Policy formulation process: Significance and considerations of stakeholders and objective setting

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Abstract
In today's complex societies, there are many individuals and organizations with different interests, expectations, and demands with respect to a matter more or less concerned to them. The Education Policy is formulated for the people of a country and it addresses all those individuals, groups, communities, associations, organizations who are directly or somehow influenced by it. The present paper aims to delineate different steps considered for the formulation of a policy. This process of policy formulation has been demonstrated taking the example of education policy. The essentials and considerations of stakeholders, interest groups and objective setting explained in the text include: understanding interest group, the rise of interest groups (broad economic developments, government policy, religious and moralistic movements, the government activities), types of interest groups (economic interests, environmental interests, equality interest, consumer and public interest lobbies), an organization's political position and its members' interests (the homogeneity of the group, people's motives for joining, the size of the staff, the level of militancy and activity of the membership), influence of interest groups on policy (credible information, public support, money), the absence of trouble (lobbying, electioneering, litigation, going public), developing/determining objectives, importance of objectives for educational policy, characteristics of educational policy objectives, identify the barriers to achieving the goals, types of educational policy objectives, role of objectives in educational policy, formation of objectives for educational policy and considerations of formation of objectives for educational policy.

Key words: Policy formation, education policy, stakeholders, interest groups, objective setting.

Introduction

The individuals and groups are termed as stakeholder or interest groups in different perspectives. Usually the term stakeholder is used in business and the concept of interest group is more common in political sciences. However, these terms are frequently employed in educational studies. Smith (2008, p. 5) defines the "stakeholders" as "individuals or entities who stand to gain or lose from the success or failure of a system or an organization". Similarly the website http://www.ehow.com/facts states that stakeholders are people or groups interested in a project, program, company or policy. Stakeholders have varying interests depending on their relationship with the project, but knowing whether they have primary or secondary interests may be valuable when doing an analysis of the situation. Primary stakeholders are the people and groups most affected by the outcome of the policy and the outcome may be positive or negative. Secondary stakeholders are individuals or groups not directly affected by the outcome of the policy, but still having an interest in it. They often help provide aid to the primary stakeholders.

Some Key Stakeholders in Education

The above definition classifies the stakeholders in terms of having primary or secondary interests. In education, the main stakeholders or partners are material resource providers (the

provincial and district authorities in public education), administrators, teachers (as service providers), and students and their parents (recipients or beneficiaries). Among these, some of the stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students and community are described here.

The teacher, along with the student, plays an interactive role in the education process because one cannot function without the other. Short and Greer state that "the empowerment of teachers will facilitate the empowerment of students" (2002, p. 13). The teacher as a stakeholder is expected to possess the professional knowledge to lead the students in instruction. In addition to serving in an instructional role the teacher can be a mentor, supervisor, counselor, and community leader. Schlechty (2001) states that the ends of education have to do with such things as providing the society with a culturally literate citizenry, a world-class workforce, people who can think and reason. Parents play key roles as educational stakeholders. Parents' primary objective is the assurance that their children will receive a quality education, which will enable the children to lead productive rewarding lives as adults in a global society (Cotton and Wikelund, 2001). Parents are very important stakeholders to the educational decision making process. As suggested by Essex (2005), many parents' decisions on educational issues are significantly influenced by their values and beliefs rather than school law. The student plays the lead role in the educational process and as stakeholders are expected to participate in the process. Successful schools encourage significant participation by parents, students and teachers (Wilson, 2008). Although the student's primary role is that of a recipient, students should be encouraged to exercise their decision-making role in the education process. By giving aid to the decision-making process students become an integral part of a successful institution. Empowering students with shared decision making increases their choices and responsibilities for their own learning (Short and Greer, 2002).

Understanding Interest Group

Thomas and Hrebner's (1992) define the interest group as any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, that attempts to influence public Policy. Since 1960 the number of interest groups has increased rapidly. There have been other historical eras of interest group proliferation. Interest groups do not, therefore, arise spontaneously or automatically out of natural social processes. It is described at http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/apgov_interest_groups.htm that at least four factors help explain the rise of interest group. For example, the rise of mass-production industry allowed the rise of mass-membership labor unions. Public programs create constituencies with an incentive to organize to maintain their benefits. Sometimes the government supports the formation of organizations by providing benefits to their members. Sometimes government policies are designed to make private interest group formation easier. These produce people, frequently young people, who are willing to form organizations, often at large personal cost. The more activities government undertakes, the more interest groups form as a response to those activities.

Types of Interest Groups

Interest groups emerge according to the nature of interest the group members share. All the group members strive to secure their interest in a similar fashion. These interest groups come forward as a result of economic, environmental, equality, consumer of public interest. The http://wps.ablongman.com/long_edwards_government_11/10/2808/719053.cw/index.html presents the following types of interest groups. All economic interests are ultimately concerned with wages, prices, and profits. Business executives, factory workers, and farmers seek to influence government because regulations, taxes, subsidies, and international economic policy all affect their economic livelihoods. Environmental groups are among the newest political interest groups.. They have promoted pollution-control policies, wilderness protection, and population control. The concerns of environmentalists often come into direct conflict with energy goals. Interest groups representing women and minorities have made equal rights their main policy goal. Equality at the polls, in housing, on the job, in education, and in all other facets of life has been the dominant goal.Public interest lobbies can be defined as organizations that seek "a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization." Consumer groups have won many legislative victories. There are many different types of public interest groups.

Organization's Interest Group's Political Position and its Members' Interests

The influence of the interest groups is not uniform. An interest group's political position affects its members' ability to pursue its demands and rights. The http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/apgov_interest_groups.htm gives the following factors that affect the political position of the group: The United States Chamber of Commerce consists of many different types of businesses and thus can say little or nothing about tariffs. As long as union members are satisfied with the union's performance on bread-and-butter issues, Thus members motivated by solitary or material incentives will give great discretion to the staff to pursue their own goals. Organizations with large staffs are more likely to take political positions in accordance with staff beliefs. Furthermore, staffs will tend to have distinct views, either liberal/left or conservative/right. Members of some organizations, tend to be passionately convinced of the rightness of particular policies. Leaders of these organizations will not find members indifferent or easily satisfied, and they will be forced to take strong stands-perhaps even stands they would prefer to avoid.

Influence of Interest Groups on Policy

One of the functions of interest groups is that they influence all the policy matters and help to refine the policy according to the needs and demand of the society. Thus the interest groups serve as the pressure groups that represent a specific community, organization or association and they emphasize to mould the policy. The http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/apgov_interest_groups.htm presents here the way an interest group affects a policy. It describes the following ways to influence the policy: This may include policy information to allow a legislator to take a position on an issue or technical information needed to implement a policy. An interest group is most powerful when the issue is narrow and technical and there are no competing interest groups to supply competing information. It is unlikely, therefore, that these tactics are effective for more than a handful of visible issues with great emotional significance. Interest groups have successfully mobilized support for and against legislators. Groups are interested in the opinions of the public. Because public opinion ultimately makes its way to policymakers, interest groups carefully cultivate their public image. The practice of interest groups' appealing to the public for support has a long tradition .Recently, an increased number of organizations have undertaken expensive public relations efforts.

Interest groups can establish political action committees to finance political campaigns, they can lobby to reduce or increase the appropriations for government agencies, they can provide jobs for former government officials (revolving door), and on occasion they may offer a cash bribe. To obtain money beyond mere dues, interest groups have turned to foundation grants federal grants and contracts, and direct-mail solicitation. Tactics such as protest marches, sit-ins, picketing are used by both the left and the right. The object is to disrupt the workings of some institution to force it to negotiate with you, to enlist the support of third parties (for example, the media), or to provoke attacks and arrests so that martyrs are created. Generally, the study of interest group lobbying delves into how groups attempt to affect government decision-making. Lobbying has been studied extensively, and the research consistently shows that at both the national and state levels, organized interests use a wide range of similar lobbying tactics (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998). Second, lobbying is more sophisticated (Cigler & Loomis, 2002). Third, lobbying largely involves generating, monitoring, and disseminating information (Cigler & Loomis, 2002). Lobbyists help members in five ways:

  i.   They are an important source of information,
 ii.   They can help a member with political strategy,
iii.   They can help formulate campaign strategy, and
 iv.   They are a source of ideas and innovations.

Evidence suggests that lobbyists' power over policy is often exaggerated, but there is evidence to suggest that sometimes lobbying can persuade legislators to support a certain policy. Lobbying clearly works best on people already committed to the lobbyist's policy position. According to http://wps.ablongman.com/long_edwards_government_11/10/2808/719053.cw/index.html
Electioneering and Litigation are another two ways to affect the policy. These are described below. Electioneering consists of aiding candidates financially and getting group members out to support them. No major interest group seeking to influence the electoral process can pass up the opportunity

to honestly and openly funnel money into the campaigns of their supporters. If interest groups fail in Congress, the next step is to go to court in the hope of getting specific rulings. Environmental groups and civil rights groups have been particularly successful in litigation. A more direct judicial strategy employed by interest groups is the filing of class action lawsuits, which enables a group of similarly situated plaintiffs to combine similar grievances into a single suit.

Developing/Determining Objectives

The determination of objectives for any activity, program or policy is a key element. Objectives are targets of a policy by which the success or the failure is assessed. Many socio-economic, political, historical and cultural factors are taken into account while the formation of objectives. The aims and objectives included in the policy represent the national expectations from all tiers of education and they give a vision to the nation as well.

The Importance of Objective Setting

The objective setting is the most important section of a policy. The overall evaluation of the policy is directly concerned with the objectives of policy. The website http://www.skillsstrategy.ie/3.5.html states that the determination of the success of many policy initiatives resides with the implementing body concerned. It also believes that effective monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of policy development. Specifically, objectives contribute to sound policy making and implementation through a number of channels:

i.   They facilitate accountability by indicating success or failure at the completion of a plan;
ii.   Moreover, they can also play a constructive role in delivering policy goals: they can be used to provide quantitative feedback on progress during the execution of a plan i.e. they provide an impartial means of gauging progress on an on-going basis; and
iii. They are measurable and, therefore, can be used to encourage staff motivation thus enhancing employee productivity.

Characteristics of Policy Objectives

The formation of policy objectives is a core issue and some characteristics must be considered during the formation of policy objectives. Slack (2007) States:

i.   The eventual success of a policy depends upon establishing clear goals.
ii.   If there are multiple objectives they must be consistent.
iii. They must be flexible enough to change over time as the circumstances evolve.

He further describes that, in simple terms the objectives must:

i.   Identify the present conditions and situation.
ii.   Indicate what the goals are.
iii. Identify the barriers to achieving the goals.
iv.   Identify what is needed from other agencies and the private sector.
v.   Identify what steps are required to achieve success.
vi.   Determine how success will be judged and measured.

Best Practices in Setting Objectives

It have been discussed that the objective setting is vital in policy formation. Therefore, to formulate the objectives some guidelines should be considered. According to http://www.skillsstrategy.ie/3.5.html, some of the best suggestions to be taken in to account are given below: Objectives are means to an end and, consequently, must be chosen judiciously to ensure that they are causally linked to the desired, over-arching goal; otherwise the objectives may assume primacy over the goal with unintended consequences;

i.   Objectives should be both realistic and ambitious;
ii.   Objectives should also be clear and unambiguous and be integrated across all levels of education and training;
iii. The ultimate objectives should be supplemented with intermediate ones, to facilitate monitoring progress over the life of the strategy;
iv.   Responsibility for achieving objectives must be clearly assigned to an executive entity;

v.   Nor should actions to achieve objectives compromise individual freedom of choice to pursue particular avenues of education or training;

vi.   Objectives should, where appropriate be outcomes-based rather than input-based. Input objectives are relatively easy to meet and easy to measure but provide little information on the overall effectiveness of a policy or program;

vii. Aspirations should not be used as substitutes for objectives; and

viii. Likewise, indicators which are used to assess progress in relation to specific policy objectives should not be confused with quantitative objectives which refer to actual outcomes rather than measurements of progress.

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