacher-mentoring program developed and implemented during the Salas and Saavedra administrations. The following quotes help gain further insight into these problems:

None of what is now being prioritized in the budget has anything to do with the pedagogical core' (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor)

When we designed PELA, it was a constant struggle with the MoF, to explain why we needed to work on school management on school climate... they didn't understand what school climate was, why we needed to work on that... (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

Over time, and especially since 2006, the Strategic Planning Secretariat became a kind of mini-MoF inside the MoE and there is even a movement of public officials from the former to the latter. An interviewee develops this idea in the following quote:

the Ministry of Finance believes it knows all that needs to be done in terms of public policies in general, it is like the great center of knowledge and power and of what has to be done, and this is somehow replicated [internally] by the [MoE's] Strategic Planning Secretariat. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

As the following quote illustrates, this takeover is seen, by some interviewees as part of a strategy by the MoF to leave the National Planning Center (CEPLAN) behind and become the main engine for public policy planning:

[The MoF believes that] that relation between the MoF and education, should be the same in all sectors and that CEPLAN should be eliminated. All sectors should have their Strategic Planning Secretariat that I [the MoF] control. (...) They are already saying this... in their heads it's the logical step... (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

This technocratic model of policy-making, which has become institutionalized through results-based budgeting and through the MoF's control of the MoE's Strategic Planning Secretariat has had both positive and negative effects. Positive ones because it has granted much needed degrees of continuity to certain policies; and negative because, through its accompanying understanding of the nature and goals of education policy, which has become the dominant settlement in education, it has led to a narrowing down of education change agendas.

We therefore find, especially in the second half of the period, a struggle between the goals of efficient management and those of pedagogical change. While the two are not (or should not be) contradictory, in practice they have become so, and this separation has become entrenched within the MoE. The reality is that pedagogical and strategic planning teams appear to speak different languages and communication between the two is difficult.

5.4. Corruption and private interests

While political instability has various causes, corruption and private interests have played a key role in the development of education policies and are at the root of much sectoral instability. This has been especially the case in two moments: the fall of Alberto Fujimori's regime, and the last presidential period, but it was also evident during Alan García's government.

During the first of these three periods, evidence of corruption contributed to the wholesale rejection of most of the policies developed during the MECEP period, which were linked to Alberto Fujimori's regime. This led to an important moment of discontinuity in quality reforms, as the processes initiated during the MECEP era – the new pedagogical model, the curriculum, etc. – were abandoned and replaced by policies that focused on the system's management (decentralization and participatory decision-making).

The 2006-2011 period was one of great ministerial stability, with the longer-lasting minister of the period José Antonio Chang. While some important policy goals were achieved during this time, especially the approval of a new teacher's career law, this period was also characterized by a very autocratic style of policy-making. While the minister had signed the National Plan for Education, the sector immediately took a different line of action in a series of key areas. In one of these areas, decentralization, the government decided to take a different line than the one being followed, and attempted to transfer capacities to municipal rather than regional governments. In other respects, this period was one in which policy was the product of occurrences, many of which had the aim of creating an effect on public opinion but meant little progress in quality reforms.

According to various interviewees, during García's government, the Ministry became a source of employment for partisans of the ruling party APRA – a well-known trend established in the party's previous government in the 1980s. One interviewee who entered the MoE in the following administration reflects on this:

[we had to dismantle] all the previous structure left by the APRA party. Half of the vice-ministry of institutional management... was made up of members of the APRA party...

... during that time the ministerial team was divided, because there were a lot of members of the [APRA] party. The viceministry of institutional management had a lot of people from APRA, while the pedagogical management side was made up of technical staff. (Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education)

Finally, during the 2016-2020 period, corruption and private interests have had a clear impact on education policies. The government's first ministerial crisis centered on the figure of then education minister Jaime Saavedra. Saavedra had been the main promoter and defender of the higher education reform that was putting at risk the interest of various key education businesses, many of which had direct representation in Congress – the owners of various such institutions were either in congress or were key funders for several political parties.

Saavedra was censored for allegations of corruption that later did not hold, but had to leave his post (BBC Mundo, 2016). The following minister, Marilú Martens was consistently attacked by ultra-conservative groups, with representation in Congress, for her administration's inclusion of a gender perspective in the curriculum (El País, 2017).

Later, in 2018, the alleged involvement of president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in the regional mega-corruption scandal known as Lava Jato, led to his resignation. This entailed a new ministerial change in just a short number of years, and what came after was a period with five more ministers and two more presidents.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout this work we have shown that the development of learning and quality reforms in Peru has been marked by a very high level of discontinuity which has led to a kind of protracted incrementalism. Reforms have taken unusually long times to coalesce and have been marked by various back and forth movements that often resulted in only partial advancements in various areas.

While in recent decades Peru has made notable improvements in key variables related to educational quality – such as test results and schooling trajectories – the link between such improvements and learning reforms is not entirely evident. What is clear, is that contextual variables, such as the country's economic growth and the consequent improvement in people's livelihoods, may have played at least an equally important role to reforms.

Throughout the period (1995-2020), and partly due to the protracted and discontinuous incrementalism at which policies have advanced, certain trends, such as that in socioeconomic school segregation have deepened, while evidence suggests that classroom practices are still in need of reform. We argue that the education system has been the subject of various first order reforms, which have certainly improved service delivery, but is still in need of second order reforms to promote stronger and more inclusive forms of learning in schools.

Our analysis of the political economy of reforms shows that policy discontinuities and their influence on reforms can be explained by the very marked weakness of the Peruvian state and its institutions. The extent of these weaknesses is a common trait in developing countries, and in the case of Latin America it has been the subject of much scholarship (O'Donnell, 1996; O'Donnell, 1998). In line with other authors, we argue that the political economy of education reforms needs to treat state and institutional strength as explanatory variables, 'rather than [as] a taken-for-granted assumption.' (Levitsky & Murillo, 2014, p. 2).

We argue that while the prevalence of a weak state and weak institutions is clearly a historical phenomenon, in the recent decades of economic restructuring and growth, their persistence can be related to the dominance of a broad political settlement which has prioritized market development and macro-economic stability, but not social investment or institutional reforms.

We argue that the absence of institutional reforms has led to the reproduction of what McEvoy describes as the 'colloidal' nature of the Peruvian Republic, in which the state 'is like an emulsion that never reaches solidity', a country with a 'moderate anarchy', 'a state of disorder which is only controlled at times'. In Peru, politics thus affects reforms not simply, and maybe not so much because substantive matters become politically contested, but because of the precarious nature of institutions and political processes, which hinder the formation of political projects and discourses, and the establishment of binding agreements and settlements with regards to key goals and how to achieve them.

This is the broad context in which education policies and learning reforms have taken place. The learning agenda in Peru has a clear starting date, which coincides with a large-scale World Bank funded quality improvement program in the second half of the 1990s. This agenda, with its focus on curriculum reform, teacher training and assessment, however, has followed a sinuous path, marked by frequent discontinuities, that have made the achievement of key policy goals extremely slow – a protracted and partial incrementalism.

The initial impulse that the learning agenda received in the second half of the 1990s took place amidst an increasingly authoritarian and corrupt government, and without efforts to establish agreements or settlements with key groups (civil society, teachers, etc.). These reforms were also marked by serious implementation problems, being more discursively than practically clear. The political context in which such reforms took place led to their wholesale dismissal and replacement by an agenda that focused on the system's governance and management more than on learning.

When the learning agenda was reestablished, it did so in a new guise, that of measurable indicators and standardized test results. This new focus has given rise to a new technocratic model of policy making and to what we describe as a technocratic settlement in education. The latter has been influenced by international agencies, such as the World Bank, which played a key role in the establishment of yearly census evaluations as a central policy to raise achievement. In this context, the Ministry of Finance, through its results-based budgeting, and through its influence on the MoE's Strategic Planning Secretariat, has become a key player in the definition of education policies. This technocratic settlement, and the leadership of groups of technocrats in the education and finance sectors can certainly be credited with many of the improvements we find in Peruvian education. They have aligned policy processes with desired goals and have pushed forward reforms in important areas.

Technocrats, however, are not immune to impact of politics and corruption, and as the years since 2020 – or since 2016 – have shown, even the technically soundest reforms can be fairly-easily dismantled or dented through ministerial discontinuities and the anti-reformist interests that are now well established in Congress – the curriculum, as well as the teachers' reform and the higher education reform have all suffered from this and are at risk.

Political and sectoral instability caused by the general weakness of the country's political and institutional system, as well as by corruption, have had a profound influence on the nature and especially on the pace of reforms during this period. The education sector has been led by 20 ministers in 25 years – a figure that in and of itself is illustrative of the radical degrees of discontinuity in policy making, especially when considering that the country does not have a stable civil service.

While successful in many respects, technocrats are often averse to engaging in the politics of "selling" reforms, of opening their proposals to public debate and contestation in order to ensure necessary levels of understanding, legitimacy and support. This may have worked against their aims.

A final point we make in relation to the technocratic settlement is that in their emphasis on efficiency and their reductionist understanding of quality and learning as equal to standardized test results, technocrats may have elided crucial questions about pedagogy and educational practice, about learning in its broadest sense. The latter are therefore still in need of reform.

Various lessons can be extracted from the political economy of learning reforms in Peru

- The study shows that politics can have both direct and indirect effects on education policy making. While there may be certain domains of contestation that are amenable to more traditional forms of political dispute and settlement, in developing contexts like Peru, it is the weak nature of the state and its institutions that define the politics of

education policy making in its unconsolidated, fragmented, discontinuous and protracted path towards reform.

- In the Peruvian case we have seen how periods of general political instability have impacted on the development – continuity/discontinuity – of education policy agendas, without necessarily implying a form of contestation over the content of those agendas.
- Political instability, paired with the general institutional weakness that is often characteristic of developing countries, acts against the consolidation and sustainability of policy agendas over time. It acts against, that is, the formation of clear policy discourses able to endure the whims of different administrations.
- Approaches that claim to be a-political, such as technocratic and narrowly understood evidence-based approaches to policy making, are in and of themselves political and can contribute to shape policy agendas in very specific ways. One of their weaknesses, however, is that they tend to be averse to open debate, making policy the exclusive terrain of experts, rather than citizens, and this may act against the consolidation and continuity of policy agendas.
- Corruption is another political dynamic that may directly or indirectly impact on the development and consolidation of education policy agendas, especially in contexts with weak institutions and weak regulatory capacity.
- In contexts with weak states and institutions, and where political party politics is also unstable, there need to be other mechanisms to establish policy discourses able to guide learning policy agendas. Such processes should include the promotion of broad-based public debate in order to established shared ideas as to the nature and overall direction of education policies.
- Open, transparent and sustained debate around key policy issues might be the only way to promote sustainable settlements to guide learning improvement policies.
- The international and donor community, together with civil society organizations, can play a key role in promoting open debate around key policy issues, helping settle policy agendas and maintain them over time and in spite of general political instability. In Peru, such organizations have been fundamental in the establishment and progress made in key education reforms. While their role has not always been one of impositions, there have been cases in which they appear to have promoted their own views too harshly, unduly influencing the course of policy agendas.
- The focus on political settlements and policy discourse is useful to understand the overall nature and direction of policies. While specific policies may reflect particular ways of framing problems, they can also be read as the product of the broader orientation in both sectoral and national politics. However, in developing countries, the idea of political settlements themselves needs to come under examination, as the conditions which enable such settlements may be entirely absent.
- When applying this approach to developing countries it is important to consider that in many cases these are highly unsettled contexts, in which broad political as well as specific policy discourses may be of a 'colloidal' nature, that is, they may not have achieved a basic level of consolidation to enable a settlement around a specific set of ideas.
- While not a necessary limitation, the settlements approach does seem to leave somewhat behind discussions about ideology and hegemony. Political settlements and policy discourses should be read in relation to dominant/hegemonic ideas, for instance,

about the role of the state or the balance between states, markets and individuals in the production of wellbeing.

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ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Codename	Interviewee bio
1. Key informant 1	Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the MoE and the National Council for Education
2. Key informant 2	University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education
3. Key informant 3	Former MoE high-ranking official and current researcher at a local institution
4. Key informant 4	Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor
5. Key informant 5	University professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education
6. Key informant 6	Former MoE high-ranking official, university professor and current counsellor at the National Council for Education
7. Key informant 7	Former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education
8. Key informant 8	University professor and former MoE high-ranking official and advisor for the National Council for Education
9. Key informant 9	Former SUTEP high-ranking official and current counsellor at the National Council for Education
10. Key informant 10	University professor and former MoE and MoF high-ranking official

ANNEX 2: ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEPLAN: National Strategic Planning Center

CNE: National Council for Education

DIGC: General Office for the Quality of School Management

ECE: Census Learning Assessment

LCPM: Teachers' Career Law

LRM: Teachers' Career Reform Law

MECEP: Educational Quality Improvement Program

MoE: Ministry of Education

MoF: Ministry of Finance

PELA: Learning Achievement Educational Program

PEN: National Education Plan

PER: Regional Education Plan

PLANCAD: National Plan for Teacher Training

PLANMED: Strategic Planning and Educational Quality Assessment Office

PRONAFCAP: Continuing Education and Training Program

SNIP: National Public Investment System

SPE: Strategic Planning Secretariat

SUTEP: National Union for Education Workers

UMC: Educational Assessment Unit

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE (KEY ACTORS)

Introduction to the study

- The study (and the interviews) seeks to analyse:
 - o The development of reforms aimed at improving learning vs reforms aimed at widening and extending access/reforms focused on solving the so-called 'learning crisis'; The political economy of these reform processes: the role of different actors and institutional factors in the negotiation and sustainability of reforms (or lack thereof); the relationship between the politics of reform (or lack thereof) and the political economy of the reforms.
 - o The political economy of these reform processes: the role of different actors and institutional factors in the negotiation and sustainability of reforms (or lack thereof); the relationship between education policy and the country's prevailing political-institutional model.
 - o The questions aim to understand education reform processes, how problems and policies were defined, their evolution over time, the identification of key milestones, the causes of major changes and the role of different types of actors in the sustainability or lack thereof of policy processes.
 - Periodisation: the study focuses on the period 1995-2020.
 - What we understand by reforms aimed at improving learning: those reforms that, unlike reforms aimed at expanding access and permanence, seek to generate improvements in learning by introducing changes in educational practices; reforms that seek to improve the 'pedagogical core', that is, what teachers and students do in the classroom with the curricular content that is proposed to them.
 - While we have some openness to consider other policy areas, we concentrate more specifically on three areas of education policy: teacher reforms, learning assessment and curriculum.
 - The hypothesis from which we start is that reforms are influenced by political and institutional dynamics, by negotiations and confrontations between different interest/power groups, and that these political dynamics affect not only progress towards the desired changes but also the very definition of policy objectives.
1. Learning improvement reforms
- At what point in the period under study do reforms aimed at improving learning began, and what do they consist of? What are the main areas of reform: teachers, assessment, curriculum?
 - How has the definition of these reforms, of what is necessary to improve learning, changed during this time and in the different governmental periods or ministerial administrations?
 - o For example, how are educational quality and learning improvement understood?
2. A period-by-period view
- In almost all (or all) governments of the period, there has been a strong emphasis and explicit promises of reform and improvement of education quality. How have these promises and reforms manifested themselves in different government periods (and perhaps also in different administrations)?
- Fujimori 1995-2000
 - Transitional government
 - Toledo
 - García
 - Humala

- PPK/Vizcarra
- Beyond electoral speeches in support of education, has there been real (practical, concrete) commitment/support/concrete actions by different governments to education - e.g. in terms of budget increases?
- What processes or dynamics have facilitated the move from reform discourse to practice?
 - o Resources, commitment, "political will", implementation capacity, opposition.
- In the case of Fujimori, for example, what happens to learning improvement reforms towards the end of the 2nd government - with the explosion of corruption, the change of emphasis in policy management, the electoral agenda?
- How does the change of government and the entry of the transitional government influence the evolution of learning improvement reforms - in a context of corruption, where the return to democracy had to be managed and where a democratic/civic deficit is recognised? (is there a change of emphasis in the reforms?)
- What has been the role of PELA in defining and developing reforms aimed at improving learning?
 - o Can it be said that there is a before and an after PELA in terms of reforms aimed at improving learning? / PELA - supports reforms but also proposes a particular (narrow) definition of what quality and learning are?
 - o Are there important changes within PELA?
 - o The logic of "interventions"
 - o The emphasis on results rather than processes
- In which governments and ministerial administrations has the learning improvement agenda been most present? And what has led to this?
- Has there been a clear theory or definition (or definitions) in the different ministerial administrations about what educational quality is and what can lead to learning improvements?
 - o What is the basis of these theories?
 - o Have these theories changed over the period under study?

3. The role of different actors and power groups in the definition and management of education policy

- Who are and who have been the main groups of actors throughout the period that have influenced the definition and evolution of education policy? (where do reforms originate from, and who influences their development?)
 - o SUTEP / MEF / CNE / Technocrats / Organised groups (e.g. Foro Educativo) / Parents / International organisations.
 - o Is the absence or presence of certain actors surprising? (e.g. private sector, STEP)
- Which actors have contributed to defining and sustaining or derailing learning improvement reforms?
- Have there been any particularly contentious issues?
- What has been the role and evolution of the state technocracy in the development of reforms and the definition of learning and quality?
- What is and has been the effect of the shift of middle and emerging middle-class families to the private sector on the momentum behind learning improvement reforms? (In the sense that this shift may lead to a lack of social demand and clear political pressure for quality improvement, especially in public education).
- What has been the role of the MEF?
 - o In a context in which the political system and the ministry organisation have not been able to sustain the continuity of policies and reforms over time, the MEF seems to have assumed a kind of leadership role with regard to the conduct of

education policies - and with this also control - establishing a particular interpretation of things (a rather reductivist idea of what evidence-based policy is, an emphasis on interventions).

- Some point out that the MEF has 'cloned' itself within MINEDU in the form of the Strategic Planning Secretariat.
- What has been the influence of international agencies in defining education policy and learning reform agendas? And how has this influence been expressed (e.g., funding, technical assistance)?
 - Is this something that has changed over time? (more influence in the 1990s, for example)?
- What has been the role of Congress?
- Are there any other institutional actors to consider?

4. The management of education reform processes

- How easy or difficult have the processes of teacher, assessment and curriculum change been and what factors have influenced them?
 - Processes of consultation, negotiation, ministerial changes, political support from above (or lack of it), design features and implementation processes.
 - Policy changes initiated by different administrations.
- Are some areas easier to reform than others? Evaluation vs teachers, for example?
- To what extent have the politics behind the policies - the negotiation processes, the lobbying, the opposition - influenced the nature and evolution of reforms?
- How have the political processes behind the reforms been managed? E.g. consensus building, persuasion, communication, negotiation.
- How coherent is the way in which reforms have been organised to promote improvements in learning? How coherent is the system with respect to this objective? For example, are training, curriculum, management practices (central, regional/local and institutional) aligned?
- To what extent do constant ministerial changes affect reform processes?
- (Everywhere, there are ministerial changes, but here the changes seem to be more drastic in the sense that there is no institutional framework to sustain reforms over time).
 - How has this situation changed over time? For example, through the emergence of technocracy in the state (both in MINEDU and MEF)?
- Is there widespread support for the reforms? Is it mobilised?
- How does the learning improvement agenda interact with the education decentralisation (and re-centralisation) agenda?

5. The relationship between the political-institutional model and the definition of educational reforms

One of the issues we are interested in exploring is the relationship between the development of educational reforms and what is known in the literature as the political settlement, which could be translated as the political-institutional arrangement or model that defines the rules of the game and underpins the way in which the state, society and the market are articulated to produce certain social welfare outcomes.

- Could it be said that there is a predominant political-institutional model in the country that defines the way in which the state, the market, and the people relate to each other? What is it? (exclusionary, neoliberal, informal, conservative).
- What is the relationship between education policies/reforms and this political-institutional model?

- For example, in terms of this arrangement's influence on financing, decentralisation, among others.
- What is the influence of the 1993 constitution on the definition and development of the education policy agenda, and specifically on reforms aimed at improving learning? (i.e. subsidiary role of the state).
- To what extent does the General Education Law alter, in the field of education, the order established by the constitution?
- To what extent have the political context (stable/unstable) and different governments' orientations (more or less neo-liberal or progressive/inclusive) influenced the definition, development and sustainability of reforms aimed at improving learning?
- To what extent did the macro-institutional arrangement change with the transition to democracy? And then with Humala and the discourse of social inclusion? Or do the changes generated in these periods not end up changing this macro-institutional arrangement?

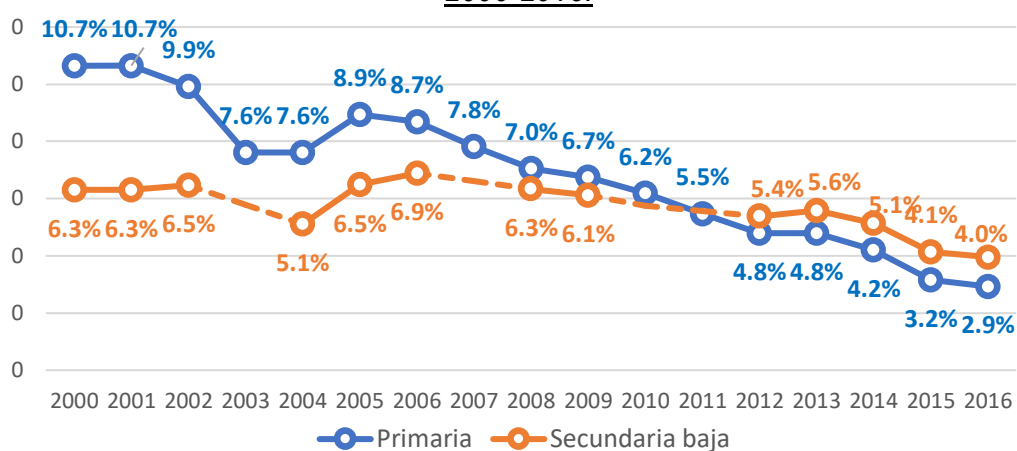
6. Institutional and structural factors

- How strong or weak is the institutional framework on which education policies and reforms are based?
 - For example, how does the absence of a stable bureaucracy (civil service) affect the conduct of reforms?
- Arguably, has there been a difficulty in developing long-term views/strategies/reforms and a greater emphasis on attention to short-term problems? What are the reasons for this?
- The influence of informality in the rules of the education policy game on progress in reforms
 - The predominance of a personalist logic and more or less informal processes of policy definition, which implies that policies can be changed at the whim of each minister? (deals rather than rules)
 - This is more or less the case during the period under study.
- Does the low institutionalisation of reforms mean that they are susceptible to changes from one administration to the next, that they take longer to take shape, and that their content is diluted over time?
- To what extent have decentralising - and then re-centralising - reforms influenced progress in reforms to improve learning? Are they necessary for this?
- To what extent has the country's socio-economic elites' lack of pressure regarding education improvement influenced the progress of reforms (economic model based on extractive activities)? (elites who, on the one hand, meet their educational needs in the private sector and, on the other hand, benefit from access to cheap/low-skilled labour)
- To what extent have there been interests behind the establishment and unravelling of learning improvement reforms, and to what extent have these processes (the back and forth) been a product of institutional weakness, constant management changes, and the idiosyncratic nature of education policy-making in the country?
- How does the political situation in the country, the absence of parties, of programmatic policy agendas, of negotiation mechanisms and agreements that allow policies to be sustained over time - or at least during the different administrations of the same government - affect the evolution of education reforms?

Other political-institutional factors that have an impact on the definition, implementation and sustainability of reforms aimed at improving learning.

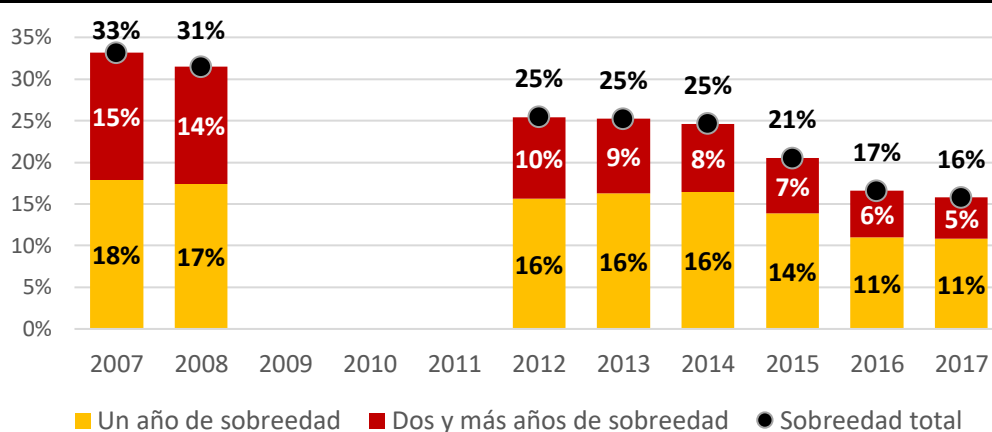
ANNEX 4: FIGURES

Figure 3. Percentage of repeaters. Primary and lower secondary education. Peru. Years 2000-2016.



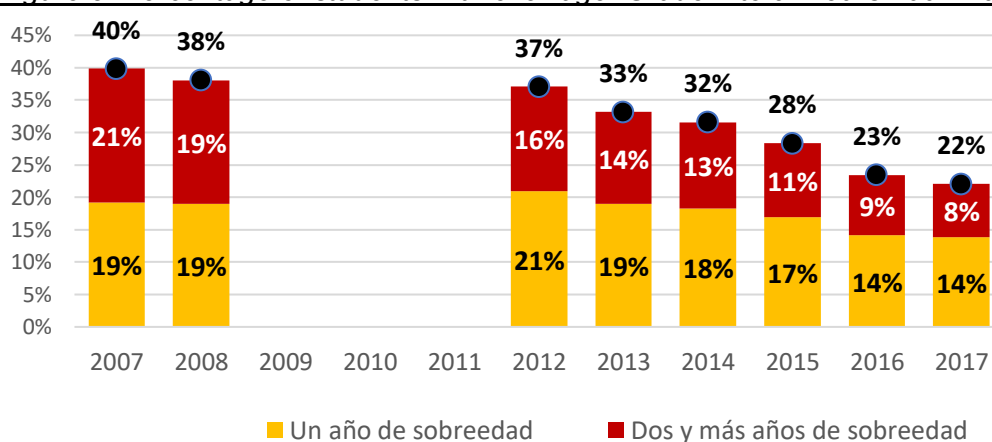
Source: Balarin (2021), UIS Data Centre

Figure 4. Percentage of students with over-age. Grades 1 to 6. Peru. Years 2007-2017



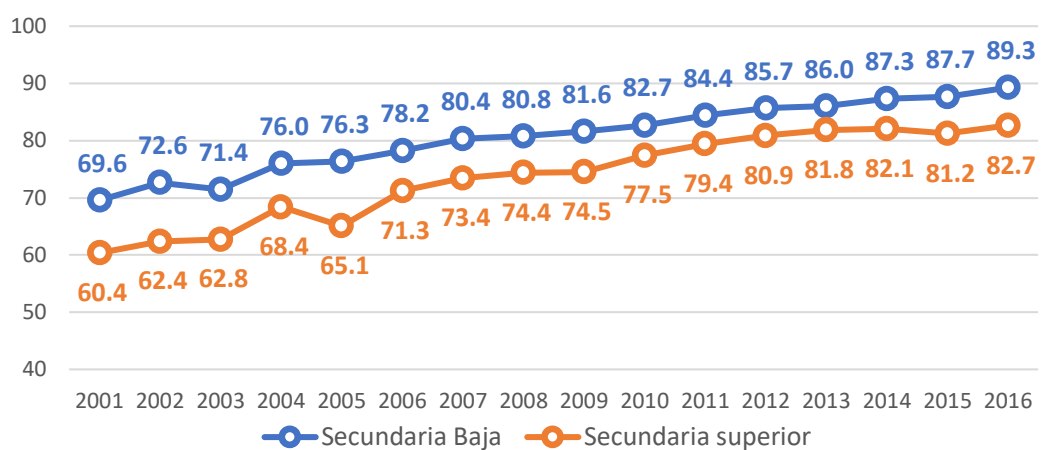
Source: Balarin (2021), UIS Data Centre

Figure 5. Percentage of students with over-age. Grade 7 to 9. Years 2007-2017



Source: UIS data centre

Figure 6. Completion rate. Lower and upper secondary. Peru. Years 2001-2016.



Source: Balarin (2021), UIS Data Centre