



**A University of Sussex EdD thesis**

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

Developing a Transformative Vision of Global Education?

Unpacking education quality and learning in the  
policy formulation and content of  
Sustainable Development Goal 4

Kathleen Moriarty

Submitted for the Degree of International Doctor in  
Education

University of Sussex

January 2019

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

**Signature**

## Summary

This thesis examines the development of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). It specifically explores the dynamics and assumptions that informed its formulation and the final text. In particular, this research unpacks the discursive construction of education quality and learning in the formulation and content of SDG4 and considers its potential for developing a transformative vision of global education.

The research draws on interviews with ‘policy elites’ and analysis of key documents that informed SDG4’s formulation, tracing the key moments of SDG4’s development. The main question it addresses is: what influences and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and do they support a transformative vision of global education? In this policy trajectory, key processes are examined, as well as how specific understandings of education shaped the final text. In deconstructing SDG4 this research shows how the consensus reflected in the overarching goal is weakened at the level of the targets. It points to the narrowing of the concept of quality education and learning, pointing to how they are reduced in instrumental ways.

This research contributes to the understandings of the processes by which global policy frameworks are discursively constituted by elites within specific historic, social, economic and political spaces. It also adds to an understanding of how what is considered ‘relevant’ in SDG4 restricts the ambition of the goal to the wider 2030 agenda. It highlights the intertextual nature of policy, revealing how meaning is reshaped even as texts are finalised, and it contributes to an understanding of how power dynamics shaped construction of the SDG4, of which very little literature exists. It recommends policy advocacy to defend the holistic vision of SDG4 as a universal agenda that is implemented at the national level. Additionally, it recommends future research focused on policy makers and other key stakeholders in the global south to better understand how their voice can inform global education policy-making.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the encouragement, support and kindness of so many people.

First, I wish to thank all of the people who agreed to be interviewed and share their perspectives on SDG4's development. They generously gave up their time to participate in this study, sharing their thoughts and personal reflections, bringing a richness to the thesis that otherwise would not have been possible. While it has not been feasible to include the full wealth of their contributions, I hope I have done justice overall to the insights and ideas they kindly shared with me. I learnt a great deal in this process, including the commitment and passion for education and development that each of them brings to their professional lives and activism.

My most wholehearted thanks go to Professor Yusuf Sayed, my thesis supervisor, who has been steadfast in his guidance and encouragement throughout this whole process. His constructive feedback helped me articulate and structure my ideas and arguments and his insightful and critical questions have been invaluable in helping me shape this thesis, which would not have been possible without his support. More than this, Yusuf's encouragement has made all the difference when I felt overwhelmed or lost. His patience and kindness have been unlimited. I have often joked I must be his worse student (he has always been too polite to answer): what is certainly true is that he has been the best supervisor.

My thanks also to my second supervisors, to Professor Naureen Durrani who encouraged my progress with her warmth and commitment. I also wish to thank Dr Marcos Delprato, for his enthusiastic interest, along with his pertinent comments that helped me get through the final stage.

In addition, I would like to thank the whole team at the Centre for International Education, including the administrative office, who helped me navigate the formalities. Thanks to my fellow cohort of doctoral students, in particular, Maja Pasic, who has swapped encouragement and friendship during these last few years.

My sincere gratitude also goes to Amardeep Singh Dhillon for his professional edits, done with thoughtfulness and flexibility, and to Lyndsay Bird for her helpful comments on my first full draft.

Thanks to all my friends, in particular to: Lea, Chloe and the little ones for happy distractions; Crystal, always an inspiration, and to Amelie, for helping me see the future. A special thanks to the 'Paris Belles' for your endless encouragement and friendship.

Thanks to all my family, including Lynne. To P.H. for his faith in his daughter and a special thanks to my wonderful mum, who never doubted I could do this. Last but not least thanks to my children: my darling Conrad, your thoughts and love enabled me to overcome the limits of my own imaginary; and my gorgeous girl, Maêv, your company and love brightens up each day (although I could have done with a few more dinners and few less interruptions!).

To so many people (some unnamed) who through their thoughtful contributions, friendship and love and have helped me in this endeavour.

## Table of Contents

<b><i>Declaration.....</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>Summary.....</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>Acknowledgements .....</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>List of Tables.....</i></b>	<b><i>10</i></b>
<b><i>List of Figures .....</i></b>	<b><i>10</i></b>
<b><i>List of Abbreviations .....</i></b>	<b><i>11</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</i></b>	<b><i>12</i></b>
1.1 Background and Rationale .....	12
1.2 Research Questions .....	16
1.3 Methodological approach .....	17
1.4 Structure of the thesis .....	18
<b><i>Chapter 2: The Context of SDG4's Development .....</i></b>	<b><i>20</i></b>
2.1. The 2030 agenda .....	20
2.2. Global Frameworks for Education: the antecedents of SDG4.....	22
2.2.1. The Right to Education and SDG4 .....	23
2.2.2 The MDGs and SDG4 .....	24
2.2.3 EFA and SDG4.....	26
2.2.4 The wider context beyond the global goals .....	28
2.2.4. Summary of this section .....	33
2.3 Changing Global Context.....	34
<b><i>Chapter 3: Literature review .....</i></b>	<b><i>35</i></b>
3.1. Education: shaping citizens (for a sustainable future).....	35
3.2: Education policy .....	37
3.2.1: What is policy? .....	37
3.2.2 Policy analysis .....	40
3.2.3 Context and participation .....	42

3.2.4. Globalised education policy .....	45
<b>3.3: Quality, Learning and Measurement. ....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.3.1 Quality Education.....	48
3.3.2 Learning and Learning outcomes .....	51
<b>3.4 Conclusion to this chapter and conceptual framework.....</b>	<b>54</b>
3.4.1 Conceptual Framework.....	54
<b><i>Chapter 4: Methodology .....</i></b>	<b><i>56</i></b>
<b>4.1: Research Philosophy.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>4.2: Methodological approach .....</b>	<b>58</b>
4.2.1 Qualitative Research .....	58
4.2.2. Research Questions .....	59
<b>4.3. Methods of Data Collection.....</b>	<b>59</b>
4.3.1. Policy Document Analysis .....	60
4.3.2. Interview data collection .....	61
4.3.3. Sampling, who and size of sample .....	62
4.3.4. The Interview Processes .....	66
4.3.5 Data storage.....	69
<b>4.4 Data analysis .....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.4.1. Analysis of Documents.....	69
4.4.2. Transcript analysis.....	71
<b>4.5 Trustworthiness and Authenticity of the Data .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.6. Ethical considerations for my research .....</b>	<b>79</b>
4.6.1. Research permissions .....	80
4.6.2 Informed consent.....	81
<b>4.7. Researcher Positionality .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>4.8. Limitations of my research .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>4.9. Summary of this chapter.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b><i>Chapter 5 – The formulation of SDG4 .....</i></b>	<b><i>85</i></b>
<b>5.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>5.2. The global development pathway .....</b>	<b>88</b>
5.2.1 The origins of the 2030 agenda .....	88



5.2.2 My World Survey .....	89
5.2.3 The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons.....	92
5.2.4. Open Working Group .....	95
5.2.5 Final reflections on Pathway 1 .....	103
<b>5.3: The global education pathway .....</b>	<b>104</b>
5.3.1 Education for All to SDG4.....	104
5.3.2 Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Development Agenda .....	105
5.3.2.a. Sidebar discussion on: The politics of leading the post-2015 Education Agenda ....	108
5.3.4. The 2014 Muscat Global Education Meeting (GEM).....	111
5.3.4 The 2015 World Education Forum .....	115
5.3.5 Final reflections on Pathway 2 .....	118
<b>5.4: Conclusion to this chapter.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>5.4.1. Key research findings .....</b>	<b>119</b>
5.4.1.a. Policy making remains a largely elite process .....	119
5.4.1.b. Power struggles .....	120
5.4.1.d. Ideological contestations and policy text compromise .....	120
<b><i>Chapter 6 - A critical analysis of SDG4 .....</i></b>	<b><i>122</i></b>
<b>6.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>6.2. The SDG4 Goal.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>6.3. The SDG4 Targets .....</b>	<b>127</b>
6.3.1. Quality Education and SDG4 .....	129
6.3.1.1 Teachers as a proxy for quality .....	131
6.3.1.2. Summary of this section.....	135
6.3.2. Hierarchies of Learning .....	135
6.3.3. Leave No One Behind: Inclusion and Equity in SDG4.....	141
6.3.3.1. Inclusion in SDG4 targets .....	142
6.3.3.2. Equity in SDG4 targets.....	146
6.3.3.3 Financing in SDG4: the implications for equity .....	147
6.3.4. Key issues emerging from the above critical review of SDG4 targets.....	151
<b>6.4. SDG4 Global Indicators: redefining the targets through measurement .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>6.5 Conclusion to this chapter.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>6.5.1 Key research findings .....</b>	<b>159</b>
6.5.1.a Narrow vision of quality.....	159

6.5.1.b Hierarchy of learning .....	160
6.5.1.c. Narrow and utilitarian vision focused on outcomes .....	160
6.5.1.d. Silences and gaps .....	161
<b>Chapter 7 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>7.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>7.2. Summary and discussion of my research findings .....</b>	<b>162</b>
7.2.1. How SDG4 was formed: summary of findings of RQ1 .....	163
7.2.2. How quality education is conceptualised in SDG4: summary of findings from RQ2 .....	164
<b>7.3. Synthesis of my research findings.....</b>	<b>165</b>
7.3.1. Policy continuity and change. ....	166
7.3.2. Policy making is an elite domain .....	167
7.3.3. A narrow learning agenda.....	168
7.3.4. Organisational and person alliances intersect with ideology in the policy process.....	168
7.3.5 The power of globalised policy discourse .....	169
7.3.6. Summary of this section.....	170
<b>7.4. Implications of my research for policy and practice.....</b>	<b>171</b>
7.4.1. Defend the holistic vision, rights-based vision of SDG4 set out in the goal.....	171
<b>7.4.2 Speed up and add to changes on global indicators .....</b>	<b>171</b>
7.4.3. Create public awareness and engagement in national SDG4 processes. ....	171
7.4.4. Prioritise and track domestic spending and ODA to marginalised groups for the achievement of SDG4 .....	172
<b>7.5. Recommendations for future research .....</b>	<b>172</b>
7.5.1 Research national level policy makers engaged in the formulation of SDG4 .....	173
7.5.2. Track how SDG4 is translated into national policy and priorities and implementation plans in relation to targets on learning 4.1 and 4.7 .....	173
7.5.3. Conduct research with children and youth, particularly marginalised groups, such as the poorest rural girls, youth with disabilities, children and youth in contexts of conflict and crisis, and/or refugees, to see how if at all SDG4 commitments have had any material impact on their enjoyment of the right to quality education.....	173
7.5.5. Study other SDG global policy processes and/or compare translation and prioritisation at the national level .....	174
<b>7.6. Contribution to knowledge .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Reflections on research journey.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>177</b>

<b><i>Appendices</i></b> .....	<b>202</b>
Appendix A: Interview Schedule (semi-structure interview questions).....	202
Appendix B: Interview Cover letter and Information Sheet .....	205
Appendix C: Interviewee Consent Form .....	212
Appendix D: Summary of MyWorld Survey results .....	213
Appendix E: High Level Panel illustrative goal on education.....	214
Appendix F: SDG4 text in full .....	214

## List of Tables

Table 1: Interviewee sample profiles .....	65
Table 2: Data set used for specific research questions .....	73

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework .....	55
Figure 2: Timeline mapping key moments and influences on SDG4's formulation .....	86

## List of Abbreviations

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CERD – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSOs – Civil Society Organisations

EFA – Education for All

GCE – Global Campaign for Education

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GEFI – Global Education First Initiative

GPE – Global Partnership for Education

HLP – UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

ODA – Overseas Development Assistance

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OWG – Open Working Group

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SDG4 – Sustainable Development Goal 4

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 70/1 entitled ‘*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*’ (UN, 2015 – hereafter referred to as the 2030 agenda). Described as “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” (UN, 2015, preamble), it covers three dimensions of sustainable development: the social, economic and environmental. In total, the 2030 agenda has 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) which range from ending poverty and hunger to achieving gender equality, protecting ecosystems, and promoting peaceful societies (cf. Ibid for full list).<sup>1</sup> Education is the fourth of 17 goals and is known as SDG4.<sup>2</sup>

While not legally binding, the SDGs represent a common political commitment and establish a normative policy framework for all nation states.<sup>3</sup> As part of the wider 2030 agenda, SDG4 is intended to shape education priorities across all UN Member States and as such has the potential to affect the lives of hundreds of millions of people globally. Establishing shared priorities for education and committing UN Member States to “[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030, it is also intended to contribute toward the achievement of the 2030 agenda more broadly. The research presented in this thesis examines the processes that shaped SDG4’s formulation and provides a critical reading of its goal and

---

1 In addition to the 17 goals there are a 169 SDG targets and 244 global SDG indicators, however, nine indicators repeat under two or three different targets, which make actual number of individual indicators as 232 (see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>). In addition to the global indicators, thematic and national indicators have also been developed for each target.

2 Although often written as ‘SDG 4’, in my thesis I write it as ‘SDG4’ for stylistic reasons and to limit word count.

3 International human rights law sets legal obligations which States are bound to respect, the SDGs themselves do not carry the same legal obligations, they instead represent a shared and common political commitment that creates a global norm for education policy objectives, thus acting as a normative framework.

targets, in particular unpacking quality and learning in the policy formulation and content of SDG4.

As a global policy agenda for education, SDG4 has enormous significance for the educational experience of children and young people worldwide, as well as for adults. For example, children aged 3 or 4 in 2016 (the first year of SDGs implementation period) will be 17 or 18 in 2030 (the last year of the SDG period of implementation): this cohort of children could have completed a full cycle of formal education from pre-primary through to upper secondary education during these 15 years. The knowledge, skills and values education can bring, the experiences in the classroom and school, play a fundamental part in shaping individuals, their interaction with their communities and their engagement with wider society. SDG4's successes or failures will also have a profound impact on the trajectories of the lives of the millions of children who are at risk of never setting foot in a classroom, or of dropping out before completing a full cycle. Additionally, SDG4 has the potential to impact adults through the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities.

Given the significant impact that access to and completion of quality education - or the lack thereof - can have on individual lives, communities and national development, an analysis of the discourses that informed the SDG4 policy framework is vital. The intention of this research is to untangle the complex interplay of global discourses and ideological influences to determine how the text of SDG4 was constructed; who had a voice; what, if any, were the conflicting visions for the goal and its targets and how did these play out in the final text.

SDG4 is in its infancy and this research - undertaken during the final stages of formulation, adoption and early implementation - provides some of the first literature to look in-depth at key moments and forces which shaped its formulation.<sup>4</sup> It offers insights into the dynamics of global policy processes and shines a light on the discourses

---

<sup>4</sup> This research does not look at SDG4s actual implementation, which is something for future research, it does however explore and highlight its implications.

which shaped both those processes and the final text of SDG4, providing an important interrogation of the assumptions and values that underpinned SDG4's development.

I was motivated to undertake this research by a belief in the transformative potential of education. As a professional in the field of education engaged in policy advocacy, rights and social justice, I was keen to understand the ideas and values SDG4 reflects and prioritises - as well as its potential for developing a transformative vision of global education. I have worked in the field of education for more than 20 years. The first part of my career in education was spent as a teacher and an adult educator. My belief that education can be empowering and transformative grew from my experience as a newly qualified teacher working with young people with special education needs. Witnessing how inclusive education and a participatory pedagogy provided everyday successes that gave these young people increased confidence.

I was also influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire, whose work I became increasingly familiar with while working on an adult education project in the early years of my career. In 2000 I moved with my children and spent a year living in Mexico and Central America, where I worked and studied with members of Alforja,<sup>5</sup> a regional popular education network. During that time and in subsequent years I participated in many popular education community training programmes. It was inspirational to watch how these popular education programmes supported individual and collective empowerment and supported action for progressive social change.

I later brought those ideas into my work at Amnesty International, where I led the global human rights education team. Later, my career became more focused on education policy and advocacy, working for Save the Children on their global *Rewrite the Future* campaign on the right to education for children living in conflict affected and fragile states. I maintained my interest in transformative education, co-authoring to two

---

<sup>5</sup> *La Red Alforja* is a Central American and Mexican regional popular education network established in the 1980's, based on the philosophy and practice of Paulo Freire, with the aim of strengthening social movements. For more information see: creating a in the <http://redalforja.org.gt/>



publications with academics at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex University on transformative education.

Transformative education for me is an education that stresses contextualised, participatory processes, that enables children, youth and adults to recognise and question inequity and injustice and break down barriers and discrimination. It is about creating democratic spaces and is *“concerned with issues of power, requires a rethinking of the dynamics and practices in the classroom, expanding participation so that learning becomes a dialogical process, rather than students adopting an attitude and habit of passive powerlessness in the classroom.”* (Bivens, Moriarty and Taylor, 2009, p. 100). Transformative quality education is learner centred and participatory, encourages critical analysis and promotes equity and rights to , in and through education.

Between 2011 and 2013, while working at UNESCO, I engaged in discussions on the framing of the third priority of the UN Secretary General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) on global citizenship (UNESCO, 2012). As the debates on what would succeed EFA and the MDGs got underway I became increasingly interested in the future (post-2015) education framework. I was keen to understand what forces and factors might influence any future global education agenda, including what ideas and assumptions it would reflect and prioritise. I was interested in understanding if it would promote a transformative vision of education. Initially, I intended to focus my doctorate on global citizenship, and this is reflected in Critical Analytical Study (CAS) , which is part of this doctoral programme. During researching and writing my CAS (Moriarty, 2014) I became increasingly interested in and focused on policy processes, including the globalisation of education policy. This interest ultimately led me to focus on the policy process by which SDG4 was formulated, and the vision of education SDG4 presents and whether or not this is transformative.

## 1.2 Research Questions

This research aims to understand the process of SDG4's development and to critically interrogate the meanings and assumptions reflected in the final text. Through this research I aim to address the dynamics of education policy formulation at a global level and shed light on the ideas and assumptions that shaped its evolution and informed its final content.

My overarching research question asks: what influences and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and do they support a transformative vision of global education?

My first (sub-)research question (RQ1) asks **how was SDG4 formed?** Through this question I aim to understand the processes that shaped SDG4's formulation: what the key moments in its development were; who was involved and what influence the different actors had in shaping the final vision of SDG4; and what underlying discourses about education and its contribution to development led policy makers to formulate SDG4 in its current format.

Through this question the research aims to identify insights into the specific dynamics of SDG4's formulation and analyse global education policy processes.

My second (sub-)research question (RQ2) asks **how is quality education conceptualised in SDG4?** This question is intended to uncover the theories of education reflected in the final text of SDG4, and I do this through deconstructing the meanings ascribed to key concepts such as quality, learning, equity and inclusion, and interrogating how the global indicators - designed as a common standard to show progress on SDG4 - interact and re-shape the meaning of targets and the goal.

Through this question the research aims to deconstruct the ideas and assumptions reflected in the content of SG4 and analyse if and how globalised discourses have shaped the final text.

These research questions are interconnected, and the division between them is neither absolute nor always clearly delineable in this research. This intersection reflects the

dynamic and discursive interaction between policy process and policy text. In deconstructing the process and text in tandem, this research points to how the concept of quality education and learning is narrowed and reduced in instrumental ways by the final text, and the fluid intertextual nature of policy that can be re-shaped even after its finalisation. It demonstrates how SDG4 reduces the importance of pedagogy in the notion of education quality and promotes quantitative measures which are axiomatically assumed to measure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. Taken as whole, this research considers the extent to which SDG4 develops a truly transformative vision of education, and to what extent it is limited by the parameters of a particular social imaginary of education and development.

### 1.3 Methodological approach

This research was informed by existing literature (as discussed in chapter 3), particularly literature on policy and policy development and the global discourses which inform it (Rizvi, 2006; Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, 2012; Ball, 2012). This literature provided a grounding from which to question and analyse how global education policy is shaped by the political, social and economic context of its development (Ball, 1997; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Additionally, literature on quality and learning offered a basis to discuss the tensions over these key concepts that arose during the process of SDG4's formulation; to understand how different traditions within education define quality (UNESCO, 2005; Tikly and Barrett (Eds.), 2013) and to question how meaning is implied to these concepts in the final SDG4 text. This provides a basis to question the potential contribution of SDG4 to the 2030 transformative vision of sustainable development.

The methodological approach to this research is shaped by my understanding of the world (ontology) and what can be known (epistemology), as well values and beliefs I hold (axiology). While I accept that a "real" (or objective) world exists outside of our experience, it is my view that we can only interpret it within our own "categories of knowing" (Elkind, 2005, p. 328). In other words, knowledge of the world is socially and historically constructed (Kincheloe, 2005). My research follows a critical constructivist approach.

Located within a critical constructivist perspective, the research is designed to critically examine the foundational views and beliefs influencing the global SDG4 policy. This requires an in-depth analysis of key texts and a behind-the-scenes understanding of the dynamics of policy formulation (see chapter 4 for a full discussion on methodology). I adopted a qualitative approach that draws both on analysis of key documents and on semi-structured interviews with ‘policy elites’ as my methods of data collection. I use the term ‘elites’ “loosely defined as those with close proximity to power or policymaking” (Lilleker, 2003, p. 207) and/or those who have specialised knowledge and valuable policy information (Logan, Sumsion and Press, 2014). Data from interviews provided insights into behind-the-scenes political manoeuvring and discussions and, combined with document analysis, facilitated a deeper interrogation of the SDG4 final text and policy formulation and the ideas and meanings that shaped it.

In deconstructing SDG4 this research shows how the consensus reflected in the overarching goal is weakened at the level of the targets. It points to the narrowing of the concepts of quality education and learning, indicating how they are reduced in instrumental ways.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis has 7 chapters, which are structured as follows:

**Chapter 1** (this current chapter) introduces the research, providing a short background and rationale, a summary of the methodology that guided the research and my research questions.

**Chapter 2:** establishes the context in which SDG4 was developed and its significance for SDG4’s formulation and scope.

**Chapter 3:** provides a review of literature to locate the research within an existing body of knowledge on education policy and global discourses, as well as key education concepts used within the SDG4 text. It also considers how dominant discourses shape

the social imaginary of policy makers. It briefly outlines the conceptual framework of the research.

**Chapter 4:** explains the methodological approach of my research. It includes discussions about data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and my positionality as a researcher.

**Chapter 5:** presents the findings of my research in relation to my first research question (RQ1), on the formulation of SDG4. It draws on policy texts and interview data to trace the most significant moments and influences on SDG4's formulation.

**Chapter 6:** presents the findings of my research in relation to my second research question (RQ2) on how education is conceptualised in SDG4. It explores the meanings of key concepts and the implications for achieving the holistic vision of SDG4's goal. It also highlights how policy texts are not closed and complete, shining a light on how SDG4 is being re-shaped globally after its adoption.

**Chapter 7:** Provides a synthesis of my findings and conclusion to my research. It sums up the key findings of my research, sets out my contribution to this field of study and makes recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

## Chapter 2: The Context of SDG4's Development

This chapter situates SDG4's formulation within its broader social, political and economic context. It also considers the implications of SDG4's location within the wider 2030 agenda (section 2.1), takes stock of the influence on SDG4 of preceding global frameworks (section 2.2) and reflects briefly on the shifting global context of multilateralism (section 2.3).

### 2.1. The 2030 agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed to effect ambitious change for both people and planet, based on the challenges facing the world in the twenty-first century. These challenges are reflected in the choice of the SDG goals and respective targets. The 2030 agenda notes that billions of people continue to live in poverty, with rising inequalities within and between countries, enormous disparities of wealth and power, a lack of gender equality, humanitarian crisis and displacement, global health threats, environmental degradation and climate change, and many other challenges besides (cf. UN, 2015, p. 4, paragraph 14). The 2030 agenda promises "more peaceful and inclusive societies" (ibid, paragraph 17), and makes repeated commitments to human rights. It is within this vision of a sustainable future, described as "a supremely ambitious and transformational vision" (ibid), that SDG4 is located.

The 2030 agenda is comprised of 17 goals and 169 respective targets and has over 200 global indicators to track its progress. As one of 17 goals, SDG4 is not an isolated endeavour and ultimately its goal and targets cannot be separated from the ambition of the wider agenda. Education is mentioned seven times in the opening text of the 2030 agenda and is also referenced in the targets of other goals, including health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change. The 2030 agenda requires attention to the interconnections between goals, which includes the

potential for education to contribute to other goals and the agenda as a whole. There is substantial evidence to show that education can function as an important catalyst for a broad set of indicators (cf. UNESCO 2014a), and it has been argued that it is central to the realisation of the other SDGs (Educate A Child, 2016).

The Education 2030 Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2015a) posits that it underpins the entire sustainable development agenda:

*Education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs. Recognizing the important role of education, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights education as a stand-alone goal (SDG 4) and also includes targets on education under several other SDGs [ . . . ] education can accelerate progress towards the achievement of all of the SDGs and therefore should be part of the strategies to achieve each of them. (ibid, p. 24).*

This suggests the need for a transformative global education policy framework, one that reflects the wider ambitions of the 2030 agenda of equity, peace and human rights.

While the potential for SDG4 to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the 2030 agenda is an important consideration in the analysis of SDG4, it is also important to acknowledge that education is not a panacea for all of the challenges that the agenda outlines. Just as education can impact on the achievement of other goals, other goals will equally determine progress in education. For example, adequate nutrition is an important component of early childhood development: malnutrition can lead to stunting and impair cognitive development, which in turn can impact on a child's ability to learn (Zubairi and Rose, 2017). Violence and conflict are common causes of 'toxic stress' - the result of heightened and prolonged levels of the stress hormone cortisol - which can alter the brain, limiting cognitive and socioemotional development (Shonkoff and Garner, 2012) and reducing the ability to learn. These examples show how achievement in other goals, such as ending hunger (SDG2), health and wellbeing (SDG3), as well as SDG16 which (among other things) calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, can impact on education.

The analysis in this thesis takes into account SDG4's location within the wider development agenda and how this impacted SDG4's formulation (see chapter 5), and its implications for SDG4's potential contribution to sustainable development (see chapter 6). I do not consider in any detail the interactions between the goals as it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## 2.2. Global Frameworks for Education: the antecedents of SDG4

The 2030 agenda continues a global focus on development, articulated most clearly with the United Nations General Assembly adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development (UN, 1986). This resolution declared development as an inalienable human right for which *“states have the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development”* (Ibid, Article 2) and, furthermore, that *“states have the duty to take steps, individually and collectively, to formulate international development policies with a view to facilitating the full realization of the right to development.”* (Ibid, Article 4). The development of the 2030 agenda reflects a UN context where global goal setting is the norm, driven by a theory of change whereby globally-agreed goals are seen as motivating governments and other stakeholders to effect change. Between 1960–2000 alone, the UN developed more than 50 different goals that include education (Jolly, 2010). The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals in 2000 arguably marked a significant turning point in international development and education, setting a new regime of goals, target and indicators intended to galvanise political will and financial support for the attainment of agreed goals. The UN Secretary General's *Global Education First Initiative* (GEFI) (which bridged pre and post-2015) was also influential on SDG4's formulation, although to a much lesser extent than the MDGs or EFA. It signalled that education was viewed as valuable at the highest level of the UN: just as the Rio+20 led to the suggestion to combine the social, economic and environmental aspects of development, GEFI platformed the environmental and citizenship aspects of education.



The formulation of SDG4 is shaped by the context of these previous global frameworks. Below, I consider how two previous global policy frameworks, with an education focus - the MDGs and EFA - impacted on the formulation of SDG4. Firstly, I consider how the existence of international human rights treaties, specifically those which establish the right to education, have impacted on SDG4.

### *2.2.1. The Right to Education and SDG4*

The development of SDG4 must be seen in the context of international human rights - most importantly, the right to education.

The right to education was first articulated in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which declared “[e]veryone has the right to education”, and that education “*be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*” (Article 26, UDHR, UN, 1948). The right to education is reiterated in numerous other human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), both of which made it a legally binding obligation (for those States that have signed and ratified these treaties). The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008), also confer obligations on States with regard to education, reinforcing the core human rights principle of non-discrimination for education. Every Nation State has a legal commitment to provide free, quality, inclusive education, as a result of the ratification of one or more international human rights treaties (Aubry and Dorsi, 2016). It is within this context of human rights treaties that SDG4 was formulated.

Human rights treaties bring pre-existing legally binding obligations on States to protect, respect, and fulfil the right to education, which undoubtedly influence the formulation of SDG4. The 2030 agenda claims to be “*guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for international law. It is grounded*

*in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties*” (UN, 2015, p. 4, paragraph 10), and the discourse is also a strong theme in SDG4’s formulation, although the right to education is not explicitly expressed in the text of SDG4 itself.

The influence of the right to education is arguably evidenced in the commitment to ensuring free primary and secondary education that mirrors existing State obligations on the right to education (see chapter 6). The impact of rights is also seen in debates on quality and learning during SDG4’s formulation. The Education 2030 Framework for Action also makes strong references to the right to education (UNESCO, 2015a) for the implementation of SDG4.

### 2.2.2 *The MDGs and SDG4*

The MDGs are the equivalent global development agenda to the SDGs, and the 2030 agenda makes clear *“[w]e will also build upon the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and seek to address their unfinished business”* (UN 2015, p.3). The MDGs (and EFA discussed below) form an important part of the historical context of the SDGs. This section gives a brief overview of how they shape SDG4.

At the start of this century, the Millennium Declaration called for globalisation to be a positive force for everyone in the world, rather than its benefits being unevenly shared (UN, 2000). From the Millennium Declaration, eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formed (UN, 2001; cf. Vandemoortele, 2011). The substantive changes outlined in the MDGs were aimed at developing countries, to be achieved by 2015. According to Vandemoortele (2011), the aim of the MDGs was to align national priorities within the MDG framework, in order to foster human wellbeing.

Education was a standalone goal in the MDGs and MDG2 called for the achievement of universal primary education with a target to *‘[e]nsure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling’*. MDG3, which focused on gender equality and women’s empowerment,

included an education target to *‘[e]liminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015’* (UN 2001). As the MDGs were the main global development agenda, these goals and targets drove government and international action on education (Lewin, 2015).

There are a number of salient criticisms that point to the limitations of the MDG agenda. Firstly, the MDG agenda has a narrow conception of poverty, focusing mainly on the reduction of poverty (Carant 2017; Fukuda-Parr 2016) and failing to see it in relation to inequality. In not foregrounding inequality, the MDG agenda focused primarily on countries in the Global South and was perceived as an agenda that was not applicable to all countries. This has changed in the 2030 agenda - which is a universal agenda - and, while the eradication of poverty remains a key priority, there is a shift from development as poverty reduction to development based on equity. In the 2030 agenda there is a strong focus on equity and a commitment that “no one will be left behind” (UN, 2015, preamble).

Secondly, while the data attests to the utility of specific goals it also points to the failure to sufficiently engage with the complex relationship between goals. It has been argued that the eight MDGs were often treated as eight individual goals, with little attention given to the interactions between them and how efforts to achieve one could influence others (cf. Evans and Steven 2012).

Thirdly, in relation to education the MDG goal was narrow, focusing only on access to primary education (although the targets of MDG3 did explicitly mention secondary and called for an elimination of gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015). The narrow focus on access of the MDG education goal resulted in policy attention and funding being targeted on increasing access at primary level, at the expense of the broader education agenda (Lewin, 2015).

Fourthly, the narrow focus of the MDGs on access at primary level ignored quality, and arguably contributed to a learning crisis identified by UNESCO in 2013 (UNESCO, 2013a). The identification of the ‘learning crisis’ sharpened debates during SDG4’s

formulation, leading to a call for learning to be the focus of the post-2015 education agenda. On one hand, it can be argued that the call for a post-2015 education goal on learning was intended to move away from an over-emphasis on access towards a focus on quality. On the other hand, a 'learning goal' was viewed with suspicion by some who believed it risked reducing quality (discussed in chapter 5 and 6). Additionally, there was a concern that shifting towards learning also risked access being ignored, which is problematic given the large number of children still out of school (see below).

### *2.2.3 EFA and SDG4*

As the wider 2030 agenda makes clear, the SDGs are considered a continuation of the unfinished business of the MDGs. SDG4 can equally be argued as continuing the unfinished business of EFA, which had an influence on the process and final text of SDG4.

A few months prior to the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in September 2000, another global framework - this time focused exclusively on education - was adopted. The Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 2000), built on the earlier World Declaration on Education for All made in Jomtien, in 1990 (UNESCO, 1990). EFA set out six goals spanning all levels of education to be achieved by 2015 (cf. UNESCO, 2000). It is clear that EFA goals had a strong influence on the SDG4, as the texts have many similarities. The EFA goals, however, did not have equivalence with the MDGs and as such it has been argued that governments prioritised MDG2.

Given the debate over learning that shaped SDG4's formulation (see chapter 5), it is notable that learning is also a focus of the EFA, in which learning is framed as "learning needs", "appropriate learning" and "measurable learning outcomes". In SDG4 learning is coupled with "lifelong learning", "effective learning outcomes" and "safe, non-violence, inclusive and effective learning environments". The word 'quality' is used three times in the MDG and EFA goals (combined) and four times in SDG4. That said, 'quality' is a good example of how one word can prompt different understandings. Historically there has been an ideological divide in conceptions of quality, with the

UNESCO (2005) highlighting two broad schools of thought: *“the first identifies learners’ cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. The second emphasizes education’s role in promoting [the] values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development”* (UNESCO 2005, p. 15). This diversity of understanding is evidenced in the formulation of SDG4. I highlight these differing interpretations to illustrate the complex and often-contested meanings assigned to words within education policy texts and will return to this later (see chapters 3 and 6).

UNESCO and UNICEF (2013) argued that MDGs and the EFA goals *“provided strategic direction to educational planning and budgeting; [were] important to monitor progress; and have encouraged focused and sustained support from development partners”* (ibid, p. 7). However, the simultaneous existence of both the education MDGs and EFA goals resulted in a dual education architecture with rival planning processes, rival organisational commitment and rival organisational processes. This arguably led to fragmentation, a lack of coordination and undue parallel demands made on national government by international organisations. It can be argued that these two processes may have diluted the education agenda rather than magnified it. This becomes an important focus for debate in the SDG4 formulation, with a consistent push for a single global agenda for education, especially within the first pathway (see chapter 5).

While the MDGs and EFA catalysed progress, no single area of either target was fully realised (cf. UNESCO, 2015b) and notably SDG4 was developed in a context where millions of children are denied their right to education, with 264 million out of school in 2015, (ibid).<sup>6</sup> Just before the adoption of SDG4, UNESCO *“projected that across low and middle-income countries, the lower secondary completion rate will be 76% in 2030, while a rate of 95% will only be achieved in the 2080s.”* (UNESCO, 2015c, p. 3). What is more, in the period that SDG4 was being developed, despite the two existing global frameworks with education goals (MDGs and EFA), overseas development assistance (ODA) to education stagnated (cf. UNESCO 2015a; UNESCO, 2017). At the same time

---

<sup>6</sup> The latest figures show a decline in number of children out of school, now 263 (UIS, 2018).

the growth of private sector engagement in education was increasing (UN OHCHR, 2015).

#### *2.2.4 The wider context beyond the global goals*

In a blog marking the transition to SDG4, Cream Wright, former UNICEF Global Chief of Education, made an important observation. “ *Those who do not learn from the past repeat the mistakes of history. A similar saying in some African languages translates as: if you are unsure of where you are going to, be certain of where you are coming from. As we ponder a post-2015 agenda, and look back to what we’ve learnt since Dakar [ . . . ]*” (Wright, 2015). His words are a reminder that the past shapes the future.

In the preceding sections I have considered the legacies of the MDGs and EFA on the development of SDG4. Just as SDG4 was shaped by the MDGs and EFA, these global goals and SDG4 were also shaped by the wider geo-political context. Education and education policy, as discussed in the next chapter and throughout this thesis, are shaped by and shape wider society. This section provides a short review of globally significant factors and events that, directly or indirectly, have shaped education globally from 1990 – the first EFA declaration - until the SDGs were adopted.

At the time of the Jomtien Declaration, progress on education was slow and uneven. At primary level there were almost as many children out of school than in school in some regions, especially girls. In South Asia, for example, there were 39.4 million girls in school (net enrolment) and 38.8 girls out of school; in Sub-Saharan Africa 25.2 million girls were enrolled in primary school (net) and 25.9 were out of school (UNESCO and UNICEF, 1993). The slowing rates of enrolments in the 80’s was a motivating factor in the coming together of governments, the UN and civil society in Jomtien, and the drive for action on education (Osttveit, 2000)

At the time of the ‘*World Declaration on Education for All*’ in 1990, the world was witness to a massive geopolitical shift. A thawing of the cold war tensions -

from ‘*perestroika*’ beginning in the 80’s to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 - marked a new era of citizens’ action and the end of old structures. Peace accords were bringing to an end the bloody wars in Central America. The official end of Apartheid in South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994 strengthened a view that old world orders were shifting, promising change and offering hope to many. However, it should not be forgotten that at the same time conflict, persecution and genocide were affecting millions of people on the basis of race and ethnicity, including Muslim communities in the former Yugoslavia and Tutsi’s in Rwanda. Liberia and the DRC, among others, also witnessed brutal civil wars. While children in these countries faced the most horrendous circumstances and any progress in education was reserved by conflict and the trauma experienced by children and their communities, Jomtien also marked the beginning of a new era for education. A midterm review of EFA post- Jomtien showed progress overall, with 50 million more children in school than in 1990. However, conflict, poverty and discrimination continued to destroy the opportunity and hope of education for millions of children and youth in spite of the early EFA commitments. In countries such as Sierra Leon, the devastating civil war that raged through the 1990’s “took the nation’s education system as an early casualty, wiping out 1,270 primary schools and forcing 67 percent of all-school aged children out of school in the year 2001” (Ozisik, 2015). Overall,

*millions of people remain untouched by the optimism of Jomtien and that much of its promise remains unfulfilled. Education may be high on the rhetorical agendas of governments, but all too many commitments remain unmet. There are too few early childhood care programmes in developing countries, and in all too many countries poorly qualified teachers are still working for low pay amid deteriorated infrastructures (Osttveit, 2000, p. 98-99).*

The impact of conflict and displacement as a result of disasters remains a major barrier to education (see further discussion at the end of this section).

Throughout the 1990’s and the early 2000’s, approaches to development were beginning to shift, set in motion by the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993.

This encouraged all UN activities to focus on the promotion and protection of human rights, and what became known as a human rights-based approach gained momentum. It shifted the notion of development away from being seen as charitable endeavours with passive recipients to a vision of development within the framework of rights-holders claiming that duty-bearers meet their obligations.

By 2000, when the 6 EFA goals and the MDGs were adopted, the global education reality was one where millions of children were still denied their right to education. While the structures first put in place under the auspices of UNESCO for coordinating EFA after Jomtien remained and were strengthened, a notable change had begun for education, with civil society exercising their voice much more effectively for the right to education. In 1999, a small group of individuals representing a number of International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) came together to form the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). GCE was a civil society coalition actively campaigning for children's right to education, and it would become a significant force in the EFA movement. GCE raised concerns about the crisis facing education that -according to one of its founders - the UN system seemed in denial over, responding *"Crisis? What crisis?" Yet despite the promises made a decade earlier in Jomtien, over 100 million children were not in school and there were major concerns about quality and equity.*" (Archer, 2015).

An evaluation of the impact of civil society (including but not limited to GCE) on EFA found that the *"engagement of civil society, in all its diversity, has been a central part of the story of EFA. It has transformed the EFA "initiative" and agenda into an EFA movement which, without civil society, would not exist."* (UNESCO, 2015d).<sup>7</sup> While civil society advocacy helped move the agenda on education, major global events also impacted it. With the Cold War fading into the past, a new global war was about to begin that would often blur the lines between development and security.

The year following the adoption of EFA and the Millennium Declaration, the United States of America - a leading actor and donor of overseas development aid - was subject

---

<sup>7</sup> I am the author of this study.



to a major terrorist attack. The attacks of 9/11 that left almost 3000 people dead sent shockwaves through American society and the world. The administration of President George W. Bush determined to seek retribution and responded with what became known as the 'War on Terror'. The result for international development is described by Green (2008) as profound and disastrous. Green (ibid) goes on to argue that the resulting 'War on Terror' eroded human rights in its efforts to vanquish those seen as enemies. However, Green (ibid) argues that it failed to address the political, social and economic drivers of conflict, noting that *"since 2001, terrorism has become a justification for seeking military solutions to problems that are more than military in nature, and poor people are paying a terrible price"* (ibid, p. 402). For education, the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror' created multiple long-term consequences. Afghanistan and Iraq were among the countries that felt its immediate and long-term impacts. In the short term both countries, already plagued by history of conflict and dictatorship, became the focused on sustained military operations by the US and its allied forces. The impact was not only the suffering and destruction that conflict causes but also an erosion of the trust in development actors.

Novelli (2010) offers a very useful exposition of the crossover of donor governments' security agendas with development and changing aid flows, as well as on the risk faced by humanitarian actors to undertake their work safely, in a climate where they were often perceived as part of the security operation. Rather than limit aid flows, the War on Terror saw an increase in aid directed at the countries against which it was being waged. Novelli (ibid) notes that *"[i]n 2006 Iraq and Afghanistan accounted for over 60% of all aid to severely conflict-affected countries"* (ibid, p. 454). Other analysis of aid to education for conflict-affected countries shows that during this period Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan were the 3 largest recipients of aid from the United States (Save the Children, 2008)<sup>8</sup>. Duffield (2002, cited in Novelli, 2010) argues that the promotion of development served a security function - a point illustrated by Novelli (ibid) with a direct quote from the then US Secretary of State, Colin Powell: *"[ . . . ] we have the best relationship with the NGOs who are such a force multiplier for us, such and important*

---

<sup>8</sup> I was a contributing author of the Save the Children research.

*part of our combat team”* (ibid, p. 456). The real or perceived linkages between the work of NGOs as part of the security apparatus (which praised NGOs) led to a mistrust of humanitarian workers, including those working in education, and in some cases resulted in insurgents’ targeting of aid workers - as well as the targeting of schools, teachers and students - that continues even today.

While global access to education increased and the financing of education grew (albeit not fast enough) in the 2000’s, another major shock was to slow progress before the end of the decade. The 2008 financial crisis led to a major global recession and reactive austerity measures, with worldwide consequences. Some countries, such as France and Italy, reduced overall levels of aid, and even when countries pledged to maintain aid spending, it was actually worth less due to currency depreciation (Kharas, 2009). For education, the crisis risked the stagnation or rolling back of progress made in enrolment, completion and gender parity (UNESCO, 2010). It was argued that:

*Such an outcome would be indefensible. Children living in the urban slums and rural villages of the world’s poorest countries played no part in the reckless banking practices and regulatory failures that caused the economic crisis. Yet they stand to suffer for the gambling that took place on Wall Street and other financial centres by losing their chance for an education that could lift them out of poverty. (Ibid, p. 19)*

While organisations such as UNESCO along with some donors - including the UK (Velde and Massa (2009), - sought to mitigate the impact on education, UNESCO’s fears were realised. In a 2014 paper, UNESCO highlighted how progress on education had stagnated from 2007 onwards, despite the pledges made on EFA in Dakar (UNESCO, 2014b). The most significant slowdown was seen in sub-Saharan Africa, with the region’s share of out of school children increasing to half of the world’s total out of school children in years 2007 to 2012 (ibid). Data also showed that between 2011 and 2013 the number of children out-of-school globally actually increased, with 124 million out of school at the end of 2013, compared to 122 in 2011 (UNESCO, 2015b). This stagnation and reversal in progress correlates with the financial crisis and its aftermath, and is clearly shown in levels of aid to education. UNESCO (2016a) noted that “[after rising rapidly in the 2000s, aid levels stalled in 2010 as a result of the financial crisis in

*high income countries, and have barely budged since then”* (Ibid, p.1). It was only in 2017 that education grew again for the first time in years (UNESCO, 2018a).

This thesis does not consider SDG4 policy processes or the final text in relation to conflict and crisis, but both conflict and natural disasters remain significant barriers to education that require attention.<sup>9</sup> In the run up to the adoption of SDG4 and since that point, the impact of conflict and crisis continue to slow and also reverse progress on education. Among the most highly publicised is the war in Syria and the related displacement crisis. Millions are missing out on their education, with little hope of an end in sight, and the children of Syria are not alone in this. Globally, an estimated 75 million children have their education disrupted by conflict or other crises every year. A recent report estimates that unless urgent action is taken to address the impact of conflict and violence on education by 2030, three-quarters of children living in countries affected by chronic community violence and conflict will not be on track to achieve the basics in learning (Theirworld, 2018).<sup>10</sup>

While the MDGs and EFA did drive progress on education, other significant geopolitical factors created barriers and led unwelcome consequences for education. As discussed above, when SDG4 was adopted in 2015, 264 million children remained out of school and millions more were not learning the basics - with poverty, discrimination and conflict being major factors in an overall lack of progress. This was the global context for education in which SDG4 global policy formulation (see chapter 5) took place.

#### *2.2.4. Summary of this section*

In this section I have sought to contextualise SDG4 with reference to past global policy agreements, such as the MDGs and EFA, and the right to education. As Bell and Stevenson (2006) suggest, it is important *“to understand how the policy may relate to*

---

<sup>9</sup> I made a decision to not focus on conflict and crisis in a detailed way because to do so in a meaningful way would have shifted the focus on the thesis. However, analysis of SDG4 from a conflict and crisis perspective is necessary and something to be considered for future research.

<sup>10</sup> I was a researcher and co-author of this report.

*previous policy experience – to what extent does it build on, or break with, previous policy?” (Ibid, p. 12).*

Throughout this thesis, it will become apparent that the MDGs and EFA are significant influences in the context of SDG4’s formulation and also in the debates and divisions on the scope of the final text of SDG4. Human rights are also evoked throughout the policy processes and in the text of the wider 2030 agenda and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA – UNESCO, 2015a), although they are not referenced in the actual text of SDG4.

## 2.3 Changing Global Context

A final issue regarding the context of the SDG4 (and other SDGs) was that it occurred at a time when the international ‘rules-based order’ – a shared commitment by countries to respect international law, e.g. asylum and immigration protocols, global agreements, climate change – was (ostensibly) respected as an important global condition. Today, this is less apparent: for example, the US administration has pulled out of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, and some European States are reluctant to fulfil their duties to asylum seekers and refugees. The context in which the 2030 agenda and SDG4 were developed is shifting. While there is currently no suggestion that the SDGs should be overturned, the climate for such multilateral policy frameworks is less secure. How this will play out is yet to be seen.

In the next chapter, I review a range of literature to help situate my research within an existing body of knowledge.

## Chapter 3: Literature review

In this chapter, I present a discussion of relevant literature in order to provide an understanding of the theoretical framework that guides my research. The literature review is determined by my main research question: what influences and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and do they support a transformative vision of global education?

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the concept of education and perceptions of its role in society in section 3.1. Section 3.2. provides a discussion of literature relating to education policy, considering key concerns for education policy analysis, the context of policy formulation, and the globalisation of education policy. Section 3.3. reviews literature relating to key education concepts central to my research including quality, learning and measuring progress in education. Section 3.4 provides a short summary of the chapter and an overview of the theoretical framework that guides my research.

### 3.1. Education: shaping citizens (for a sustainable future)

In the opening declaration of the 2030 agenda there is a pledge “*to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility.*” (UN, 2015, p.10, paragraph 36). This pledge is part of the vision of the whole agenda, and its constituent goals, which SDG4 has a unique potential to support. Education constructs knowledge, understanding and values to learners that reflect beliefs about society and ourselves as the citizens.

Education is frequently described as a common social good recognised as playing an important role in society and in fostering sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015f). As discussed in the previous chapter, SDG4 is considered a catalyst that underpins the wider 2030 agenda (UNESCO, 2015a). Education, however, is not neutral: it exists within a particular social, political and economic context and is a key site through which social, political and economic norms are constructed and maintained.

Although the benefits of education are well evidenced (UNESCO, 2014a), there is also ample evidence that many groups are marginalised from those benefits. Among these are children with disabilities, ethnic minority groups and girls. Family income remains one of the most significant indicators of education enrolment and completion as “[p]overty continues to be the largest determinant of education deprivation and inequality” (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 73). Even in high-income countries where there is universal primary and secondary education, learning inequalities based on income begin before school are visible and remain or increase throughout schooling, with no evidence to suggest these gaps narrow (Rose and Alcott, 2015).

It has also been argued that more than simply failing to address inequity, education institutions/systems as well as pedagogical practices can reproduce unequal relationships and inequitable societies (Freire; 1996;<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu, 1977). The above evidence suggests that, in addition to structural inequalities, there is a ‘bias’ within education systems that reinforces dominant cultures and relations of power and perpetuates inequity.

Freire (1996) argues that education is not neutral but highly political. In his view, education is generally used to construct a particular type of citizen, one who through lack of the appropriate knowledge and tools is unable to question the fundamental inequalities of society and is, therefore, obedient to the socio-political status quo. Freire calls this ‘domestication’ and uses ‘banking’ as a metaphor for the type of traditional education whereby knowledge is ‘deposited’ in the learner’s head (Ibid). Building on Freire’s work, Mayo (1993) suggests a ‘good educatee’, does not think critically but repeats what they are taught. As Michael Apple (2013) points out, Freire compels us to rethink the purpose of education, which he identifies as traditionally conveying a set of beliefs and values, functioning to maintain a particular set of power relations and the economic and political systems that underpin them. Nevertheless, Freire also believes in education’s role in changing people’s ability to ‘read the word and the world,’ to create what he refers to as ‘critical consciousness’ and thus transform society.

---

<sup>11</sup> This reference is an updated translation of a 1970 publication.

For Bourdieu, the culture of the dominant group is embedded in the field of education. As such, education is a site of social reproduction, privileging of a certain form of cultural capital and perpetuating it through education qualifications and forms of knowledge that the school system reinforces. Nash (1990) suggests:

*A school system controlled by the socially and culturally dominant classes, it is supposed, will perceive students who possess the habitus of the dominant classes as evidence of "readiness" for school knowledge, and perceive students who possess the habitus of the dominated classes as evidence of a deficit of the child or the home, as cultural deprivation (Ibid, p. 436).*

These arguments are important because the content, processes and desired outcomes promoted by SDG4 will play an important part in shaping learners for the transformative sustainable future the 2030 agenda promises.

Bias is also reproduced at the level of policy development. Lingard, Sellar, and Baroutsis, (2015), suggest elite global policy makers share a similar 'habitus' that leads them towards a particular understanding of the world. Rizvi (2006) argues that within education policy there is a struggle over the control of this 'social imaginary' between *"a dominant neo-liberal imaginary underpinning educational policy"* and *"a democratic alternative to it, conceived as a radically different way of interpreting the facts of global interconnectivity and interdependence."* (Ibid, p. 200). The social imaginary reflects an interpellation of the dominant discourses of education among policy makers and society more broadly. This so-called "struggle" referred to by Rizvi is important in exploring SDG4: what goes in, what does not, who decides and why are key concerns of this research. It is important also to consider how the social imaginary of education policy makers involved in the formulation of SDG4 expands or limits education potential as a transformative vision of global education. This struggle is at the heart of globalised education policy.

## 3.2: Education policy

### 3.2.1: What is policy?

While the concept of a policy or policies will be familiar to the majority of people around the world, a shared definition is not readily available. Education policy is often

understood simply as a foundation text for conceptualising and guiding education planning, with an inherent assumption that the policy text will be translated into practice. UNESCO Bangkok (2013) claims that “*national education policy establishes the main goals and priorities pursued by the government in matters of education – at the sector and sub-sector levels – with regard to specific aspects such as access, quality and teachers, or to a given issue or need*” (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013, p. 6). Although this description may be helpful in its simplicity, policy is also conceptualised as more complex and politicised, as Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill (2004) note:

*There was a time when educational policy as policy was taken for granted ... Clearly that is no longer the case. Today, educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and public contestation ... Educational policy-making has become highly politicised. (Ibid, p.2-3)*

Below I provide a brief review of literature on education policy in order to highlight the diverse understandings of what policy is; and to also situate how policy is viewed for my research.

Hill (2013) provides a review of some definitions, such as policy as “*a set of interrelated decisions . . . concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation . . .*” (ibid, p. 15) and policy conveys authority and action, and also inaction (Smith 1976 cited in Hill, 2013). Van Damme (2013) offers the view that policies are intended to be forward-looking and may involve compromise. Policies are a ‘patterns of decisions’ made by politicians or state authorities on behalf of state bodies and/or institutions (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) and “[p]ublic policies are thus normative, expressing both ends and means designed to steer the actions and behaviour of people” (Ibid, 2010, p.4). It is also argued that policy is the result of political pressure to avert conflict over public goods - such as education - into “*an authorised course of action concerning their allocation*” (Bell and Stevenson 2006, p.16). Ball (1993) refers to “*policy as text and policy as discourse*” and argues that policies are about processes and outcomes (Ibid, p.10). Public policy differs from other forms of policy because of its perceived authority and legitimacy (Hill, 2013). Public policy is also seen as a planned course of action by state authority or government (BES, 2017). As Bell and Stevenson (2006) note:



*the state almost universally has a key role in the provision and/or regulation of education services. 'State policy', whether national or local (or increasingly supra-national), therefore has a considerable impact on shaping what happens on a daily basis in schools and colleges. (ibid, p. 4)*

What is clear from the literature is a complexity in the understandings of policy. While I do not dismiss the description by UNESCO Bangkok (above), this alone is not enough - it leaves aside the dynamic nature of policy, the multiple possibilities for 'the play' in policy (Ball, 1993). Policy in this sense is not a simple written text offering guidance to action: it is also the site of dynamic contestation, where meaning is made not just in the process of developing the policy text but also in its interpretation. Education policy, much like education itself, is not a neutral piece of text, but a fundamentally political activity. Policies are ““operational statements of values”” (Kogan 1975, cited in Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p. 15), which highlight important questions such as “*what is education for? Who is education for? Who decides?*” (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p. 15).

Ball (1993) argues the policy cycle involves influence, production and practice and that at every stage of the policy process different interpretations arise. Lipsky (2010) refers to 'street level bureaucrats' as those actors in national and local contexts influencing policy (such as teachers etc.). Policy is therefore dynamic and “[t]exts carry with them both possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces. The reality of policy in practice depends upon the compromises and accommodations to these in particular settings” (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 15). Bacchi (2000) questions (sympathetically) the description of policy as discourse, arguing that the understandings of what discourse is also vary. She makes a useful distinction between “[l]iterary deconstruction [which] tends to see everything as text, whereas social deconstructionists—among whom I would include policy-as-discourse analysts—emphasize the processes involved in the creation of text.” (ibid, p 46).

While it is possible for a variety of understandings to co-exist, it is also important for my thesis – insofar as it is possible – to locate myself within the literature. My research is concerned with understanding the influences and ideas that shaped the formulation of SDG4 (this is important for my RQ1). Therefore, more complex descriptions of policy

help structure my research and analysis. I understand policy as representing struggles and compromise, as “*contested, value-laden and dynamic.*” (Rizvi, 2006, p198).

Ball (1993) claims that through language and structure - the order and combination of words or omissions - meaning is embodied in policy, creating parameters for thought. This understanding is important for a critical analysis of the final text of SDG4 (my RQ2). I look at policy as both text and discourse, deconstructing some of the language and structure of the text to highlight how meaning is represented and how the final text of SDG4 interacts with itself (goal and targets) and with other texts such as global indicators in a dynamic process. Ball (in Avelar, 2016), discussing his work on policy notes:

*We were thinking about policy and trying to build an idea of policy trajectories [...] not as a document, or as thing, [but] as a social entity which moves through space and changes as it moves, and changes things as it moves, changes the spaces it moves through [...] So we talked about contexts of policy: the context of influence, the context of text production and context of practice (Ball, in Avelar, 2016, p.5).*

Gale (1999) also offers a useful summary in his discussion on policy trajectories arguing that policies are represented by text and discourse and informed by ideology. These, he argues, are constituted discursively with particular contexts:

*policies are represented by texts and discourses, but they are also informed by particular ideologies. [ . . . ] they are produced discursively within particular contexts whose parameters and particulars have been temporarily (and strategically) settled by discourse(s) in dominance” (Ibid, p. 405).*

These more complex understandings of policy, its construction, its scope and limitations within an existing political/ideological context, inform my research into SDG4.

### 3.2.2 Policy analysis

Having drawn on existing literature to frame my understanding of what policy is, it is also helpful to review literature relating to analysing policy. The distinction made between an analysis of policy for academic purposes differs from analysis for policy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) is of particular importance for my research. As a professional working in the field of education (largely for non-governmental organisations - NGOs), I

engage more often in analysis for policy, but for the purpose of this research I am engaged in analysis of policy.

Ball (1993) makes an important point in this sense, in that our understandings of policy and the meanings we give it affects how we research and interpret it. Reviewing a variety of traditions in policy scholarship, Diem *et al.*, (2014) make a similar point that the theoretical perspective of the researcher influences the research. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) make clear that the dichotomy between the analysis of and analysis for should not be overstated. However, they also suggest that analysis of policy offers a more critical starting point. Working within a framework of critical policy sociology, they reject the notion of value-free policy analysis and argue that policy analysis is an 'inherently political activity' (Ibid, p.52).

Gale (2001) reflects on different methods of 'doing' critical policy sociology, which include policy historiography, policy genealogy and policy archaeology. Gale provides a useful observation on how these methodological approaches relate respectively to questions of the what, how and why of policy. While Gale does not claim to have found the perfect combination, analysis of these is a useful way of approaching research on policy. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) also argue there is no given recipe for policy analysis, although they suggest it will be affected by the purpose of the research, the positionality of the researcher, and the site of production and relations of power.

Diem and Young (2014) summarise and discuss approaches to policy research in which they distinguish between traditional approaches to policy studies and those that they identify as critical education policy analysis. The former, adopting a positivist rationalist approach, is largely concerned with the goal-driven action of planning and the implementation of policy, whereas "*[c]ritical theories facilitate the exploration of policy roots and processes; how policies presented as reality are often political rhetoric*" (ibid, p.843). Bell and Stevenson (2006) point out that "*[p]olicy is treated uncritically and denuded of its values, neglecting to assess how policy impacts differentially on different social groups*" (Ibid, p. 8). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) also suggest that in undertaking policy analysis, it is critical to ask "*who are the winners and losers with regard to any*

*given policy and whose interests the policy serves.”* (Ibid, p 53). These are important considerations that I am cognisant of in analysing the SDG4.

### 3.2.3 Context and participation

Just as defining policy is not straightforward, unravelling the complex influences on its development is also challenging. Policy has been portrayed as simply responding, in the most effective and efficient manner, to objective problems (Coombs 1970, cited by Simons, Olssen, Peters, 2009). However, politics and policies are intertwined in the process of policy development. Ozga points out that education policy is not limited to government processes, schools or teachers – it is also necessary to understand the political, social and economic contexts of policy (Ozga, 1999). In this section, I briefly discuss policy context and participation in policy processes.

Policy is developed within a particular socio-political and economic environment by actors with the authority to do so. Taylor (Eds., 1997) argue that *“[t]here is always a prior history of significant events, a particular ideological and political climate a social and economic context – and often, particular individuals as well – which together influence the shape and timing of policies* (ibid, , p. 16). Policy responds to cultural, social, political and economic norms, and, in turn, is shaped by the same context. Understanding the wider context that shaped SDG4’s formulation, and the implications of how it will in turn contribute to shaping ideas and contexts, is an important aspect of my research.

In the preceding chapter, I have considered the context of SDG4’s formulation, including the impact of the MDG and EFA global education policy frameworks that preceded it. In analysing any policy, the context in which it is formulated is an important consideration and that is certainly the case for global policies such as SDG4. The context of policy production to a degree also determines who participates. A local policy, for example, may involve more direct consultation with beneficiaries, and a global policy such as SDG4 (within the wider 2030 agenda) is more likely to involve governments and their international partners (as I discuss in chapter 5). The formulation of SDG4 was arguably unique, with considerable levels of engagement - beyond governments and

the UN - with civil society groups and private sector organisations engaged in formal and informal processes with an aim to shaping the agenda, including through consultations through the online MyWorld survey (UN, 2012b) (discussed in chapter 5).

More often than not – as, I argue, is the case for SDG4 (see chapter 5) - policy is the domain of elite policy makers who bring their own values and assumptions to the policy process. As previously mentioned, Lingard, Sellar and Baroutsis (2015) make an interesting analysis of the shared ‘habitus’ of global and national policy makers and the traits they share. They note that

The habitus of the policy-makers and technicians was similar in respect of the globe as a commensurate space of measurement, in terms of the promises of technology, psychometrics and science [ . . . .] their habitus is embodied middle class, it includes high-modernist, cosmopolitan and scientific dispositions: schemes of perception and thinking that underpin their practices. (Ibid, p. 38).

This is an important analysis because it points to how those making policy share similar traits that influence both how they understand problems and solutions and make policy. Understanding the context of policy production and the power of actors involved is important for any meaningful analysis of policy.

My research, by the nature of its subject, is focused on international (or global) policy. These types of global policies, including the SDGs, are ‘held’ by international ‘supra-state’ institutions that coordinate, monitor and/or regulate their implementation. In these contexts, international organisations have a high degree of influence in shaping education policy at the national level because of their perceived authority. Among the most influential is the World Bank, which wields significant reach and influence on education policy, particularly in emerging and low-income countries (Mundy and Verger, 2015; Zapp, 2017; Menashy, 2013).

The power these organisations hold has led to them being described as “supra-state institutions, which act, to some degree, as superordinate states” (Hill 2013,). Lingard & Rawolle (2011) describe this as the influence of ‘transnational policy’, whereby *“international organisations, have effects within national polities through discourses, practices, [ . . . ] multilateral surveillance, such as the effects of its PISA testing and*

*national indicators of the knowledge economy and associated global policy discourses*".<sup>12</sup> (ibid, p. 491).

Other international education organisations such as UNESCO (including its specialist institutions) work directly with member states to provide guidance, often training national policy makers. Although this assistance is portrayed as purely technical and neutral, it also brings with it particular values and globalised policy ideas.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a key part of the global education funding architecture, exercises significant influence over the development of education sector plans in low- and middle-income countries and fragile states. GPE, which rebranded and developed from the *Fast Track Initiative for EFA*, portrays its work as a partnership with developing countries, suggesting it creates a plan for education *together with* national actors and provides technical expertise and financial resource. However, this discourse of partnerships masks power relations (Gaventa, 2006). Recognising how these powerful actors shape education policy globally is important in undertaking analysis of SDG4. While the nation state continues to be seen as the main arbiter of education policy, even at a national level education policy is strongly influenced by globalisation and these powerful supra-state institutions, although they do not always act in unity (see chapter 5).

The globalised nature of education policy is another important consideration in undertaking research on the formation of a specific global policy for education, as it highlights the pre-existence of dominant discourse(s) in the field of education. Given that SDG4 is a universal global policy, the influence of globalised discourses is arguably more, rather than less, likely to impact its formulation, as these global discourses on education are already known and resonate with a broad group of policy makers/elites.

---

<sup>12</sup> PISA is the 'Programme for International Student Assessment', a global assessment for 15 years old in reading, science and maths overseen by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Below I offer a short review of the literature on the globalisation of education policy in order to locate the formulation of SDG4 within the existing globalised environment of education policy.

#### *3.2.4. Globalised education policy*

Historically, and still today, the nation state has been seen as the primary location of policy development. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conceive of a hermetically-sealed development of education policy. It is easy to identify broad similarities in education systems around the world, which lends support to the notion that, to an extent, “*a single global model of schooling has spread around the world*” (cf. Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 2). This suggests that there have long been external influences on national policy formation – for example, the imposition of policies by colonial powers or, more recently, what is known as policy transfer or the borrowing of policies (Dale 1999; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012; Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, 2012). The borrowing or transference of policy between nations is therefore not new. However, a growing body of literature has highlighted the increasing globalisation of education policy, with many positing the rise of neo-liberal economic policies and political ideologies as central to this process (Lingard and Ozga, in Lingard (Eds.), 2007; Lingard and Rawolle, 2011; Verger, et al., 2012; Ball, 2012). Whilst acknowledging the “blurring” between the global and the local, Lingard and Ozga (Eds., 2007) caution against a simplistic reading of globalisation as purely neo-liberal economics and politics (Ibid, p. 66). It is not necessarily the result of direct economic pressures, but rather that these globalised ideas models of schooling are ‘imagined’ as better; they are “*perceived as the best or at least as the only acceptable way*” (Ramirez and Boli, 1987, cited in Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 4).

Although nation states still have the [*de jure*] authority to develop their own education policies, this authority is now impacted to a large degree by transnational forces and economic and political ideologies. Lingard and Rawolle (2011), in pointing to an emergent global education policy field, refer to it as a ‘rescaling of politics’. By this they mean “*the rescaling of authority beyond the nation now works in education policy through a ‘global education policy field’*” (Ibid, p. 490). Verger et al. (2012) argue that

globalised ideas are now dominating to the extent that it is possible to identify a convergence of national policy directions in education that can be referred to as 'global education policy' (GEP). The implications for nation states will vary, depending on their economic position (Dale, 1999). Ball (2012) argues globalisation reduces the ability of weaker states to maintain control over their own national education systems, arguing that these forces impact 'insidiously' on education policy development. The success of the globalisation of education policy is also because these policies are 'perceived' to work even when there is limited empirical evidence (Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, Eds., 2017). Additionally, 'global agents' (among these can be international organisations, influential donors, think tanks, INGOs etc) are persuasive in promoting homogenised global education policies, which national decision makers/policy actors buy into in an attempt to gain political and economic benefit (Ball, 2013). Lingard and Rawolle (2011) suggest there has been an 'economising of education policy'. They draw on the work of Bourdieu to illustrate this and highlight how education is increasingly seen as 'national capital': *"[e]ducation has become a central economic policy tool for nations, geared to the strengthening of national capital for enhancing global competitiveness, and has become positioned as a foil against the uncertainty that global market dynamics produce."* (Ibid, p. 493).

The economic imperative of education for development is one that is widely accepted, promoted not only by the private sector but also by governments, international organisations and many sections of civil society. For example, the Malala Fund recently published a report which highlights the lost economic potential when girls' miss out on education (Malala Fund, 2018). It is an increasingly common discourse used to justify the importance of education in development and has been a strong theme running through SDG4. For example, the High-Level Panel (HLP) report (discussed in chapter 5) strongly promoted the economic role of education for sustainable development.

The relationship between globalisation of education policy and the growth in the influence of neoliberalism is now central in the discourse of education policy (Rizvi, 2006; Verger *et al.*, 2012; Ball, 2012). Fisher (2009) argues that the neoliberal economic model as the dominant form of socio-economic organisation is also the only reality we



can imagine. Arguably, this is the lens through which everything, including education policy, is now framed, as if this were somehow the only natural condition. The neo-liberal imaginary has become the hegemonic ideology, in education as elsewhere. In this sense, the idea of Westphalian sovereignty in processes of education policy determination is undermined by the forces of globalisation - and neo-liberal ideologies in particular - leading to a situation in which globalised discourses are applied irrespective of local context. Robertson, 2012) provides a useful separation of the different ways in which global education policy can be understood, including: 'global' as a condition of the world, as discourse, project, scale and reach. She also considers the impact of neo-liberalism, as well as changes in technology, and a particular social imaginary as a way of framing education problems and their solutions. She gives EFA as an example, which today has been replaced by SDG4. She argues that these changes were not caused by *"a global steamroller; rather, the complex reworking, re/bordering and re/ordering of education spaces to include a range of scales of action"* (Ibid, p. 18) highlighting the geographically situated nature of 'international' actors and organisations. Her analysis is helpful in encapsulating the complexity of global education policy.

SDG4 as an explicitly global policy is not immune from these influences and is arguably more susceptible given the power of global discourses in education policy making and the shared 'habitus' and social imaginary of international policy elites.

In this section, I have reviewed a range of literature on education policy, discussing how policy is understood and important factors in analysing policy and explored how education policy is increasingly globalised. The above review locates my analyses of SDG4 within an understanding of policy that is dynamic and contested, political and value laden and shaped by globalised discourses on education.

### 3.3: Quality, Learning and Measurement.

Quality education and learning are key themes within SDG4, and to large extent these form the basis of a struggle over the framing of SDG4 (as discussed in chapter 5). Despite their centrality, the meaning of these concepts in the final text of SDG4 lacks

specificity of definition (see chapter 6). In this section, I draw on existing literature to discuss these key education concepts in order to explore debates and locate my research within an existing body of knowledge related to these concepts. As learning in the context of SDG4 is predominantly focused on learning outcomes, the progress of which will be tracked globally (as well as nationally), I also briefly review literature highlighting the debates on the measurement of learning.

### 3.3.1 Quality Education

Like theories of development itself, understandings of quality education remain diverse, and it is these competing concepts that were played out in the lead up to the final iteration of the SDG4 process (see chapter 5). Below, I provide a discussion of literature highlighting the various meanings of quality in relation to education policy.

Quality education has long been part of the language used in international education and development circles. It was a key concept in both the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) and Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All (UNESCO 2000). Despite the familiarity of the concept of quality within the education policy lexicon, there is no single shared understanding, with Alexander (2015) even suggesting that *“quality’s very pervasiveness may have encouraged the view that it requires no further elucidation”* (Ibid, p. 251). Quality was a focus of the EFA agenda, while the MDGs focused instead on access, arguably at the expense of quality. Another major barrier to delivering quality education has been resource constraints at the financial, human and infrastructural level. For example, one of the gaps in previous educational goals was the lack of focus on teachers as an important factor for quality. It is not only physical access and the number of schools that matters, but also the quality of the teaching and what people learn (Case and Deaton 1999; Sayed & Ahmed 2015). While there is extensive literature on quality, there is less evidence that it has made *“significant changes needed in the lives of children who suffer marginalisation and disempowerment”* (Bivens, Moriarty and Taylor, 2009, p. 98).

UNESCO (2005) presented an in-depth examination of the concept of quality education, highlighting how different education traditions have different understandings of quality.

The report detailed how quality was understood in relation to five different education traditions: humanist, behaviourist, critical, indigenous and adult education approaches. Quality education across different traditions varies in terms of the intrinsic nature of learning and learners' agency in their own cognitive development; how education develops values and attitudes; education's role in society and its relationship to inequalities, among other differences. The approaches do share some common ground. UNESCO (2005) argues that in terms of international debates and action, three principles are shared in relation to quality: more relevance, greater equity and the observance of individual rights.

Tikly and Barrett (Eds., 2013) argue it is possible to divide these multiple definitions of quality into 2 main approaches, which they identify as "*human capital theory (HCT)* and *human rights approaches*" (Ibid, p. 11). The term 'HCT' of education' came from the work of Becker (1964), who took the terminology traditionally applied to tangible economic assets and applied it to the skills and knowledge gained through education. He argued that "*it is fully in keeping with the concept of capital to say that expenditures on education, training [ . . . ] are investments in capital*" (Becker, 1992, p. 85). Becker termed this 'human capital' because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, values etc. This instrumental, economic argument for education was further strengthened by the influential analysis of 'rates of return' on educational investments (Psacharopoulos, 1972; Mincer, 1974; McMahon and Wagner, 1981). All of these approaches stressed the economic value of education and were heavily promoted by the World Bank. As Becker himself acknowledges, while at first treated with scepticism HCT is now wholeheartedly embraced (Becker 1993). This promotion of education primarily on the basis of its economic value to the individual and society has had a substantial impact on education policy and expansion. However, critics claim that the rates of exchange argument is based on a narrow set of income data not applicable to all contexts (cf. Bennell, 1996). The economic justification for expanding education remains a central and important discourse within global education policy, but the question remains of whose interests an education policy driven by economic imperatives alone really serves.

Tikly and Barrett (Eds. 2013) suggest that rational choice theory, which assumes humans act in their own best interest, is a key influence in HCT and spurred a market led approach to education, where competition is a motivating factor. Citing Hanushek and Wößmann (2007), they highlight how this human capital model argues that in order to improve quality there should be:

*greater choice and competition between schools, which will encourage schools to improve outcomes; greater school autonomy including local decision making, fiscal decentralization, and parental involvement; and greater accountability through the publication of school performance data, the use of external examinations and benchmarking including participation of countries in international tests (Tikly and Barrett, 2013, p. 12).*

They then suggest that while there is some evidence that market-based approaches have increased enrolment, overall the evidence of the benefits are weak, and should be treated with caution. Other research also suggests that market-lead approaches, particularly through low-fee private schools, show weak evidence of any benefits and raise concerns over equity (Rose, 2002; Day *et al.*, 2014).

Yet HCT continues to be a dominant discourse within globalised education policy discussion. The 2018 World Development Report repeatedly links education with human capital. In one example of many, the report argues that “*education builds human capital, which translates into economic growth*” (World Bank, WDR 2018a, p.41). The World Bank has also launched a new Human Capital Index (World Bank, 2018b) with education as a central plank in its theory. This has received criticism from the head of international federation of teachers’ unions, who argues that:

*the Bank’s “human capital” discourse understands people not as rights holders, but only in terms of their future economic contribution. Indeed, according to the index’s methodology, the HCI is “measured in units of productivity”, brushing aside longstanding critiques of human capital theory. (Edwards, 2018).*

The critique from Edwards (*ibid*) links back to the second main approach to quality as identified by Tikly and Barrett (2013), namely human rights approaches. The human rights understanding of quality education is motivated by a concern for the full human rights of an individual rather than for economic growth (*ibid*). They go onto to argue

that equitable inclusion is central to a human rights approach to quality, placing democratic, learner-centred processes at its heart. Within the human rights approach, quality cannot be separated from equity. Equity is key feature of quality (Alexander, 2014), and essential if SDG4 is to address the past failing in quality education, especially for the most marginalised (Rose, 2015).

As discussed above, a researcher's own positionality impacts the analysis of policy and my analysis of SDG4 is informed by a rights-based understanding of quality. I have argued elsewhere that quality education is education that *"empowers students and addresses the inter-generational transmission of inequality and poverty"* (Oswald and Moriarty, 2009, p. 29). I have also argued for a transformative approach to quality (Bivens *et al*, 2009) that builds on the methodology of Freire (1996). The transformative education described by Cowhey (2006), hooks (1994), and Sotto (1994) are examples of this and would be a compatible model for quality education (cf. Bivens *et al*, 2009). This links with Tikly and Barrett (2013) own position that quality education should be informed by social justice approaches (cf. Ibid, p 13-14). A key conceptual limitation of SDG4, however, is its failure to engage with what is meant by education quality, leaving it open to interpretation and change (see chapter 6).

### 3.3.2 Learning and Learning outcomes

As mentioned above, debates around quality and learning informed the formulation of SDG4, with the identification of the 'learning crisis' (UNESCO 2013a) sharpening debates around access, quality and learning. It was, according to some, a catalyst for a learning goal (interviewee). However, the call for a shift to learning predated the release of the data on the learning crisis, with a call for a new 'global compact on learning' (Brookings, 2011) and before that a call for a *Millennium Learning Goal* (Filmer, Hasan & Pritchett, 2006). Underpinning these calls is the idea that learning outcomes indicate quality and that they should be concrete and measurable.

Although the focus on learning was central in the formulating of SDG4, it is argued that *"learning within the post-2015 education debate is ill-defined, distanced from discussion of pedagogy as debate and focused mainly on questions relating to the*

*outcomes of learning – which outcomes we should care about and how they can be measured.* (Barrett, Sayed, Schweisfurth and Tikly, 2015). Others highlight concerns that the discourse on measurable learning outcomes dislocates learning from the inputs and processes that enable it to take place (interviewee; McLean, 2014). Barrett (2011) has also suggested that a goal that *“promotes education quality would have to do more than set quantitative targets for achievement in standardised tests, indeed it is questionable whether such targets should form part of a [future goal] given the potential for harmful washback effects.”* (Ibid, p. 129-130).

Importantly, the focus on outcomes ignores what happens in the classroom, failing to acknowledge the centrality of pedagogy. Alexander (2015) presents a critique of how the previous global education agenda, including EFA, failed to address (what he considers) this most fundamental component of education. He argues that inputs and outcomes cannot easily act as a proxy for quality and that any future agenda (by which he meant what was to become SDG4) should avoid these same outfalls. Furthermore, there is a risk of ‘teaching to the test’, which could distract from other important aspects of education and quality (Barrett 2011). There is a real danger that in stressing learning outcomes, teachers’ professionalism is undermined by the highly-structured learning that such an emphasis on testing often brings, and importantly that test results themselves do not necessarily reflect observed learning outcomes among students (Goldstein, 2004).

While formative and evaluation assessment have an important role to play in education for both students (and their parents) and teachers, they must be deployed appropriately to support learners and strengthen educational processes. Otherwise, measurement has limited policy purchase if it does not result in improvements in classroom practice. Rose (2015) takes a pragmatic position, arguing that three lessons that should be learnt from the EFA era are that goals and targets need clarity, that each target should be measurable and that the post-2015 education goal and targets must reach the marginalised. Rose (ibid) suggests that tracking progress need not necessarily result in teaching to the test or in internationally standardised assessments: instead, she points to examples from countries such as Brazil to argue that national systems can

help improve the quality of education. Importantly, Rose (ibid) argues that equitable learning – tracked not simply by national averages but requiring a disaggregation of data based on sex, income, disability etc. – would support quality and ensure the most vulnerable were not left behind.

Alexander (2015) argued that “[l]earning needs a process indicator well as an outcome one, and on the basis of what we know about crucial conditions for learning, we might try student engagement” (Ibid, p. 257). This is important because even with quality inputs and outcomes, the experiences of children in the classroom are key to quality, and vital in enabling critical thinking, as well as other wider ‘outcomes’ from education, such as ‘learning to be’ and ‘learning to live together’ (Delors, 1996,). How and what to measure, or if to measure, is clearly important (as both Alexander (ibid) and Rose (2015) argue, albeit from different angles. Sayed and Ahmed (2015) make a more fundamental point about understanding quality:

*Whilst global targets and measures which set minimum benchmarks may be important for accountability purposes, there is a real risk that this may narrow the education quality agenda. It is imperative that what is measured as learning is comprehensive and does not delegitimise important aims of education such as citizenship (Ibid, p. 337).*

Ultimately, learning outcomes are a strong feature of SDG4, and how these are measured ultimately shapes the education agenda. The global indicators for SDG4, developed after the final text of SDG4 was adopted, reshape the meaning of learning in SDG4 (see chapter 6). What’s more, the debate over the measurement of learning continues. In 2016, the Education Commission called for one global indicator on SDG4 to be developed (Ibid). More recently, the World Bank has linked measurable learning outcomes to HCT, arguing that “*international assessments can be powerful tools politically: because country leaders are concerned with national productivity and competitiveness, international benchmarking can raise awareness of how a country is falling short of its peers in building human capital*” (World Bank, 2018a, p.18). This sheds light on how the drive for standardised measurement is prioritised in the implementation of SDG4 and thus how it reinforces the HCT approach to quality.

The above review of literature in relation to quality, learning and outcomes highlights how different traditions within education understand quality and learning. On the one hand, learning outcomes are seen as a measure of quality, playing an important role in the development of human capital, with education primarily perceived in terms of its economic function as ‘national capital’ (Lingard and Rawolle 2011). On the other, a human rights-based approach understands quality and learning as focused on inclusive and child-centred pedagogy, qualified teachers and inclusive curriculums that encourage critical thinking. Understanding these theories of quality and learning provides a strong basis for interpreting the debates that occurred during the formulation of SDG4 and analysing the goal and targets of the final SDG4 text, as well as identifying the vision of quality education and learning reflected within it.

### 3.4 Conclusion to this chapter and conceptual framework

As this review of literature has shown, questions around what policy is, how policy is made and what influences its production, remain as diverse and contested as key concepts such as quality, learning and the value of measuring learning. A key issue is whether SDG4 education policy reflects largely uncontested globalised assumptions and ideas of education or whether it will offer a contesting view. This will both determine its part in perpetuating existing hegemony and its potential to support the kind of radical transformation described in the broader sustainable development agenda.

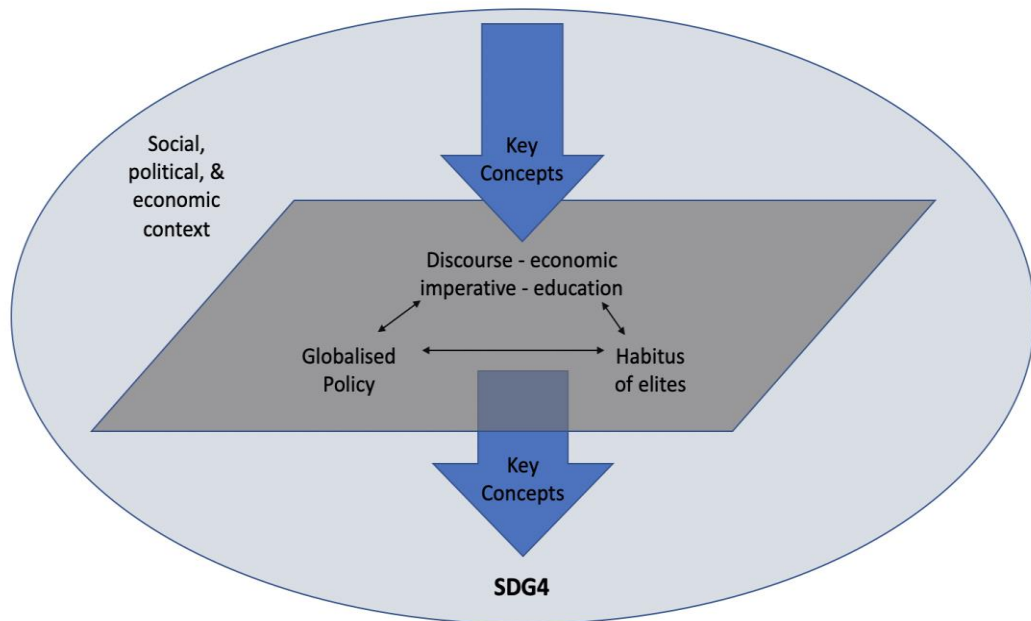
#### 3.4.1 *Conceptual Framework*

My research is framed by the theories and concepts explored in the above literature review. It is within this theoretical framework that I consider the influences on the construction and text of SDG4 and its wider interactions. SDG4, as a global policy for education, is produced discursively within specific social, political and economic contexts. Education problems and their solutions are constructed within a particular social imaginary of powerful policy elites, influenced by globalised discourses on education/education policy. Key concepts are undefined and/or reshaped through intertextual interactions (in particular by global indicators designed to measure



progress). SDG4, like all education policies is value-laden and reflect beliefs about society and its citizens.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



\*Key concepts = learning, quality, equity, etc.

In the next chapter I discuss the methodological approach to my research. I discuss my research design and methods and their relevance for my research.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter is focused on the methodological design and provides a discussion of my research approach. It is divided into a number of sections and begins with a discussion of my overall research philosophy (4.1); followed by an introduction to my overall methodological approach (4.2). I go on to discuss the methods of data I used and the rationale for doing so (4.3); and how I analysed my data (4.4.). In the latter half of this chapter I discuss the trustworthiness of my data (4.5) and explain the ethical considerations and permissions (4.6); and my positionality as research (4.7). I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of my research (4.8) and a brief summary of the chapter (4.9).

### 4.1: Research Philosophy

An important discussion on research philosophy argues that three fundamental issues locate the researcher within a particular research paradigm: how the form and nature of reality are understood (ontology); the relationship between the would-be-knower (researcher) and what can be known (epistemology); and how the would-be-knower (researcher) can go about finding out what can be known (methodology) (Guba and Lincoln, in Denzin and Lincoln (Eds.), 1994p. 108). These three interconnected areas allow a researcher to define a “*worldview*” (Ibid). In addition, axiology (the values and beliefs held), together with ontology and epistemology, inform “*how we view our world(s), what we take understanding to be and what we see as the purposes of understanding, and what is deemed valuable*” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 3). Guba and Lincoln (in Denzin and Lincoln, Eds., 1994) identify a number of research paradigms which they categorise as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. They note that paradigms are human constructs and as such no one paradigm is the “*ultimate foundational criteria*” (Ibid, 1994, p. 108).

I approach this research through a constructivist lens, however, as Elkind (2005) argues, constructivism does not imply a rejection of the notion that a real world exists outside

of our experience, rather that we have to understand it within our “categories of knowing” (Ibid, p. 328). Elkind’s understanding is that “[c]onstructivism is the recognition that reality is a product of human intelligence interacting with experience in the real world. As soon as you include human mental activity in the process of knowing reality, you have accepted constructivism.” (Ibid, p. 334). It is in this theoretical space that I would locate myself and my research. SDG4 exists, in as much as it exists as a text and is recognised as guiding framework for education. Nonetheless, it is shaped by understanding(s) and meaning(s) given to the concepts and ideas it contains and shaped by the historical, social, political and economic context in which it was formulated and operates (see chapter 2). I approach this research with an understanding that “ [ . . . ] not only is the world socially and historically constructed, but so are people and the knowledge they possess.” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 2).

Through this research I provide a critical analysis of the discourse(s) that have influenced this process, exploring and unmasking the forces that have impacted the formulation of this global education policy. Discourse is understood as ideas encoded in language and text, and Bacchi (2000) suggests that for policy-as-discourse-analysts, discourse is understood as providing “*meanings that assist particular groups to maintain positions of influence*” (ibid, p. 55). Rather than accepting a view that policies are neutral, my aim is to understand the political rhetoric of policy that is presented as reality (Diem *et al.*, 2015). Through a critical analysis it is my intention to “[ . . . ] *dislodge hidden mystifications, power, and oppression in political communiqués [ . . . ]*” (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2010). This leads me to adopt a critical perspective, which “*aims at understanding, uncovering, illuminating, and/or transforming how educational aims, dilemmas, tensions and hopes are related to social divisions and power differentials.*” (Griffiths, 2009, p. 1).

In approaching this research, I therefore locate myself within a tradition of critical constructivism, whereby an “*expanded idea of constructivism emphasizes understanding the contingent nature of knowledge to induce a more critical reflection about various educational institutions and practices*” (Bentley, Fleury and Garrison, 2007, p. 10).

My choice of research paradigm was informed by existing personal understandings of the world and of how knowledge and meaning are created. As Mir and Watson (2001) note in defending their position on constructivism, there *“is intrinsic merit to the contention that reality is as much a manifestation of our own social construction as it is of natural forces beyond our control and understandings”* (Ibid, p. 1173). Critical constructivism allows for the possibility to take into account macro-level influences on SDG4, as well as micro-level understanding assigned by key informants and the dynamic interplay between them. As Kincheloe suggests, critical constructivism offers an insight into the ‘contact points’ (Kincheloe in Tierney & Lincoln, 1997) between the macro and micro, which will be important in understanding the forces and factors which have/are shaping SDG4. My intention is to *“bring together structural, macro-level analysis of [. . .] education policies and micro level investigation, which [. . .] takes account of people's perception [. . .]”* (Ball, 2006, p.10).

## 4.2: Methodological approach

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Research

In line with a critical constructivist paradigm, I employ qualitative data collection and analysis methods (see below). In doing so, I am rejecting the hyper-rationalism of the positivist approach that has historically favoured quantitative research methods as the most objective and reliable method of data collection, used so frequently in education policy research.

The concern and focus on interpretation in qualitative research is highly relevant for examining the influences that have informed SDG4 because an *“interpretative paradigm recognises that reality is socially constructed as people’s experiences occur within social, cultural, historical or personal contexts.”* (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2011, p. 15). The choice of qualitative research methods is coherent with my ontological and epistemological perspective and the most appropriate for my research questions.

#### 4.2.2. Research Questions

My belief in the transformational power of education and influence of global education policy discourse led me to focus my research on SDG4 formulation and content. My overarching research question (as discussed earlier in this thesis) asks: what influences and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and do they support a transformative vision of global education? My two specific sub-questions are research question 1 (RQ1) which asks *how was SDG4 formed?*, and question 2 (RQ2) which asks *how is quality education conceptualised in SDG4?* Through these questions my research examines the processes, dynamics and assumptions which shaped SDG4 and critically analyses the final content of the goal and its targets. Understanding the interconnections between policy process and policy text requires an interrogation of actions, of power and of meaning. It was on the basis of these research questions that I undertook the data collection and analysis detailed below.

The research is not designed to provide a technical analysis to improve effectiveness of existing policy (although I do make some recommendations for policy based on this research in chapter 7), instead it is intended to critically examine the foundational views and beliefs influencing global policy in light of the transformative ambitions of the 2030 agenda. This requires in depth qualitative data, which I considered to be best gained through interviews and discourse analysis. In applying qualitative methods of interpreting and analysing policy documents and interview data, I am mindful once again of my positionality as a researcher and the ‘double hermeneutic’ whereby I “*strive to interpret and operate in an already interpreted world*” (Cohen et al 2011, p.32). This will inevitably affect my research to some degree (see section on researcher positionality in chapter).

#### 4.3. Methods of Data Collection

Cohen *et al.* (2007) describe research methods as “*approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction*” (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p.47). However, these approaches are shaped by a commitment to a particular philosophical position (Bryman, 2008) rather than purely technical choices. My research philosophy and methodological framework were important influences in deciding the actual research methods chosen.

Data for my research is drawn from two main sources: (a) policy texts, and (b) interview data from policy actors involved in or close to the formulation of SDG4. Both of these data sources were consistent with my overall interpretative and qualitative approach to researching SDG4. Below I describe these methods, the rationale for each, what the data consisted of and how I collected and analysed the data.

#### *4.3.1. Policy Document Analysis*

Document analysis can offer an important source of readily available data sources, often without cost (especially in the case of policy documents), and can be a less time-consuming method (Bowen, 2009). For my research, looking at a global policy framework, it was an obvious choice to directly engage with the text of SDG4.

SDG4 is the primary document of analysis for my research and makes up the most significant focus of my document analysis. However, I understand policy as intertextual (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) and complement the analysis of the SDG4 with other relevant texts that have informed its construction or impact it directly. As such I look at a number of other documents, which I identified by their direct relationship to the final text. For example, with the wider 2030 agenda, there is a clear and direct relationship in that the text of SDG4 is contained within that document. Other documents - such as the High-Level Panel (HLP) report (UN, 2013b) and the Open Working Group report (UN 2014), and the report on the Global Thematic Consultation for Education (UNESCO, 2013b) and the Muscat Agreement (UNESCO, 2014c) - highlight stages of text development and influences in terms of the language of the goal and targets of SDG4.

Additionally, I consider the global indicators (UN, 2017) which, although only developed after SDG4 was adopted, have a direct impact on it.

#### 4.3.2. Interview data collection

For the second strand of my data collection process I conducted semi-structured interviews with policy ‘elites’ who (as described in chapter 1) are close to the policy process and have expert knowledge relating to the formulation of SDG4. The use of interviews offers an opportunity of *“access to what is ‘inside a person’s head’, [it] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information)”* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.411). Interviews allowed me to hear the reflections of policy actors, their thoughts on the process and the text. They enabled me to look ‘behind the scenes’ so to speak, accessing information that cannot be obtained from reading policy documents.

Before beginning any interviews, it was important to consider what type of interview was best suited to the research I was conducting. Cohen et al. (2007) discuss five broad interview categories, which they identify as: structured, semi-structured, unstructured, the non-directive interview and the focused (non-directive) interview (Ibid), with the names being autological.

I felt that semi-structured interviews were consistent with my overall research paradigm and appropriate for uncovering the beliefs, assumptions and meanings in processes of policy construction. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for a number of common key issues to be addressed across the informants, while also providing a space for the informants to raise additional topics and areas of interest that are important to them. Semi-structured interviews commonly have a number of questions that define key areas and/or issues being explored but also allow for divergence to gain more detail or discuss an idea (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008). In other words, *“the topics and questions are given, but the questions are open-ended, and the wording and sequence may be tailored to each individual interviewee and the responses given, with prompts and probes”* (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 511). Kvale

(1996) argues that semi-structured interviews enable a certain degree of uniformity, while also enabling flexibility. This was important as I wished to get the interviewee's reflections on SDG4 without restricting the scope of their answers or their ability to bring in new areas for discussion.

In devising my research questions, my aim was to cover themes which I felt would provide insights into the process of SDG4's formulation that could not be found in any formal write up and could reveal hidden dynamics. I also wanted to understand how SDG4 was viewed by informants who had been close to the process of its formulation.

I gave careful thought to my interview guide, wanting my questions not to come across as too simplistic given the expertise of the interviewees, and to avoid any prior assumptions. As Grek (2011) points out:

*Interviewers have to show/demonstrate that they are trustworthy, and to some extent this is achieved by accepting the account being given (and understanding it as a story), by showing familiarity with the assumptive world of the interviewee. It is important to have a very good knowledge of the world that is to be presented - both in order to follow the narrative and to understand its construction. (Ibid, p. 239).*

I structured my interview guide into three sections and divided my interview questions according to: the wider framework, the process of SDG4's formulation and SDG4 content (see appendix A). I used main questions and sub-questions as prompts to keep the interview on track. My aim was to ask and listen in a way that felt 'conversational' but also maintained professionalism. Additionally, formal aspects were in place and explained to protect anonymity and data (see below for a discussion on the interview process).

#### *4.3.3. Sampling, who and size of sample*

One of the considerations before starting the interviewing process was how I would analyse the data, a question which according Kvale and Brinkman (2009) should not be left until after the data has been collected. Weighing up how much data was



manageable (in terms of collection, transcription and analysis) and whether a small number of informants could offer enough data was part of the process of designing the data collection. Having sought advice from my supervisor I decided on a small sample size. According to Patton (1990), the use of relatively small, purposefully selected samples is a key feature of qualitative research and marks its difference with quantitative methods of data collection (Ibid, p. 169). In the case of my research, purposeful sampling was based on the following criteria: (a) engagement in the SDG4 process over a period of more than a year; (b) participation in negotiations, key meetings and/or sustained and high-profile advocacy, direct involvement with lobbying and networking with key decision makers; (c) involvement in either UN, government or civil society organisations; (d) at least mid-senior level in their professional posts (this gave authority in the engagement). In other words, they had to be close to the process of SDG4's formulation. I considered these criteria as a means of strengthening the reliability of the data.

The research was what Maguire and Ball (1994) refer to as “‘elite’ studies or what might be called situated studies of policy formation” (Ibid, p. 279). Interviewing such ‘elites’ creates its own challenges and constitutes what Cohen et al. (2011) refer to as sensitive research (this is something I had not considered until my ethical review – see below). They point out that where there is high profile debate and negotiation over content that is politically sensitive, it can lead to a refusal of policy makers to participate in research (Cohen et al., 2011). This last point is extremely relevant to my research, given the timing of data collection, with SDG4 still in its early days.

Lancaster (2017) suggests:

*the issues associated with interviewing ‘elites’ while conducting research in a contested policy domain, especially if policy processes are being studied as they play out in real time, remain underexplored. While the broader extant literature on ‘elite’ interviewing has begun to grapple with the notions of ‘power’ and ‘vulnerability’, the question of how these notions might need to be rethought in the context of a politicised policy domain where professional, personal and political stakes are high, remains open for examination (ibid, p. 94)*

This was an important ethical consideration. During the interviews I was mindful of the politicalised context of discussions, with SDG4 in the early days of its implementation and debates over indicators continuing. I was also mindful of the ‘vulnerability’ of the participants, who as professionals need to maintain discretion and trustworthiness. The perceived ‘risk’ that their voices could somehow be identified may explain why a number of those I approached chose not to participate.

It was my intention to ensure a balance of professional affiliations - i.e. UN, government or civil society, nationality and gender. Participation was voluntary and dependant on willingness and availability. I approached prospective interviewee via email, with a formal cover letter and information sheet about the research and the research process (see appendix B). A number of those I approached for interview did not respond (despite more than one request) while others did not have the time. Ultimately, this limited the total number of participants - my aim was to interview 10 people, in the end the total was seven. It also proved harder than anticipated to balance gender, with only 2 of the interviewees being women. On one hand, this can be seen as a limitation, but on the other it reflects how men are more often in senior positions and/or leading policy discussions. Although I am aware of the gendered nature of power, I did not focus on the gendered aspects of policy making in my research in a purposeful way, and it perhaps is a consideration for future research.<sup>13</sup> I was also cognisant of the power dynamics of the interviews, especially given that most interviewees were in more senior professional positions than me. In the majority of cases they were men, which also raised issues of gendered power dynamic in the interview process (although, as I discuss briefly in the section below, this was not apparent).

The participants represented 6 different countries (two were from the same country, which was in the in Global North) but only two of the interviewees were from the Global South. Again, this is a limitation of this research and something to consider in future research (see chapter 7).

---

<sup>13</sup> Given the small sample size I made a conscious decision that gender, age or ethnicity would not be part of analysis, however, I mention gender as an example of how power operates and may impact on data collection.

The thesis overall is informed by all of the interviews conducted. I aimed to provide a balanced view and used summarised discussion points from interviewees, as well as a large number of direct quotes within the thesis. Although I numbered the interviewees for my own purposes, I decided not to include this numerical identification when presenting quotations from the research. I made this decision to minimise the risk of identification - for example, if I assigned quotations to Interviewee 1, and it is also known that this participant is female and comes from a civil society background, it could feasibly make it easier to identify that person. I made this decision based on considerations of ethical permissions (see section 4.6 on ethics below). It is common practice to have a numerical or alphabetical identification, and it can be interesting to track a particular interviewee and see coherence in their input (although of course the quotes only represent a small part of all rich discussions). However, being able to track each interviewee makes the probability of identifying them much higher. On balance, given the initial feedback I received from the ethics committee prior to data collection, and the assurances I gave to the interviewees, I decided to leave the quotes completely anonymous.

While this may not be fully satisfactory, I have indicated how many direct quotes are drawn from the different interviews (in the last column on the right of Table 1 below). I felt this offered a constructive way to show that the direct quotes are drawn from all the interviewees. Some have fewer direct quotes, which may be due to the wording used or length of the interview.

In addition to the quotes, the data from all the interviewees was important in shaping the overall findings. The views and voices of all the interviews are reflected in this thesis.

**Table 1. Interviewee sample profiles**

Interviewee	Organisational background	Region	Sample criteria met	Direct quotes

				used in thesis <sup>14</sup>
1	International Civil Society	Global South	All	5
2	Non- governmental	Global North	All	12
3	Government	Global North	All	6
4	Government	Global North	All	9
5	International Civil Society	Global North	All	10
6	United Nations	Global South	All	12
7	Non- governmental	Global North	All	12

One interesting point to note (in hindsight) is that those interviewed identified themselves with education. As a group, they were closer to the education policy process (described in chapter 5) in terms of engagement, although some were focused on the processes in New York linked to the wider 2030 policy discussions, and some in both. This can be seen as a strength in that the interviewees had strong views on education and proceeding knowledge, which for my research on education was important. On the other hand, it might also be seen as limitation and something to be considered for future research.

#### *4.3.4. The Interview Processes*

---

<sup>14</sup> In addition to direct quotes I have also summarised views expressed by all interviewees.

Before beginning the interviews, I attached a numerical code to each, which was used as the file name for the audio storage.

I conducted the interviews in English, and all participants had a high level of competency in English language and regularly used English in their professional practice (although for most it was not their first language). There were no noticeable language barriers during the interview.

In my approach to prospective interviewees I offered to conduct the interview via phone or Skype or, if circumstances allowed, in person. Since all but one of the interviewees live outside of the United Kingdom (UK) where I live, Skype or telephone were in these cases the only means available. Skype is increasingly used in qualitative research and recognised as having advantages in a variety of situations (Alkhateeb, 2018), and (non-UK based) interviewees chose Skype as the medium through which to conduct the interview. I offered for the interview to take place with audio only or audio and camera to ensure that I took into consideration any cultural sensitivities and/or personal preference. All participants chose audio *plus* camera. In this sense it felt more personal, despite the interviewees being in different countries and different time zones. Additionally, to a degree this overcame some of the loss of visual cues associated with telephone interviews. I conducted one interview face-to-face in the UK. Interestingly, the dynamic was similar to the Skype interviews, though the interview lasted longer. This fits with Cohen *et al* (2007) noting that telephone interviews tend to be shorter than face to face interviews.

Much of the literature on interviewing raises question about power, and more often than not this assumes power dynamic is in favour of the interviewer (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Interviewing 'elites', however, arguably brings a different set of challenges. Elites are used to fielding questions, they are often good at being interviewed and deflecting or invalidating questioning (Batterson and Ball, 1995). There is also a view that interviewing elites is challenging in terms of gaining access, due uneven power dynamics in favour of the elite respondent and even that the respondent might be dishonest (cf. Morris, 2009). Morris (ibid) also makes the point that in terms of power

relations the researcher also has considerable power because they set the questions, they interpret the data and they select excerpts to support their arguments.

Lancaster (2017) points out, drawing on his own experience, that this is not necessarily always the case and in fact the opposite might be true. He notes that “[m]ost of the individuals I approached for interview were enthusiastic participants, pleased to lend their expertise, perspectives and time to the research” (ibid, p. 95). My experience with those who agreed to be interviewed was very positive and another of Lancaster’s descriptions match my experience: “participants in my study were articulate and knowledgeable, and spoke freely about the issues under investigation. In many cases, participants were eager to ‘inform’ me of their perspectives of the issues and processes [ . . . ]” (ibid).

I soon realised, however, that no two interviews would be the same, not only in the responses but in the way the questions and structure of the interview flowed. I did not feel it was appropriate to stop an interviewee, even if in answering one question they jumped forward to one I had scheduled later on my list. So, although I had an interview guide (see appendix A), it acted more as guideline than a precise set of questions, often covering the issue in the question in a different order or different way. I allowed the process to be flexible, to create an open interaction, whilst remaining professional and adhering to the ethical standards required by the university. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) suggest that interviewing should be seen as a social encounter rather than simply information gathering and a moment where knowledge is created. This is an interesting suggestion reinforced by the feedback from a number of interviewees (always after the actual interview had ended and the recording stopped), who said the interview process had allowed them to reflect on their own experiences and ideas on SDG4. It was, however, important to maintain a certain degree of distance, so as not to allow the process to become too informal. This was particularly important because in the majority of cases I had had prior professional contact with the interviewees (see the section on research positionality below).

#### 4.3.5 Data storage

To protect anonymity, personal information (name of interview) was separated from the transcript and audio recordings. All data was assigned a code before being stored in a secure location.

### 4.4 Data analysis

#### 4.4.1. Analysis of Documents

According to Prior (2008), most analysis of documents is focused on what is ‘in’ the document. However, in addition to what is in the document, she also identifies three other main ways of analysing documents: the archaeological approach, which focuses on how the document came into being; how the documents are used by human actors for purposeful ends; and how documents function in and impact on structures or patterns of social interaction and organisation (cf. Ibid). For my research, I looked primarily at how the SDG4 text came into being, as well as its content. I also touch on its implications (i.e. translation down and/or implementation of SDG4 at national level). In a similar vein to the archaeological approach described by Prior (ibid), Bowen (2009) notes that looking at different drafts of a document can provide valuable information and track changes. This was important for my research, in looking back over the language used in earlier proposals for how SDG4 should be framed. As discussed in Chapter 6, this led to an understanding of when and where some of the core language in the final text of SDG4 originates, recognising that even small and subtle changes in a text can reflect substantive implications (Yin, 1994 cited in ibid).

Analysing documents has different stages, including a review of the content, but Silverman (2000, cited in Bowen, 2009) highlights the need not to undermine the interpretative aspect in doing. I understand this to mean that it is not just a question of words and their frequency but how they are used and what meaning can be interpreted. Bowen (ibid), suggests that document analysis occurs in different stages and “involves *skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and*

*interpretation*" (Ibid, p. 32.) This leads to thematic analysis whereby patterns emerge. This was the type of iterative process I followed when analysing key documents for my research and it allowed me to engage more fully and critically with the text (I followed a similar pattern with my interview recordings and transcripts – see below). In my case, how I read the text was also shaped by its centrality in my analysis – for example, my analysis of supplementary texts differed to my analysis of the final text of SDG4 itself, the latter of which was a much more detailed line by line analysis.

In analysing the primary text of my research (i.e. SDG4) I undertook discourse analysis. There are differing forms of discourse analysis, including political, critical and rhetorical discourse analysis and also interpretive policy analysis (Glynos, Howarth, Norval and Speed, 2009). While there are multiple understandings of the word discourse and different schools of discourse analysis, what they share is a common concern for analysing the construction of meaning by subjects. For educational research, discourse analysis offers a means by which to interrogate *"the ways in which people make meaning in education"* (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui and Joseph 2005, p. 366).

In line with my overall methodological stance I applied a critical lens, and as such the research falls within what is known as critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is relevant for my research because it views language *"as a cultural tool [that] mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge"* (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 367). In CDA, language is seen as a social practice of power whereby discourse both reflects and constructs the social world (Ibid). CDA aims to go beyond a merely descriptive process to examine the social structures and social interactions that have informed and created the discourse(s), bringing together a micro and macro analysis. Fairclough (1989) offers a framework for analysing discourse that includes three dimensions of analysis: the analysis of texts (spoken or written), analysis of the processes of text production and of discursive practice. In analysing the final text of SDG4, I was cognisant of that *"each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis: 1. text analysis (description); 2. processing analysis (interpretation); 3. social analysis (explanation)"* (Janks, 1997, p. 329). However, Breeze (2011) notes that CDA is



not a “unitary, homogeneous entity,” (ibid, p. 494). She offers a view that CDA analysis has:

*A more or less political concern with the workings of ideology and power in society; and a specific interest in the way language contributes to, perpetuates and reveals these workings. Thus, the more explicit definitions all emphasise the relationship between language (text, discourse) and power (political struggle, inequality, dominance) (Ibid, p.495).*

I acknowledge the critiques of CDA as a method for analysis (cf. Breeze, 2011), including that CDA is defined by its political aims and that as such the analysis will reflect this (Ibid). This does not necessarily imply the critical reading is therefore false, however - it simply makes the political aspects and reading of the text explicit, whereas policy is often portrayed as neutral. Another criticism is that CDA moves too quickly to interpretations, requiring the researcher to do justice to the text to ensure their interpretations are well grounded (Ibid). In my view, this can be the case for any research, not just CDA. Nonetheless, based on my understanding of the premise of CDA I found increased confidence to delve into the text in a deeper way – in a way that was different to how I might read a policy text for work – and believe there is merit in the fundamental intentions of CDA. Breeze (ibid) does make an interesting point that in CDA’s efforts to highlight how “ideology works through discourse to maintain unequal power structures [ . . . ] this work has been overwhelming negative” (Ibid, p. 521). She argues it suggest a rather deterministic view of society and makes a plea for CDA to explore positive changes. While I do not necessarily agree that CDA always leads to a negative deterministic perception of society, I am aware that in my analysis of SDG4 I am highlighting the negative (this is particularly the case in chapter 6) rather than the positive. Despite my critical analysis, I still welcome the existence of SDG4 and hope it will spur governments and their partners to respect, protect and fulfil the universal right to quality education.

#### *4.4.2. Transcript analysis*

For the interview transcripts I used a similar technique as I had applied to the secondary/supplementary document analysis using the stages described by Bowen (2009) above. However, the processes are slightly different, as the act of transcribing each interview enabled me to engage with the data in a different way than simply reading a text. It gave me the opportunity to listen in detail, and to reflect on the interview process, and I listened to the interviews more than once even after transcription. I was keen to see what themes emerged on re-listening and re-reading the interviews and the transcripts, and to a degree the notes I took during the interview (although these were less systematic and very varied in detail and length). In doing so, patterns – or codes – emerged. This helped me become familiar with their content. I then adopted what might be described as a ‘coding’ approach. I chose to do this ‘manually’ (so to speak) rather than use any computer programming software (such as NVivo)<sup>15</sup> to analyse and code my data. However, it was also important to acknowledge that the interview questions themselves, to a degree, established themes. I reviewed the emerging themes in relation to the supplementary texts and what was known about the processes to build a picture of how SDG4 came into being, using the archaeological approach Prior (2008) refers to (that I described in the previous section) to inform my reading and critical analysis of the final SDG4 text. In analysing the interview data, I sought to treat it systematically and respectfully (to hold onto the meaning the interviewee had ascribed it). I recognise, however, that ultimately an objective reading was not possible as *“[d]ifferent analysts focus on different aspects of data, interpret things differently, and identify different meanings. Also, different analysts arrive at different conclusions even about the same piece of data.”* (Corbin and Strass 2008)

The table below shows which data sets were the main source of data for my specific questions.

**Table 2. Data set used for specific research questions**

Research Sub-Questions	Main data set for analysis	Additional data set for analysis

<sup>15</sup> See Nvivo website for more information <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>

RQ1: <i>How was SDG4 formed?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Interviews</li> <li>○ Secondary documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SDG4 final text</li> </ul>
RQ2: <i>How is education conceptualised in SDG4?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CDA of SDG4 final text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Secondary documentation</li> <li>○ Interviews</li> </ul>

#### 4.5 Trustworthiness and Authenticity of the Data

A common criterion for judging research is its reliability and validity, which are seen to equate with the ability to generalise from the findings and the ‘accuracy’ of the findings. These, however, are standard criteria in quantitative research: qualitative research starts from a different premise, aiming to provide in-depth insights and critical analysis rather than seeking to ‘generalise’ the findings.

Qualitative research acknowledges subjectivity and that (as I acknowledge in this thesis) ultimately the interpretation of the data is dependent on who is doing the interpreting (Corbin and Strass 2008) – any text can be read in a *plurality of ways* (Codd, 1988 cited in Ball 1993). The perspectives of the participants and the researchers are a ‘valid’ part of what distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative research:

*While human emotions and perspectives from both subjects and researchers are considered undesirable biases confounding results in quantitative research, the same elements are considered essential and inevitable, if not treasurable, in qualitative research as they invariable add extra dimensions and colors to enrich the corpus of findings” (Leung, 2015, p. 324).*

Questions related to the qualitative equivalent of reliability and validity still require consideration, however, although according to different criteria to those relevant to quantitative research. The robustness of the data is important if the work is to have

significance and, to paraphrase Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Golafshani, 2003), if anyone is going to pay attention to the research findings. Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose an alternative set of criteria for the qualitative researcher that will establish the ‘trustworthiness’ of their research, which include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as alternatives to quantitative measures. The concept of reliability associated with quantitative research can be reframed as “dependability” or “consistency” (Ibid, p.601). However, as Golafshani (2003) highlights, there are differing opinions on the matter, and some claim that the concept has no place in qualitative research at all (Stenbacka, 2001 cited in Golafshani 2003, p.601). Corbin (in Corbin and Struass, 2008), however, explains she is not comfortable with terms like validity and reliability being applied to qualitative research. Instead she states her preference for the use of the term ‘credibility’ by which she argues *“findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible “plausible” interpretations possible from data.”* (Ibid, p. 302). Corbin, after reviewing various criterion for evaluation research (Cf. Ibid), proposes ten different criteria. Below, I quote Corbin (Ibid) to explain the criterion (all text in ***bold italics*** is a direct quote from Ibid) and then briefly explain how my research coheres with these criteria. Corbin describes this as *“a list of general criteria that can be used to evaluate the “quality” of research findings.”* It is my understanding that not each and every criteria must be a perfect match, but I have tried to show how I endeavoured to meet these criteria in my research.

***The first criterion is fit. Do the findings resonate/fit with the experience of both the professionals for whom the research was intended and the participants who took part in the study?***

In drawing on the views and voices of my interviewees, rather than relying solely on my own analysis my research should have a stronger possibility to resonate with professionals in the field. I use a large number of direct quotes which allows the ‘voice’ of interviewees to come through. While there are different interpretations and different issues stressed by the interviewees there is also considerable commonality,

suggesting that the research will fit the experiences of some, although not all, who were engaged in this process.

*The second criterion is applicability or usefulness of findings. Do the findings offer new explanations or insights? Can they be used to develop policy, change practice, and add to the knowledge base of a profession?*

I have sought to build on existing theories and literature on policy processes and influences (see chapter 3), thereby locating my research within an existing body of literature. At the same time, the research offers new insights into SDG4's formulation and content, on which limited literature exists.

*A third criterion is concepts. Concepts are necessary for developing common understandings and for professionals to talk among themselves, therefore one would expect that findings would be organized around concepts/themes.*

I structured the research around key moments in the formulation of SDG4, and key education concepts such as quality, learning, equity, and rights. I use these concepts as means to discuss my findings. In discussing common concepts, I highlight how these concepts are sometimes ambiguous or not as they first appear, and in doing so point to how meaning is constructed.

*A fourth criterion is the contextualization of concepts. Findings devoid of context are like jelly donuts devoid of jelly, to use a rather graphic simile. I mean to imply that findings devoid of context are incomplete.*

I provide a contextualisation of SDG4's formulation and content, (see chapter 2) which offers insights into historical context of SDG4 (antecedents to the global agenda) and situates my analysis in the political and educational context..

*A fifth criterion is logic. Is there a logical flow of ideas? Do the findings "make sense"? Or are there gaps or missing links in the logic that leave the reader confused and with a sense*

*that something is not quite right? Are methodological decisions made clear so that the reader can judge their appropriateness for gathering data and doing analysis?*

I have endeavoured to create a logical flow, to show how the context and assumptions about education impacted the process of SDG4 formulation and how the process impacted the ideas expressed in SDG4. In undertaking this research, I selected methods of data collection and analysis that are consistent with my research philosophy of critical constructivism, using interview data to help paint a picture of the processes and issues of SDG4's formulation and shed light on the assumptions and ideas that shaped it (see chapter 5 and 6).

*A sixth criterion is depth. While concepts provide a common language for discussion and give organizational structure to the findings, it is the descriptive details that add the richness and variation and lift the findings out of the realm of the ordinary. It is depth of substance that makes the difference between thin, uninteresting findings and findings that have the potential to make a difference in policy and practice.*

Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to bring depth to the discussions, whether through existing literature or methodology, in order to try to demonstrate that I have approached my research in a systematic and rigorous manner. The data shared by interviewees, through semi-structured interviews, provides a depth to my analysis, providing insights that are unique in relation to the dynamics and influences which shaped SDG4. My research findings can be helpful for policy and practice and future research (see chapter 7).

*A seventh criterion is variation. Has variation been built into the findings, meaning are there examples of cases that don't fit the pattern or that show differences along certain dimensions or properties? By including variation, the researcher is demonstrating the complexity of human life.*

I would suggest that while reflecting some commonality, the interview data also offers variation, which in turn brings variety to the discussion and my analysis.

*An eight criterion is creativity. Are the findings presented in a creative and innovative manner? Does the research say something new, or put old ideas together in new ways?*

This research arguably contributes something new to the field. It offers unique insights from interview data on a recent global policy process and new (just 3 years old) global agenda. In writing the thesis, I have also sought to describe the ideas in manners that offer a creative discussion of the issues at hand.

*A ninth criterion is sensitivity. Did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity to the participants and to the data? Were the questions driving the data collection arrived at through analysis, or were concepts and questions generated before the data were collected.*

I have endeavoured to be sensitive and respect the data collected through my interviews. I have not manipulated this data in any way, instead I use direct quotes to allow those voices to come through. Inevitably, the findings presented and the arguments made in this thesis represent my interpretation of the data, which will have been shaped by the questions I asked (in the research itself and in the interview processes) and my own understandings of the concepts discussed. However, in my view this is consistent with my research philosophy of critical constructivism and view (as already quoted earlier in this chapter) that “*the world is socially and historically constructed [ . . . ] so are people and the knowledge they possess [ . . . ]*” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 2).

*A tenth criterion is evidence of memos. Finally, but certainly ranking up there among the most important criteria, is evidence of memos. Since a researcher can't possibly recall all of the insights, questions, and depth of thinking that goes on during analysis, memos are among the most necessary of all procedures. Memos should grow in depth and degree of abstraction as the research moves along. Thus, there should be some evidence or discussion of memos in the final report.*

Throughout the research I have taken notes, electronic and handwritten, to aid my thought process, but this has not included a systemic collection of memos that trace the process of my thinking – I rarely use personal planning tools in my professional life. My desk is usually covered with handwritten notes or print-outs of articles that shape my thinking, and the various iterations of the chapters in this thesis no doubt show the progression of my thinking.

In addition to the above, I have used two sources of data throughout the research, which enriches the data and help establish greater ‘credibility’ (Guba and Lincoln (1984) Ibid). In doing so I aimed to *“guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias”* (Patton, 1990, p. 556).

Importantly, the idea of triangulation in qualitative research has been questioned. Cohen et al (2011) cite a number of authors who question the use of triangulation to ensure validity. For example, Silverman (1985, cited in Ibid ) argues that the very notion of triangulation is a positivist method, and Fielding (1986) argues that having additional sources of data does not necessarily increase validity (cited in Ibid). From a critical constructivist approach, it is suggested that a way to support *“data triangulation [is] by allowing participants in a research to assist the researcher in the research question as well as with the data collection.”* (Golafshani 2003, p.604). For my research, I sought to achieve this through semi-structured interviews with policy ‘elites’. Through flexible and open-ended questions, I left space for the interviewee to have a creative role in interview process. In doing so, the views and voices of the interviewees contributed additional validity in the research. The interviewees are part of the knowledge-creation process. Furthermore, their insights are set in relation to each other and to document analysis and bring consistency of findings across data sources. In this way I sought to capture and respect multiple perspectives, as a means of triangulation.

I believe (as will hopefully become apparent in reading this thesis) that my research reflects an honest and rigorous interpretation and analysis of data I engaged with. For this reason, the following passage resonates:



*By the close of the investigation, the researcher's conviction about his [sic] own theory will be hard to shake, as most field workers can attest. This conviction does not mean that his [sic] analysis is the only plausible one that could be based on his data, but only that he [sic] has high confidence in its credibility ..."* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 225, cited in Corbin and Struass , 2008).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest that *"a rejection of epistemological innocence demands that researchers articulate their positioning within the research, in terms of their value stances, their problem choice, and their theoretical and methodological frames"* (Ibid, p. 49). Doing so arguably strengthens claims of credibility (reliability and validity). At the beginning of this chapter I clearly stated that I believe *"[ . . . ] the world is socially and historically constructed [ . . . ] so are people and the knowledge they possess [ . . . ]"* (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, I cannot claim my findings are 'the truth'. I have, however, endeavoured to be honest and systematic and show integrity and respect in approaching this research. In doing so, I have sought to strengthen the validity and credibility of my findings. For qualitative research, the essence of reliability is found in consistency, with variability being tolerated if there is methodology and epistemological consistency (Leung, 2015).

#### 4.6. Ethical considerations for my research

Ethical considerations are an important part of any research in the field of education and need reflection throughout the research process. Ethical practices in research involved all aspects of the research process, reflecting the integrity, trustworthiness and awareness (reflectivity) of the researcher and how they approach the research.

Among key considerations is the cost-benefit ratio, which compares the potential social benefit of the research to any personal costs to the participants (Cohen et al, 2011). Ensuring no harm to research participants must be a central consideration for qualitative research: researchers need to protect their research participants, show integrity, develop trust and guard against misconduct or impropriety (Israel and Hay,

2006 cited in Creswell, 2009). Ethics in qualitative research require that the purpose of the study is disclosed to any participants (Creswell, 2009). A key consideration of voluntary participation and informed consent (Cohen et al, 2011), ethical considerations in interviews includes the process and treatment of participants and the data from the interviews, including maintaining anonymity.

#### *4.6.1. Research permissions*

In undertaking my research, I consulted and followed the guidelines set out by the University of Sussex and sought the approval of the University Ethics Board before data collection began. In line with research protocols, I had to consider the ethical implications of my research. While I understood the absolute need for voluntary participation and informed consent, as well as the importance of anonymity, I saw my research as low risk and in completing the necessary paperwork rated my research as such. This was based on the understanding that I was not working with any vulnerable groups but with ‘policy elites’. I waited a long time for an answer from the University Ethics Board and was surprised to learn that the ethics board did not consider my research low risk. What I failed to consider was that with only a small group of informants from a highly specialised field, it might be easy to identify the interviewees through their answers. The risk to the potential interviewees was greater than I had considered. This led me to redraft my information sheet and consent forms (which were approved the second time, see appendices C). Although not a requirement, it also impacted on my decision regarding how best to present the interview data in relation to direct quotes from interviewees. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, and as will be apparent on reading this thesis, I do not allocate quotations to specific interviewees, not even through lettered or numbered references. I simply refer to all as ‘interviewee’. I have presented quotations in this way to create an additional layer of anonymity. I concluded that a series of quotations attributed to ‘interviewee Y’, for example, when read together could facilitate identification, especially given the information presented in table 1 above. In this way I provide a greater degree of anonymity. The risks of identification can never be removed altogether, but I have sought to minimise such risk

as far as possible. For the same reason I do not include a copy of any of the transcripts in my appendices.

#### 4.6.2 *Informed consent*

As discussed elsewhere, voluntary participation and the informed consent of interviewees is central to ensuring an ethical approach to my research. Each participant was approached via email from my university account, with a formal cover letter on university-headed paper, along with a participant information sheet (also on university headed paper). This information sheet also included the contact details of my main supervisor and explained that the potential interviewee was able to contact the Chair of the University Ethics Committee if they had any concerns about how the research was conducted.

I explained I would be interviewing them because of their knowledge and/or engagement in the post 2015 (SDG4) policy processes and in their individual capacity, not as representative of affiliated organisations or governments.<sup>16</sup> I was keen to make this clear for two reasons (a) I was interested in their own views and (b) I understood there might be complexities in getting organisational permissions and how this might limit what information shared.

I made it clear their identity would be treated confidentially and none of the information provided would be attributed to them. However, based on advice from the University Ethics Committee, I explained the risks involved and stated that *“[w]hile absolutely no personal data of any kind will be included in the final thesis or any articles which originate from the doctoral work, given the relatively small number of interviewees it could be feasible for readers to deduce from some specific answers which organisation or even who the person answering is. This is a limited risk and there would be no means of verification as all the data will be treated confidentially.”* (information sheet, see appendix C).

---

<sup>16</sup> Although obviously I am aware of their professional affiliation.

I also made it clear that any information shared would be used for research purposes only and not for any professional gain, including this sentence which was underlined for additional emphasis: “I will not use any of the information to enhance or further my professional career or to influence any policy discussion in my professional contexts” (Ibid). Each interview was asked to sign a consent form prior to interview.

#### 4.7. Researcher Positionality

As a professional in the field of education, I came to this research process with a set of experiences, knowledge, beliefs and values that inform my thinking and researcher position. I am concerned professionally and personally with social justice and this motivated me to approach this research from a critical research perspective.

In undertaking this research, I was cognisant of the complexities and possible contradictions that exist as someone who is both engaged in research and active professionally in policy advocacy. I have been directly engaged in advocacy on SDG4 through my work with UNESCO, the Global Campaign for Education and the Malala Fund. Furthermore, I also come from a background in human rights advocacy that undoubtedly shapes my thinking. As a former teacher (in youth and adult education), I also have a particular outlook on the importance of pedagogical processes. This is shaped in particular by my first experience as a teacher working with young people with learning disabilities, where I came to understand the value of learning as an experience, not simply as the result of a test.

My researcher positionality has implications for both the theoretical and methodological sources and choices I make in my analysis (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Working in the field of global education has been helpful for this research on the one hand, bringing insider knowledge, on the other hand it is arguably harder to maintain some distance between work and research. I found the distinction made by (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, as discussed in the previous chapter) between analysis of and analysis for

policy of particular significance. I was more familiar with the latter and it was a learning curve to learn to look at policy text not through the lens of an advocate or campaigner.

Having been in this field of work for some time, I had also had professional contact with many of the interview participants who took part in my research and this obviously had implications for how I engaged with them and also how they saw me. This was largely positive - it was a more relaxed process and there was (I assume to different degrees) a level of trust. Conversely, I had to take extra care to maintain professional distance in the interview process and to avoid assumptions based on prior knowledge. As someone 'known', some of the interviewees may have been more cautious in their answers, perhaps concerned there was a 'risk' in sharing their views with me, although this was not apparent to me. Obviously, adherence to university protocols of ethical conduct, anonymity, and consent, mitigate these factors (see the following section). Nonetheless they were important issues to be cognisant of and reflect on.

#### 4.8. Limitations of my research

The first limitation is that the research is inevitably impacted by my positionality as a researcher (see above), which can be seen as having limited my research in a number of ways. Firstly, I came to the research through a close connection with the subject matter, working as a professional in the field of global education and having directly engaged in policy advocacy on SDG4. In this sense, I was not - and am not - neutral in my view and analysis of SDG4. Secondly, I had pre-existing contact with a number of my interview participants, which can alter the interview process from both sides, creating the possibility of distorting the process and data collected. Thirdly, selecting the interview participants in a purposeful way, often through this prior knowledge, may have led to unconscious bias, either in my approaches to potential interviewees or in their willingness or otherwise to participate. Additionally, the small number of interview participants could be perceived as reducing the scope of the data and the ability to draw generalisable conclusions from it. This is not necessarily the case but, as I acknowledge above, the majority of my respondents ended up being men from the

global north. In this sense – and because I am also from the global north - the research can be seen as not having a sufficient diversity of voices. The same is true of the gender mix.

#### 4.9. Summary of this chapter.

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology that was used for this research, starting with a discussion of my ontological and epistemological understandings that shaped my research philosophy of critical constructivism. I also explained my qualitative approach, data collection and analysis and ethics, as well my researcher positionality and the limitations of the research. Understanding my research approach is intended to facilitate a clearer reading subsequent chapter of my thesis.

In the following chapters (5 and 6) I share the findings of my research, on the processes which led to and shaped the development of SDG4 and my critical reading of the final text.

## Chapter 5 – The formulation of SDG4

### 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, based on data collected from semi-structured interviews combined with an analysis of prominent policy texts that were important in these processes, I trace the genesis of SDG4. SDG4's formulation can be traced along two distinct yet interrelated pathways (see below). Along these pathways, different groups of actors put forward their visions to be given a central place. Given the scale of activities along each pathway, a complete and absolute analysis of these processes that SDG4 is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I have selected three key global 'policy moments' along each that I consider significant in SDG4's formulation. By 'policy moments' I am referring to either a particular meeting, consultation or report that had significance in shaping the final text of SDGI have limited my discussion to three 'policy moments' in each pathway to make the scope of my discussion manageable. Each 'policy moment' discussed operated at a global level and has also been selected because of its significant impact on the formulation of SDG4 (as they emerged in my research).

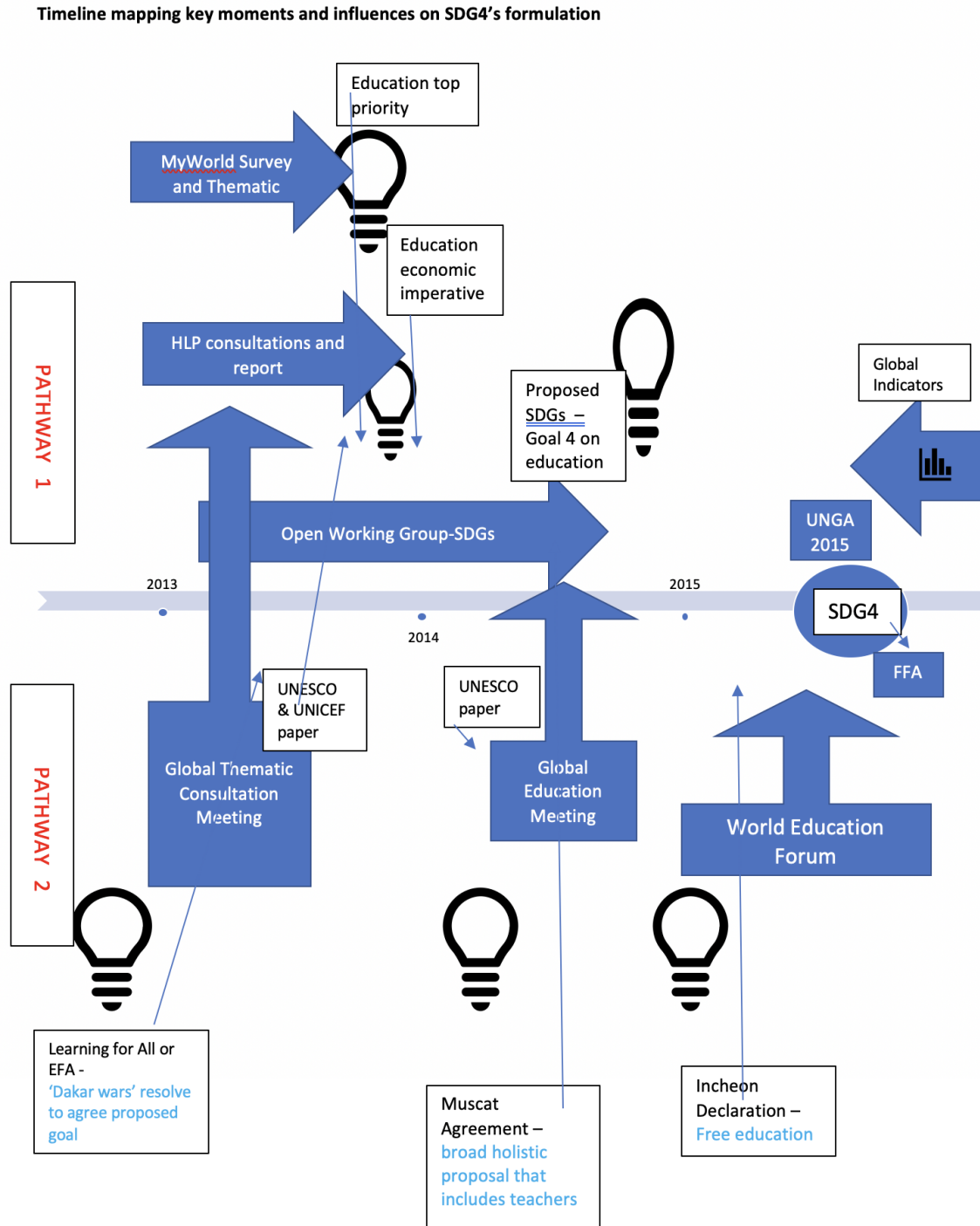
I have structured this chapter by pathway and by selected moments within each to highlight the role of different processes. This chapter presents the findings in relation to the first of my specific research sub-questions, **RQ1: How was SDG4 formed?**

My discussion and analysis focused primary on policy moments concentrated in 2013, 2014 and 2015. This arguably represents the most intense period in the formulation of SDG4, although some processes did begin before. In Chapter 6, I also discuss what influences have been brought to bear on SDG4 after its adoption.

The chronology of decisions and events runs across the two pathways and I have signalled where the pathways coincide and impact upon each other. Reading this

chapter requires cross-referencing between the processes to understand their interaction. To add clarity, below I have included a timeline to act as a visual reference to how they fit together:

Figure 2: Timeline of policy formulation processes





This chapter is divided into four main sections, including the above Introduction, section 5.1. In section 5.2, I focus on key policy moments in the wider 2030 agenda process that were influential in shaping SDG4. This first pathway is what I call ‘the road from Rio’. It was at the Rio + 20 meeting in 2012 that the first references to sustainable development as a global framework gained support. This is the pathway from the MDGs, centred in New York, where the bulk of the negotiations over the SDGs took place. In section 5.3, I discuss the education-specific pathway. This pathway is guided by the legacy of the EFA movement and hinges on Paris, where the UN’s only specialist agency for education, UNESCO, is housed. The processes here were focused only on education, albeit with the negotiations of the global development agenda as an ever-present backdrop. In the concluding section, section 5.4, I summarise my key findings in relation to RQ1 (see above).

I do not include a focus on the final high-level inter-governmental negotiations for two reasons: firstly, because none of my interviewees had direct access to this process and secondly, because the SDG4 text was already in place by July 2014. One of my interviewees explains why this was the case:

*When the OWG adopted its own set of goals the only thing that was clear was that [it] would be submitted to the General Assembly [as] part of the inter-governmental negotiations that would start in January 2015. I think most of the member states assumed that changes could still be made to the OWG outcomes and it was only by February/March 2015 that it was clear that nothing would be opened up, because if one thing is opened up then everything will have to be opened up. Which meant that by the time Incheon happened, most of the Agenda 2030 was pretty much set in stone.<sup>17</sup> (Interviewee).*

---

<sup>17</sup> Incheon is the location of the 2015 World Education Forum and the outcome of that meeting is known as the Incheon Declaration (discussed below in section 5.3.).

## 5.2. The global development pathway

### 5.2.1 The origins of the 2030 agenda

In 2010, at the close of a summit on MDGs, the then UN General Secretary said, “*we must also look ahead, beyond the deadline for the goals [ . . . ] to initiate a process that will result in a post-2015 framework for the development work of the United Nations*” (UN, 2010). This statement began the process for any unfinished business from the MDGs to be carried forward into a new global development agenda (what eventually became the 2030 agenda). However, it was the Rio + 20 conference in 2012 that set the path to the more expansive sustainable development agenda. In the preparations for that meeting, an idea emerged (initially proposed from within the Colombian Government) that would bring together the social and economic with the environmental aspects of development into one agenda (Dodds, Donoghue and Roesch, 2017). The Rio + 20 meeting set out a common agenda for the ‘Future We Want’ (UN 2012), formally paving the way for what would eventually become the Sustainable Development Agenda, with its 17 goals and “*in retrospect it is clear that without Rio+ 20, the post-2015 agenda would not look the way it does today*” (Dodds, et al., 2017, p 24). Many of the formal processes that influenced the formation of SDG4 and its content were born directly from the Rio +20 meeting, as well as building on the legacy of the MDGs.

Within this first global development pathway I have chosen three ‘policy moments’ to highlight particular influences on SDG4’s formulation. These are:

- (i) the MyWorld survey and UNDP consultations.
- (ii) the report of the United Nations High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP).
- (iii) the UN Open Working Group stocktaking and negotiations

I acknowledge that these represent parts of a very complex process and that my discussion of them represents just a snapshot of each process. However, I draw out the key influence of each on the process (see below).

### 5.2.2 My World Survey

The 2030 agenda set a new tone for developing such global frameworks, with ordinary people given a voice. As *The Million Voices* (UNDG, 2013) report explained, the:

*United Nations was determined to tap into the spirit of the first words of its founding Charter: “We the Peoples”. The consultation sent a clear message. While the post-2015 agenda should and will be determined by governments, people across the world are demanding a say in the decisions that affect their lives. (Ibid, p.iii )*

For almost two years spanning 2012 and 2013 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) undertook a series of 88 national consultations, 11 thematic consultations and the global MyWorld online survey on the future development agenda. Through these processes they received input from over one million people globally. In this section, I focus on the MyWorld online survey (UN, 2012b) in particular, and assess why this was significant in shaping SDG4. In my discussions on the second pathway later in this chapter, I discuss the global thematic meeting on education which took place in March 2013 (see below).

The MyWorld Survey asked individuals to prioritise six of sixteen possible issues that would make the most difference to their lives and those of their family. This included choices such as better health care, a decent job, protection against crime and violence, honest and responsive government and action on climate change. Among the choices was ‘a good education’, which when clicked on had a dropdown box with text that read:

*This means that all children should have a high quality primary and secondary education that equips them for employment and an enjoyable life. Governments and the private sector should work together to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development for adults (Ibid).*

While the dropdown box does link education to an enjoyable life, the first link is to employment and a clear link is also made to the private sector. While arguments can be made as to why this is justifiable, it reinforces a message - that runs through the process - on the link between education and work. Naming the private sector creates a privileged space for this group in the future education agenda. By contrast, there is no mention of qualified teachers, who are at the heart of education.

The MyWorld survey, which garnered responses from over 800,000 participants in 194 countries was unprecedented in listening to the views of ordinary people. For the future of education post-2015 it was more than symbolic and signals a key policy moment in SDG4's development. The outcome of the MyWorld Survey is also materially important for the future of SDG4, with 'a good education' the highest ranked priority for all country groups, all genders and all ages combined (see appendix D).

Although it may have seemed logical that education would be prominent in any post-2015 agenda - given it was one of the MDGs and is a fundamental human, as well as the compelling evidence of its impact across a wide range of indicators, from health to democracy (cf. UNESCO, 2014) - this was not always certain. In the early stages of the post-2015 process it was thought that education could be grouped in a cluster with other essential services such as health or be included as a cross-cutting theme. As one of my interviewees points out, this was a view held by very influential global actors:

*to give you an anecdotal piece of information around in 2013 [ . . . ] we met with the Chief economist at the World Bank in New York to discuss some of the issues related to education and he clearly indicated from their perspective and most of their consultations there was no real desire from other sectors for a standalone education goal, [ they ] were arguing for a consolidated goal around social services, combining health, education, and perhaps other related social services, social welfare (interviewee).*

The fact that 'a good education' emerged as the highest priority globally arguably changed this. From the perspective of a number of my interviewees it represents a turning point in the formation of SDG4. Words from the same informant who gave the quotation immediately above capture the sentiment:

*I can't remember when the My-World-Survey electronic consultation began but even in the first round of the survey, education featured as a priority within the top five from the outset and during the two years/18-month, education never dropped below five and towards end always in the top three, [ . . . ] .so, by time formal consultation began within UN [ . . . ] [i]t became clear that education had to be a standalone goal so when the bigger OWG discussion began, even though some quarters were still resistant, by and large I think the development community accepted that education had to be a standalone goal. (interviewee).*

The MyWorld Survey (UN, 2012) is a critical policy moment in the development of SDG4 becoming a standalone goal in the 2030 agenda. The result sent a clear message that education was key to sustainable development. As another interviewee noted:

*once you open up a consultation process and then from every region and every age group says education is really the top it becomes incredibly compelling evidence [ . . . ] not [to] have education now would just be violating every aspect of [the] process' (interviewee).*

The Million Voices report, (UNDG, 2013) - which also reflected a range of global and thematic consultations as well as the MyWorld Survey - acknowledges the central role of education for future development, arguing that “[w]ithout a strong education system, many structural deficiencies and inequalities will persist, hindering the realization of the post-2015 agenda UNDP, 2013, (, p. 108). Interestingly, that same report spoke of “a single harmonized global education framework” that built on lessons from the MDGs and EFA and universal relevance (Ibid). This suggestion is reinforced generally throughout this pathway, signals the desire among many key actors to end EFA.

While the MyWorld Survey and consultations are notable for giving ordinary people a voice in shaping the SDGs, there are also critiques of who was represented in these consultations and in the formulation of the SDGs and SDG4. King and Palmer (2013) suggest there was more engagement and influence from northern actors (in which they

included international NGOs) in the formulation of SDG4. Sayed and Ahmed (2015), while accepting the limitations of such consultations, argue that “ *[e]ven the consultations from the Global South probably represent a particular ‘privileged’ constituency already well-resourced and connected to a global policy community.*” (Ibid, p. 332).

These critiques are important in understanding policy making processes at a global level. Policy (as discussed in chapter 3) remains the domain of elites, who often share similar ideas and values constituting a common ‘habitus’ (Lingard, Sellar, and Baroutsis, 2015). This leads to understanding problems and solutions in a particular way, with certain groups being privileged. For example, with SDG4 (as discussed in detail in chapter 6) the target on scholarships (SDG4.b) is seen by some an example of elites possibly being influenced by how of their own children could benefit, and certainly as a way of powerful donor appearing more generous in overseas development assistance (ODA) whilst benefitting themselves. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest, it is important to consider who benefits and who loses by specific policies.

While governments would be the ones to ultimately determine the detail of the agenda, this opening up to consultation marks a shift from the MDGs which, as noted earlier, were almost exclusively expert-driven and decided by policy elites. The MyWorld Survey without a doubt marks a hugely significant policy moment for SDG4’s formulation, ensuring that education had a central place in the post-2015 development agenda.

### *5.2.3 The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons*

The second key policy moment I have identified within this first pathway is the final report of the United Nations High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) *in 2013*. This HLP was convened by UN Secretary-General in 2012 to “*advise him on a bold and at the same time practical development agenda beyond 2015.*” (UN HLP, 2013, p. 66). It was co-chaired by three heads of State (at that time): President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the UK, with 27 women and

men (predominately politicians and high-level policy officials) along with some business leaders and a couple of human rights activists. The HLP were tasked with making recommendations for the development of the post-2015 agenda following on from the Millennium Development Goals and Rio +20 process.

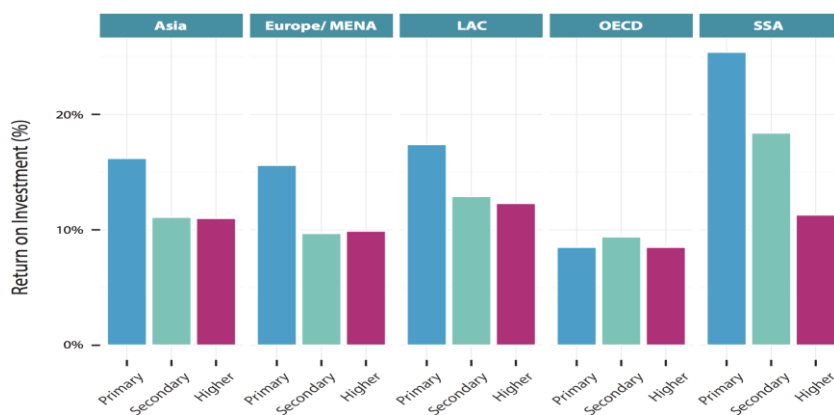
Over the course of the year, the HLP sought input through meetings, surveys, and mobile phone polling, asking what to keep from the MDGs, what to amend and what to add, publishing their final report in May 2013 (UN HLP, 2013). The HLP process ran more or less simultaneously with the MyWorld and thematic consultations, with the survey results and the outcomes of the 2013 thematic consultation meeting for education (see pathway 2) informing the HLP deliberations.

HLP call for social, economic and environmental aspects of development to be merged into one single universal agenda. This is a significant shift from past global frameworks where these areas were separate and where, as in the MDGs, development was seen as something for the Global South. The report calls for *“five big, transformative shifts”* (UN HLP, 2013, Exec. Summary), which include *“leaving no one behind”* – which becomes a mantra of the post-2015 agenda. One of the shifts is to transform the economy to promote jobs and inclusive growth. They also call for sustainable development at the heart of the post-2015 agenda and to build effective, open and accountable institutions. The final shift, which they argue is the most important, is to forge a new global partnership (cf. Ibid). The HLP note that globally agreed goals can be powerful drivers of change but to do so they must have measurable indicators. The HLP put forward twelve illustrative goals, one of which proposed that governments *“Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning”* (HLP, 2013. p.36, see appendix E for the full illustrative goal on education).

The report is influential for education for a number of reasons. Firstly, including education as one of the illustrative goals further consolidates it as a standalone goal. Secondly, the illustrative goal has a focus on quality and lifelong learning, as well as including a strong focus on learning outcomes, all of which make it into the final SDG4 -

and in some places, the language is almost identical. It signals an expansion beyond the MDG goal, although it's not as broad as the EFA framework. Thirdly, it stresses the economic imperative of education for development post-2015, aligned to an HCT of education discussed in the previous chapter. This is partly done through the targets and partly in the accompanying text. While education is identified as a “fundamental right” and there are references to the rights of the child, the overwhelming flavour is one that promotes education as a key ingredient in economic development. It stresses education's role in lifting “*lifetime earnings as well as how much a person can engage with and contribute to society.*” (ibid, p36). It places a strong emphasis on learning, including signalling that “[s]kills learned in school must also help young people to get a job.” (ibid, p37). This emphasis on the economic role of education is given an additional boost by inclusion of a graph on the economic rates of return that education can bring, reinforcing education's role in society as an economic imperative.

**Education Benefits Individuals and Societies<sup>24</sup>**



(HLP, 2013, p. 37).

The chart above sends a powerful message on where the value of education lies. From this perspective, education's ‘success’ is largely measured by its ability to create a skilled workforce and promote economic growth.

The fourth important influence of the HLP for SDG4 is that it emphasises measurable outcomes calling for children to be “*able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards*” and for “*adolescents to achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes to x%*” (ibid, p. 36). The call for measurable learning



outcomes is realised in the final text of SDG4. What is more, the global indicators for SDG4 ultimately have a strong impact on how the targets themselves are interpreted, arguably reshaping the goals and targets after their adoption (see chapter 6).

In many ways the HLP report offers a broad understanding of the contribution of education to the post-2015 development. It recognises education's potential to contribute to sustainable development in building awareness for recycling and renewable energy, ending corruption, impacting health and family size, and playing a role in peace processes. More generally, the report highlights women's rights, indigenous rights, sexual and reproductive rights. However, the economy is dominant in relation to education, with numerous links between education and earnings, livelihoods, jobs, growth success of business and business capacity. The HLP report clearly reinforces a HCT vision of education. In fairness to the HLP, they explain that *"[y]oung people asked for education beyond primary schooling, not just formal learning but life skills and vocational training to prepare them for jobs."* (Ibid, p 2). But the strong emphasis on education and work (also reinforced from the outset through the drop-down box of the MyWorld Survey) can also be seen as a means by which education is used "to forge subjectivities whose imagination is aligned with the interests of capital" (Rizvi, 2006, p, 200), with education part of a trajectory to earning potential rather than being of inherent value.

The HLP format was seen as means of building consensus on new policy directions in the context of increasingly complex multilateralism (von Einsiedel, and Pichler, 2017). Comprised of high level figures, the HLP was vested with power from the outset and, unsurprisingly, was influential in shaping the future agenda. It cemented the formalisation of a standalone goal for education; it influenced the scope and core language and a strong focus on learning outcomes, and promoted the link between education, work and the economy.

#### 5.2.4. Open Working Group

The OWG is arguably the most significant of all the processes in the formation of the 2030 agenda, and as such a core ‘policy moment’ in the formulation of SDG4. In this section I provide a brief overview of the OWG process and the dynamics that shaped the final text of SDG4.

The origins of the OWG stem from the previously mentioned Rio + 20 conference in 2012. Formed in 2013, the OWG was initially envisaged as a smaller group, but grew to 70 UN Member States in thirty groupings, with different expectations and levels of trust being one of many barriers to overcome:

*In addition to the usual North-South mistrust and the need for the co-chairs to build trust with the membership, this was an unusual process where very little was predictable [ . . . ] There was also lingering mistrust about the entire concept of the SDGs. It was clear that the understandings of sustainable development, the levels of expertise, and the institutional support among member states were light-years apart. Some delegations were very much about renewing the MDGs, especially those that had not been achieved. Others didn't understand what the SDGs were supposed to be, and still others didn't think that a set of goals could result from intergovernmental negotiations (Kamau, Chasek, O'Connor, 2018, p. 82).<sup>18</sup>*

The OWG held thirteen sessions over seventeen months from early 2013 to mid-2014, and these were divided into two stages: stocktaking and deliberations. It received structured inputs from the UN Systems Technical Support Teams (TST) through a series of technical briefs. Additionally, the OWG held consultation with so-called Major Groups and other Stakeholders, made up of trade unions, civil society and business groupings.<sup>19</sup> In July 2014 the OWG delivered their final proposal for the sustainable development goals and targets, one of which was SDG4.

In June 2013, the OWG held its fourth session to take stock and discuss ‘*employment and decent work for all, social protection, youth, education and culture*’. To support the discussion on education the technical support team provided a briefing paper, which

---

<sup>18</sup> One of the authors of this book is Macharia Kamau, the Kenyan Ambassador to the UN, who was one of the co-chairs of the OWG. The other co-chair was Csaba Kőrösi, of Hungary.

<sup>19</sup> For more information see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/about>

provided a stocktaking of the situation of education globally (UNDESA, 2013). The briefing paper called for “[ . . . ] *a single harmonized global education framework, informed by the successes and challenges of the MDG and EFA agendas*”(Ibid). On one level this is not surprising, as the audience for the paper were the New York-based ambassadors focusing on the whole sustainable development agenda (the follow up to the MDGs). The HLP report had talked of a single agenda, but this document made explicit calls for a merging of the MDGs with EFA. The end of EFA was something that many within the international education community – most notably the civil society coalition and the Global Campaign for Education – were resisting. They feared a narrowing of the agenda and wanted to maintain the EFA movement (see below). In this sense this ‘technical’ briefing had a clear political message that EFA should not continue, and this offers an insight into how power was operating behind the scenes.

The briefing paper included the overarching goal of “*Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All*”, which had been proposed - after fierce debate – in March 2013 at the Global Thematic Consultation on Education (see next section). The goal was very close to the one proposed by the HLP just the month before. This shows some interconnection between pathway 1 and pathway 2.

The technical paper also highlighted the immediate and intergenerational “*paybacks across all dimensions of sustainable development*” (Ibid) that education could bring. This included the rates of return on wages, echoing long-standing arguments on the economic returns on education (Psacharopoulos, 1972; Mincer ,1974; McMahon and Wagner, 1981) - as discussed in chapter 3 - and poverty reduction. It also included wider indicators on infant mortality, reduction in conflict and greater support for democracy, among others.

It is reported by one of my interviewees that although the OWG discussions did focus on the link with jobs, the conversations were broader:

*If you look at what the countries were saying in the very beginning of the OWG, very many were talking about learning outcomes and skills for work*

*and people needing jobs but also loads of countries were talking about how it's so important what kind of citizens we bring up. Possibly it's related to the fact that the OWG was building on the whole UN sustainable track, which meant that education had been defined as education for sustainable development in that setting rather than the MDG understanding of primary education for all. There was an appreciation of the role of education in forming the basis for a new world and new kind of values and ways of doing things (interviewee).*

However, in their summary of discussions during session 4 of the OWG, the Co-Chairs included two bullet points on education:

- *The human rights dimension, equity of access, quality, and relevance were emphasized with respect to education. At the elementary level it should be free.*
- *Complete the unfinished work of the MDGs to ensure universal primary school enrolment - but also learning outcomes, relevance to job needs, lifelong learning, adult literacy, and non-formal education. (OWG 2013a)*

This summary points to a contradiction in the OWG discussions that stressed the human rights dimension of education while simultaneously proposing to meet the absolute minimum obligation to make education free at primary level, rather than recognise the obligation for all levels of education to be free (see chapter 2). The co-chairs' summary maintains a link between education and employment.

At this point, although the technical briefing paper for the 4<sup>th</sup> session OWG had suggested education should be a “*cross-cutting issue across all development goals, as well as an explicit education goal*” (Ibid, p. 4), the co-chairs made no mention of this in their summary. One interviewee who had a close engagement with OWG processes suggested that for many in the OWG this was not seen as an issue, and in fact that overall education elicited less enthusiastic debate:

*many outside the education community just took it for granted that it would be a standalone goal, so neither the member states nor civil society were really excited about education [ . . . ] There wasn't really much thoughtful engagement with the priorities in the education (Interviewee).*

By the middle of 2013, the OWG had issued an interim progress report on their work to date that noted “[e]ducation is absolutely central to any sustainable development agenda. It is not only an essential investment but an important basis for human enrichment through life-long learning” (OWG, 2013b, paragraph 78, p. 12). This interim report called for a greater focus on measurable learning outcomes, and further reinforced links between education and the economy. At this stage the OWG had still not actually stated that education should be a standalone goal, and concerns persisted:

*People felt social services needed to be a block [. . .] I think by then the Social Development Network had been set up and their critique was if you were going to have these separate goals it would be totally unmanageable. Those concerns were raised quite early, jockeying to see how you could consolidate related goals, but then I think [there was] the pressure from countries in particular, and other actors, that you couldn't bundle education [together] with other goals as it would lose its focus (interviewee).*

This highlights the lack of agreement among different stakeholders, including civil society, and also references the different realities of different countries. While the SDGs are a universal agenda, there is considerable diversity in national contexts and this influenced government positions throughout the discussions.

In the first quarter of 2014, the OWG issued “a list of 19 ‘Focus Areas’ for consideration by Member [. . .]” (IISD, 2014), of which education was the fourth. It flagged the benefits of education, such as poverty eradication and gender equality, and “ensuring equitable access to education at all levels with focus on the most marginalized”, as well as “improving access to education for persons with disabilities” (*Ibid*). As with the HLP, there are also multiple links made to the economic value of education in “creating the necessary skilled and productive labour force,” “ensuring effective learning outcomes at all levels and imparting knowledge and skills that match the demands of the labour market” and “vocational training” and “economic growth, employment, and sustainable consumption and production”. In this sense it echoes the discourse HCT, while also calling for education to be inclusive.

In early June 2014, the OWG released its zero-draft proposal with education featuring as a standalone goal and called on member states to *‘provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all’* (IISD, 2014, p. 3). The education goal and targets were similar to those in the final SDG4 text. It was also remarkably similar to the goal proposed by the international education community at the Global Education Meeting (GEM) held in Muscat, Oman, just two weeks earlier (see the education pathway). It appears that the 2014 GEM proposal to *‘ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030’* (UNESCO, 2014b) influenced the OWG. There is, however, scepticism over exactly who influenced whom, given the Muscat meeting was delayed from March to May 2014:

*There are many things to be annoyed with, and the whole Muscat process – the meeting itself was postponed from March to May 2014, which meant that it was adopted the week after the May session of the OWG, which then meant that at the June session of the OWG – when UNESCO, Norway and Brazil organized the side event to inform the open working group of the Muscat agreement – it was just too late to start rewriting the targets completely (Interviewee).*

This sheds a different light on the interaction between the two processes, suggesting the education processes had been held back in order to allow the OWG the space to shape their proposed goals, rather than the Muscat goal and targets being the driving force. Of course, UNESCO and other stakeholders shared the outcomes of the Muscat meeting with the OWG, and the same member states (albeit by different individuals) were represented in both the OWG and the education dialogues. It is difficult to identify the true direction of power and influence, but by the Muscat meeting the OWG were already well established and not necessarily interested in outside perspectives. The same interview as above notes:

*which meant they weren’t going to start taking some language that some random external process proposed. And you can sympathise with that. The OWG had worked together for over a year at the time of Muscat Agreement, but I think it’s really troubling to think that the Muscat agreement wasn’t some random proposal but was representative of agreement based on numerous consultations, regional meetings (Interviewee).*

This quotation offers insight into how actors working in their own particular spaces were reluctant to accept outside influences leading the process, despite the fact that those trying to influence the OWG as part of a legitimate process had expert knowledge.

In July 2014, the final OWG Proposal for SDGs was published with 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets (UN 2014). The fourth goal, SDG4, “*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*”, with seven thematic targets and three means of implementation targets, which are almost entirely carried forward to the final text of SDG4. The discussions of what shaped the OWG’s decisions on education goals are often painted in purely technical terms:

*The OWG wanted to address these shortcomings [of the MDGs], so delegates added targets on quality lifelong learning, including early childhood and preprimary education, free and equitable primary and secondary education, and technical, vocational, and tertiary education [ . . . ]* (Kamau, *et al.*, 2018, p .162).

Such descriptions mask the underlining discourses and politics that shaped the agenda. According to one observer, the OWG neither objected nor promoted education. It was, compared to other areas, seemingly uncontentious:

*the OWG signalled consistent but quiet support for education. While there were no outspoken opponents – aside from those opposed to commitments on sexuality education and financing – neither was there anyone championing education and taking the strategic ownership of the goal-in-making. It is hard to tell whether this was due to complacency that there would be an education goal, or a failure to understand the urgency of education progress in relation to sustainable development (cf. Wulff forthcoming, 2019).*

This ‘quiet support’ belies the political nature of SDG4. This is not only, as Wulff (*Ibid*) points out, about the exclusion of certain issues that were culturally contentious; it also related to debates about what levels of education should be free, although this changed

during the OWG process from free at elementary level only to secondary level also being free in the OWG proposal.

Unsurprisingly, there were substantive debates and divisions within and outside of the OWG. Even in the twelfth session of the OWG when the proposed goals were about to be published, discussions continued on the possibility of merging some targets (such as the then 4.1 on primary and secondary with the then 4.3 on early childhood development and pre-primary) (NGOs-Beyond-2014, 2014) or formulating other indicators than targets (as in 4.9 on the quality of teaching) (Ibid). The former led to nowhere, but the latter succeeded. Debates over the inclusion of human rights education and/or comprehensive sexuality education under curricula 4.7 were also hotly contested, and the latter didn't make it into the final document.

While the OWG refers to education as a human right, it has a strong focus on the outcomes of education, with the benefit of education for work and the economy consistently referenced. As one of my interviewees argued:

*inevitably within the SDG logic there is a sort of instrumentalism. We want education because it is going to help with all these other things, rather than 'an inherent good in itself of value to people as human beings [ . . . ] It shapes their thinking, I think if you are looking at education as something that has a very narrow instrumental function to feed an economy and get people ready for jobs so you [only need] literacy and numeracy so you can follow instruction and add up numbers [ . . . ] (interviewee).*

This suggests that the 'quiet support' for education is underpinned by assumptions about the instrumental value of education. Central to this is the prospective economic return of education, and this discourse partly explains why education was in some ways taken for granted within the wider development community. Having recognised its instrumental value, those outside the education community were less concerned with the intricacies of the debate.



The OWG's vision for education did change and grow during the process, shaped by views from governments of varied political persuasions. One of my interviewees suggested that the OWG process was something its members truly believed in:

*They had a really interesting process, because they did eight rounds of what they called stocktaking sessions, and after that in March 2014 they put out a document of what they called focus areas, which everyone thought were standalone goals, and then they just had a short paragraph explaining the priorities under each focus area, and then the next round they had added some more detail to these focus areas, and then the one after that they had broken down into a,b,c, where they listed priority areas and then they started fleshing them out as targets. I think what the open work managed to do which most UN negotiations don't do, is that co-chairs held onto the pen throughout the negotiations. They never had line by line negotiations where different proposals were put against each other. So, you had this collaborative spirit in the room throughout, which meant that all the negotiators developed a very strong ownership of the text. Honestly, they probably felt that they were co-writing the future (interviewee).*

The goals proposed by the OWG at the end of their long process become SDG4. The MyWorld Survey and the HLP report had set the groundwork, but the OWG goal formally proposed education as a standalone goal and was fundamental in the formulation of SDG4.

#### *5.2.5 Final reflections on Pathway 1*

Each of the 'policy moments' I have discussed above ensured education was central to the post-2015 development agenda. Each process also gives insight into whose voices helped realise this – from the wider public who participated in the MyWorld Survey and wider consultations, to 27 eminent persons of the HLP and the UN Member States in the OWG. The HLP and the OWG pushed for a single post-2015 framework. They also shape the scope of the agenda, expanding it beyond the narrow focus of the MDGs and both reinforce the economic returns of education, whilst also highlighting human rights. Both processes also include a focus on learning outcomes.

These processes were not alone in shaping SDG4. Running in parallel – in a way mirroring the MDGs/EFA duality – a separate strand of discussion on education post-2015 was also taking place as I discuss below.

### 5.3: The global education pathway

#### 5.3.1 *Education for All to SDG4*

In this section I describe and analyse three key ‘policy moments’ in the second pathway focused exclusively on education. This pathway is shaped by the legacy of EFA and, as such, final EFA reviews and global EFA meetings led by UNESCO form the main bulk of this discussion.

The continuation of EFA post-2015 was a central concern that shaped debates along this pathway. Many stakeholders, including the powerful civil society coalition the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), were resistant to the idea of a single post-2015 agenda, which would mark the end of EFA. Even the idea of changing the name from *Education for All* (EFA) “was to be resisted” (interviewee). EFA was equated with an expanded vision of education and there was considerable concern that without a continuation of EFA the post-2015 education agenda would be narrow. Importantly, civil society - through the EFA steering committee and the CCNGO<sup>20</sup> - were key stakeholders in the EFA process, with a seat at the decision-making table both globally and nationally. EFA was also synonymous with UNESCO, which led its global coordination and until late in the SDG4 process did not publicly accept that EFA would come to an end. Internally, however, some of the senior leadership within the education sector of UNESCO were beginning to question the value of EFA as early as 2012.<sup>21</sup>

The legacy of EFA and the EFA follow-up process are important in shaping SDG4. Given the scale of these post-EFA reviews, I have limited my analysis in this second pathway to

---

<sup>20</sup> Now renamed as ‘Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO/Education 2030)

<sup>21</sup> This is an insight gained while working at UNESCO.

the global level, picking out key milestones and issues that are framed or emerge from global meetings. I have chosen three different ‘policy moments’ to highlight their particular influence on SDG4’s formulation. These are:

- (i) Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Development Agenda, held in Dakar in 2013 (organised jointly under the auspices of UNDP)
- (ii) The Global Education Meeting, held in Oman in 2014; and the
- (iii) World education Forum (WEF) held in, Incheon, the Republic of Korea Incheon in 2015.

These processes ran in parallel to the other UN and Member State processes of pathway 1 (see timeline diagram in section 5.1).

### *5.3.2 Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Development Agenda*

The ‘Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Development Agenda’ was held in Dakar, Senegal, in March 2013. The location was symbolic - this is where the EFA Dakar Framework of Action had been agreed in 2000. The intended aim of the meeting was to review the EFA (and MDG education) goals’ achievements and remaining challenges and to consider how education should be reflected in the new post-2015 education agenda. It was considered ‘a key milestone’ in the consultation process and built on EFA regional meetings and consultations with key stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, on the post 2015 education framework (UNESCO 2013b).

This thematic consultation meeting (hereafter referred to as the Dakar-2013) was nicknamed “*the Dakar Wars*” (interviewee) in a sardonic analogy with (the film) *Star Wars*. The implication was that Dakar-2013 was a moment at which the more powerful actors (“dark forces”) claimed “a consensus on ‘learning for all’” (interviewee) which was being promoted as ‘learning for all’.

An interviewee questioned who was driving this and referred to a World Bank Ministerial level meeting planned for April 2013 that had been publicised (ahead of Dakar-2013) and had the name 'Learning for All'. The suggestion was that there was an expectation that Dakar-2013 would 'rubber-stamp' a narrow framing of post-2015 education agenda (interviewee). This seems to be borne out by the message of the President of the World Bank, at their April meeting, where he promoted a narrow, human capital rationale for education post-2015:

*We are here today because there is a global learning crisis that requires urgent action. Learning is one of the most important driving factors for economic growth. It is at least as vital to fostering a dynamic economy as investing in infrastructure or energy. Countries need a work force that has the skills and competencies necessary to keep farms and factories producing, create jobs, fuel innovation and country competitiveness, and drive inclusive economic growth. (World Bank, 2013).*

Another interviewee also claimed that a grouping of powerful organisations was pushing for a narrow framed post-2015 education agenda:

*In the early period it seemed as if there was a very big push from some quite powerful actors – World Bank, UNICEF, DFID – for a very narrow framed goal with literacy and numeracy outcomes and standardised measurement of those outcomes... quite a lot of the donors were keen to say, 'we have done access, now we will do learning.' (interviewee).*

For these interviewees, the proposed focus on 'learning for all' represented a struggle between an instrumentalist view of education focused on outcomes (equated with human capital theory) and a broader, rights-based vision of quality education (see literature discussed in chapter 3). One interviewee made the point that it was important to have the word 'education' in the post-2015 goal to maintain a link to human rights frameworks of the right to education, which is one reason some stakeholders fought so strongly for it.

While Dakar-2013 is reported by some as tense moment and marked the explicit beginning (in the post-2015 process) of struggle over learning and quality, others saw it

as collaborative and pointed to how the education community came together to establish the basis of the final SDG4 goal:

*in 2013 meeting held in Dakar [ . . . ] by that time the education community had presented a united front, if you look at targets being proposed in both of those they very much mirror what was adopted in SDG4 (interviewee).*

It appears that Dakar-2013 was simultaneously a place of struggle and of compromise. As Rizvi (2006) argues, policy is contested and dynamic, and as Bowe, Ball & Gold (1992) note the reality of policy depends on compromises.

It resulted in a proposal for “Equitable quality lifelong education and learning for all” as an overarching education goal for the post-2015. The outcome document also identified access, quality and equity as priorities to promote “a holistic lifelong vision of education and learning” and recognised education as a human right and key for wider development (UNESCO 2013b).

In my analysis, Dakar-2013 is an important policy moment in the path to SDG4 because, as one of my interviewees highlighted, the proposed goal remarkably survives to become basis of the final SDG4 goal:

*we ended up in a meeting in Dakar in March 2013 where we more or less agreed on the overall goal which remarkably managed to survive the whole UN process later and I think the only thing that was added was ‘inclusive’ [ . . . ] the goal is more or less set in early 2013, that was two years before the actual goal (interviewee).*

Additionally, the outcomes of the 2013 global thematic consultation were fed into one of the HLP meetings held in Bali later that same month, arguably influencing the final report of the HLP (discussed above). The outcomes also contributed to the final report of thematic consultations on education, published in September that year, ‘*Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*’ (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2013).<sup>22</sup> This report highlighted that any education goal(s) should set priorities and

---

<sup>22</sup> That report was written by Yusuf Sayed, the main supervisor of this thesis.

standards that would also be adaptable to national contexts and should address equity and quality of education, and it kept open the possibility of a continuation of EFA (*cf. Ibid*).

My analysis is important in bringing to the fore the struggle over how the global post-2015 education policy should be framed as either learning for all or quality education. This remains a point of contestation throughout and also after SDG4's adoption (see chapter 6). It reflects ideological divisions, and influences organisational and individual alliances (see below, in particular see section 5.3.2a on organisational dynamics).

In summary, the 2013 meeting set in motion the explicit struggle over learning and quality, as well as highlighting the possibility for compromise. It fed into the HLP process and informed how the wider development agenda addressed education. Importantly, more than 2 years before the adoption of SDG4's final text, this meeting proposed language that was carried through to the final iteration of SDG4.

Before moving onto the second key policy moment in this pathway, I want to briefly highlight tensions over the leadership of the future education agenda and the impact this had on the development of SDG4. Although this dynamic is part of the 2013 meeting, it pre-dates it and continues afterwards. As such, it does not fit neatly into any single 'moment' and I include it here as a 'side-bar' discussion immediately below.

#### 5.3.2.a. Sidebar discussion on: The politics of leading the post-2015 Education Agenda

While the UN is perceived as a harmonious entity, it is also the case that sometimes UN agencies seek to strengthen their own position, forming alliances and taking a position for their own ends. This is captured in the quote below taken from a book (jointly) written by one of the co-chairs of the OWG:

*...over time they had begun to assert more influence. In some cases they would quietly champion views or ideas of certain member states, especially those that provided the most funding. Secondly, if a policy or program position under debate could affect the mandate or operations of a given*

*organization, the technocrats would work assiduously with those countries that would protect the organization's mandate or buttress its policies.* (Kamau, et al., 2018, p 86).

This particular view is given as rationale for why OWG co-chairs wished to reassure Member States that the UN agencies would not control their discussions. Their assessment gives weight to the views put forward by a number of my interviewees that different UN agencies, notably UNICEF and UNESCO (and individuals within them), saw SDG4 as way of boosting their own position, and this dynamic was linked to wider political and ideological positions. UNICEF and its allies did not want UNESCO to be the lead UN agency for education post-2015. Importantly, this fed into debates on (a) whether EFA should continue or if there should be one single agenda, because EFA was synonymous with UNESCO and; (b) the divisions between the narrower 'learning for all' agenda, or rights-based approach, the latter closely with UNESCO.

As one interviewee described the tensions, *"I think that was complicated and started soon after 2013 meeting, mainly from UNICEF, although UNESCO was not handling it in the best way"* (interviewee). These tensions between UNICEF and UNESCO were not new and had come to the fore only a year or two before over the leadership of GEFI, although one interviewee argued it went right back to the 2000 EFA meeting:

*oh, there definitely was a split and that split goes right the way back to Dakar [2000], pre-Dakar, , at that time [ . . . ] <sup>23</sup> there was a push that UNICEF or World Bank should take the lead [ . . . ] but UNICEF is much less accountable, where UNESCO is through its Member States (interviewee).*

The leadership struggle was fuelled by criticisms of UNESCO by influential education donors, most notably the UK which, following a damning assessment of UNESCO's performance in 2011 (DFID, 2011), threatened to withdraw support from the organisation. The fact that the US had already pulled out of UNESCO over Palestine was another incentive to support UNICEF to lead on education. Even defenders of UNESCO among my interviewees recognised there were many problems, with weak leadership of

---

<sup>23</sup> Personal details removed to protect anonymity

the education sector and slow-moving bureaucracy (interviewees). As one interviewee explained, UNESCO is:

*not the most dynamic [there are] very few leaders in UNESCO who I would stand up and champion, but the reality is UNESCO is the right body to be doing it. It had been progressively undermined over the last 25 years by the World Bank assuming this space as a knowledge bank and the stuff that comes out of the bank is given credence [ . . . ] donors all moved to seeing the World Bank as the knowledge bank but developing country governments tend to trust UNESCO more, I think, and part of UNESCO's continuing strength lies in [developing] country governments think 'oh think comes from UNESCO', they give it much greater weight than the donors who readily dismiss it (Interviewee).*

This is reinforced by another interviewee:

*UNESCO has so little credibility with the donors particularly with some influential and visible donors, such as DFID, who have been extremely important and influential in setting the agenda and they have been quite dismissive and not very respectful of UNESCO [ on the other hand] UNESCO has a lot of credibility because it is seen as belonging to the Member States and not the big superpowers, it is very political (interviewee).*

The push for UNICEF to lead was further fuelled by an ambivalence of some senior figures in the leadership of the education sector in UNESCO. It was claimed that some of the senior leadership of UNESCO's education sector were not “well informed” and “not very confident in this global arena” and there were also “internal power struggles between different UNESCO [senior leaders]” (interviewee). However, it was also claimed that “the Director General was very supportive, and she realized this was critical in regard to the visibility of UNESCO” (interviewee).

UNICEF was seen as an alternative to UNESCO, not simply based on institutional preference but on individual ties between the agencies and particular education donors and shared perspectives on the vision for education focused on learning and measurable outcomes. One informant highlighted this personal link:



*So, there was a tension with UNESCO and UNICEF and we can't take out individuals [X] who been at [X donor] and went to UNICEF and had believed absolutely at [X donor] this very narrow agenda and goal and [X] relationship with the World Bank when she was at [X donor] had been strong and we saw that coming through (Interviewee).<sup>24</sup>*

However, it was not as simple as UNESCO's ability or UNICEF (or others) wanting more power for their own organisations. This struggle was also inextricably linked to the debate on learning and the nature and purpose of education post-2015:

*one of the interesting things is that groups that wanted to get their way - to shift in terms of the testing industries - the no excuses Metrix [people], wanted UNESCO out for variety of reasons: because of bureaucracy, because of Paris, because of human rights etc. (interviewee).*

As this quotation highlights, the struggle for the leadership of SDG4 reflected multiple interests and power dynamics and a disagreement over the future vision of the education agenda. This ideological dichotomy framed the debates within the education community in terms of any future education goal, added to by personal, organisational and political alliances.

Notwithstanding the above, it is also important to note that among the interviewees there is a recognition that there were (and are) good and cooperative people in both organisations and that these people maintained positive and collaborative relationships that were not always as harmonious at a higher geo-political level.

#### *5.3.4. The 2014 Muscat Global Education Meeting (GEM)*

The second policy moment in this education specific pathway that I discuss is the Global Education Meeting, held in Muscat, Oman in 2014 (hereafter referred to as Muscat). Originally scheduled for March 2014, Muscat was put back to the middle of May 2014. As discussed above (in section 5.2.4), one interviewee felt this may have been a strategy to allow the OWG to conclude their deliberations in early May, ready to present a

---

<sup>24</sup> Names removed for confidentiality

proposed goal in June 2014. However, Muscat is seen by others as influencing the OWG. It is also considered by more than one interviewee as offering the best proposal for the post-2015 education agenda. Additionally, it is important in signalling an end to EFA.

UNESCO published a policy paper in preparation for Muscat, in which they openly supported one education goal for the post-2015 agenda:

*UNESCO advocates for a single, clearly-defined, global education agenda, which should be an integral part of the broader international development framework. Such a global education agenda should be framed by a comprehensive overarching goal, to be translated into a number of measurable targets and related indicators. (UNESCO, 2014d, p.2-3).*

This left no doubt that UNESCO was squarely aligned with the wider UN-led development process of one post-2015 framework for education, and as such signalled an end to the EFA. Until this point, UNESCO had not publicly signalled support for a single agenda and an end to EFA, and it is likely that pressure from outside (as well as a bid for personal power) influenced this decision. It is suggested that UNESCO got behind the call for single agenda – and therefore the end of EFA – because the then Director General of UNESCO wanted to be the next Secretary General of the UN. As one interviewee noted:

*there was a micro political aspect at UNESCO where you had certain Ambassadors who felt that in her bid to become SG, Bokova was sort of selling out education, she loved Brookings, she loved the [World] Bank, she was willing to do whatever it took and they [UNESCO Ambassadors] felt – like a lot of us felt -getting rid of EFA was a big loss, a big mistake. So, there was a big push especially from GRULAC,<sup>25</sup> for UNESCO to reinsert itself [in the post-2015 process] and to reinsert itself in New York into the process, El Salvador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, the G77 those guys, they were really not having it that the World Bank and USAID, [were dominating] (interviewee).*

---

<sup>25</sup> GRULAC is the UNESCO group for Latin America and the Caribbean

From this perspective, UNESCO's Director General made a strategic choice in her bid for leadership of the UN. This is an important motivation; however, UNESCO had also been under pressure from donors and the wider UN processes (in pathway 1) to agree to one single post-2015 agenda and avoid dual processes and architecture that had existed with EFA and the MDGs. Additionally, UNICEF and others were moving against UNESCO for the leadership of the post-2015 education agenda and UNESCO needed to position itself as a lead actor, unified with the wider 2030 agenda process. This was a position that many in the education, although not all, were reported as sharing:

*I think by the Oman meeting it was quite clear, at least in the education community, that education should be a standalone goal. Even by then the agenda had gone beyond the limits of EFA and ... there was a recognition that the new agenda had to look beyond basic and primary education. So, number of things [were] happening at same time – reaffirming a central need for a standalone goal greater in scale (interviewee).*

While the backing for one global agenda was a shift, UNESCO's position paper reaffirmed its commitment to education as a fundamental human right and noted that the "State is the custodian of education as a public good." (UNESCO, 2014c, p.3). It also established a number of imperatives for the post-2015 education agenda, which included equitable access to quality education and learning at all levels, a focus on equity and in particular marginalised groups, along with a continued focus on gender equality. Lifelong learning through formal, non-formal and informal pathways was also included. Additionally, UNESCO said it was imperative for education to provide enhanced opportunities to gain knowledge and skills for sustainable development, global citizenship and work (Ibid, p.4). This input from UNESCO was important in shaping the 'Muscat Agreement' which suggested the following overarching goal, 'Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030' (cf. UNESCO, 2014c, p. 3 for full list of targets proposed at the meeting).

As one interviewee notes:

*I think it was the right strategic choice we made in 2013/14 to say if we in the education community would not be able to in a way focus on our*

*agenda then in NY diplomats would do it for us and their priorities would be our priorities, that is what I feared and I argued very strongly for that [in] the lead up to the Muscat agreement in 2014, which I still think is the best education agenda [ . . . ] (interviewee).*

The Muscat Agreement was shared with multiple stakeholder, including all UN Member States and the co-chairs of the Open Working Group. There is considerable overlap between the proposed goal and targets agreed at Muscat and the zero draft proposal presented by the OWG shortly after. Some of my interviewees believe that the outcomes of Muscat were influential in shaping the OWG position. One interviewee claimed:

*I think where we were able to influence the NY agenda very concretely in 2014. They did not have goal or a target on literacy – we had meetings with Brazil and Norway and the Argentine and other delegations in New York and argued we had to have target on adult literacy and that was taken on board after our meeting in NY in June 2014 (interviewee).*

Another suggested that when the first text was realised by the OWG shortly after Muscat, it became clear that UNESCO Member States had been sharing text with their counterparts in the New York delegations and had managed to influence the process:

*There was a big focus on New York and big attempt to say that the EFA Steering Committee is [rubbish], was just a talking shop, [ that] needs to end, UNESCO needs to let go, they failed on achieving EFA and ... all of a sudden, the first OWG text was released [ . . . and] we realized the people in Paris were actually sharing draft language of what we were doing towards the Incheon declaration to their New York diplomatic head offices (interviewee).*

And another interviewee saw both difference and also some influence:

*I think the Muscat agreement goal and targets is different to the outcome of the OWG, and I think that's a good and a bad thing, in the sense that you have some examples of the open working group actually going beyond what Muscat agreed, but you also have examples of the Muscat agreement having been written by education experts as opposed to a working group that maybe wasn't (interviewee).*

There are noticeable differences between Muscat and the OWG proposal (and also final text of SDG4) which are worth bearing in mind. For example, the Muscat Declaration proposes a target on domestic financing of education (UNESCO, 2014c, p.3): by contrast, the OWG proposal does not have general financing target and the only mention of financing relates to an increase in scholarship funding as one of three means of implementation (MOI) targets (see chapter 6). Another noticeable difference is that in Muscat target 6 “ [ . . . ] *learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers.*” (*Ibid*) In the OWG and final SDG4 text, teachers are a MOI target and the reference to ‘motivated and well-supported’ is no longer included. One other noticeable difference is that the Muscat Declaration calls for free and compulsory pre-primary education: in the OWG and final SDG4, the words free and compulsory have been removed. Many in the education community felt Muscat was by far the best education agenda.

Despite these significant alterations, Muscat is undoubtedly an important policy moment in the formulation of SDG4 because there was at least a feeling (based on interviewee opinions) that the education voice had been heard and that this led to a more expansive proposal for SDG4. This is evidenced by the wording of the final goal – which is practically identical to the Muscat goal (see chapter 6). Muscat is also significant in signalling an end to EFA after 25 years.

By summer of 2014, after Muscat and the final OWG proposal (see 5.2.4 above) the bulk of debates on SDG4 had taken place and there was little change to SDG4. However, there was one additional important policy moment in the education pathway - the 2015 World Education Forum, discussed below.

#### *5.3.4 The 2015 World Education Forum*

The very final stage of the post-EFA process took place in May 2015 with the World Education Forum (hereafter referred to as the 2015-WEF), in Incheon, the Republic of Korea. The 2015 WEF marked the culmination of the post-2015 education policy processes, and was in some ways a moment of celebration, although tensions

remained. With the intergovernmental negotiations taking place in New York on the final wording of the SDGs, it was believed there was still the scope to influence the text of SDG4 through the 2015-WEF. For example, there was a push for financing to be included in the Incheon Declaration (which it was) in the hope that this would still influence the inter-governmental negotiations and make it into the final SDG4 text (which it did not). The 2015-WEF saw the sharing of a draft of the Education 2030 Frameworks for Action (FFA) - a guide to implementing SDG4. This FFA does include a call to mobilise increased resources for SDG4 (UNESCO, 2015a).

A number of ongoing struggles were reported by interviewees, including a focus on the scope and text of the new education agenda, as well as ongoing issues over the leadership and even a last-minute effort to hold onto EFA. One dispute that surfaced arose over the word 'free'. The Malala Fund<sup>26</sup> identified the omission of the word in the draft outcome declaration, as one of my interviewees notes:

*So, you at Malala Fund were really good, [ . . . and] realized the drafters had left out free at last minute [and] came running to us and we were able to fly down there and get it back in and take a stand on 'free not affordable,' that was big (interviewee).<sup>27</sup>*

I have heard different accounts of this and some individuals held the view that the word free had not even been part of the discussion but was inserted at the last moment by civil society representatives.<sup>28</sup> This shows that even at this late stage – seemingly a moment of unity and celebration among the international education community – tensions remained. Ultimately, the word 'free' made it into the final Incheon Declaration (UNESCO 2015a), not once but twice, with a commitment to:

*ensure the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes. We also encourage the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality preprimary*

---

<sup>26</sup> With whom I worked at the time.

<sup>27</sup> The Interviewee was aware that I was working for the Malala fund at the time of the Incheon meeting and this may have influenced the praise given.

<sup>28</sup> This is based on information from professional practice while working in the Malala Fund based on comments from other non-civil society actors.

*education and that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and education. (Ibid, p.7).*

The wording in the final text of SDG4, in regard to which aspects of education would be free, did not change from the OWG proposal in July 2014, so the Incheon Declaration in this regard is not in itself materially important. It does, however, highlight that divisions remained in the education community.

Another point of contention was that despite UNESCO having signalled their position on one post-2015 framework for education, some still held onto the possibility of keeping EFA alive:

*As we worked on the draft Incheon Declaration in May 2015 [there was] still some reluctance from civil society to bind themselves to one agenda. They wanted to see what that one agenda would be like, whereas the Member States said they will have one agenda [ . . . ] even though it might not be a 100% perfect agenda (interviewee).*

However, the final Incheon Declaration committed “with a sense of urgency to a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind” (UNESCO, 2015a). The 2030 Education Framework for Action (ibid.) went a step further and argued that “[a] key lesson of past years is that the global education agenda should work within the overall international development framework, [ . . . ] rather than alongside it as occurred with the separate EFA goals and education related MDGs.” (Ibid, p. 25).

There was also ongoing wrangling over the leadership of SDG4, with one interviewee critical of ongoing attempts to influence the leadership of SDG4 within the UN:

*[there] was also a big fight over whether UNESCO would be lead agency, [and] whether GMR would continue, [ . . . ] and it became clear to World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children, etc., that there would be an Education 2030 Steering Committee, Ban Ki Moon had said UNESCO would be the lead, it was done so they had to hold their noses and come back to the tent [ . . . ] those were the heated negotiations in Incheon (interviewee).*

The final Incheon Declaration was clear “[w]e further entrust UNESCO, as the United Nations’ specialized agency for education, to continue its mandated role to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 agenda” (ibid).

One final notable point comes in the form of one the most memorable phases from the Incheon Declaration. It states that “[n]o education target should be considered met unless met by all.” (ibid, p. 7) and was accompanied by a commitment to focus efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities. While the 2030 agenda commits to leaving no one behind, the specificity of this wording arguably calls for a much greater scrutiny of the targets and their implementation in relation to inclusion and equity (see chapter 6 for a discussion on SDG4 targets).

The 2015 World Education Meeting in Incheon was the final policy moment in this pathway ahead of the adoption of SDG4 at the UN General Assembly in September of that year. While arguably not shaping the final text of SDG4 itself, Incheon was undoubtedly important in signalling a strong commitment to inclusion and equity, helped further shape the FFA and, importantly, cemented UNESCO’s leadership of SDG4.

### *5.3.5 Final reflections on Pathway 2*

Each of the ‘policy moments’ I have discussed above significantly impacted the formulation of SDG4. The Dakar-2013 marks an important moment in the struggle against the promised ‘learning for all’. It leads to a compromised proposed for the overarching goal, which survives intact in the language of SDG4. It fed into the HLP ahead of their report and a significant part of the language is reflected in the final SDG4 goal. The outcomes of the second policy moment, MUSCAT were also significant, with a number of my interviewees claiming that the education community had influenced the OWG. Most importantly, in a policy paper ahead of Muscat, UNESCO aligned themselves with the wider UN process and one single post-2015 education framework. The Muscat overarching goal for education is almost identical to the final SDG4 goal, with just two differences in the actual goal (discussed in chapter 6). The third and final



policy moment in this pathway – the 2015 WEF – came only a few months before the final adoption of SDG4 and did not impact on the formulation of SDG4 text itself. However, it did influence the education 2030 FFA, welcoming a new vision for education and accepting the replacement of EFA with a single education post-2015, adopted in Paris in November 2015. Importantly, one of my interviewees notes it was in Incheon that the then UNSG signalled his support for UNESCO’s leadership of the new global education agenda, ending the struggle for leadership that had run throughout the processing processes.

## 5.4: Conclusion to this chapter

In this chapter, I have traced the genesis and formulation of SDG4, describing significant moments in its construction between 2013 and 2015 and identifying key contributions to the shaping of SDG4. Below, I summarise a number of points that stand out in shaping the final text of SDG4. In doing so, I am not intending to oversimplify an enormously complex and multidimensional process, but rather highlight some of the key findings on RQ1. **how SDG4 was formed.**

### 5.4.1. Key research findings

#### *5.4.1.a. Policy making remains a largely elite process*

- My research findings show that the formulation of SDG4 was an expert driven process, although the participation of ordinary people through the MyWorld Survey (in particular) is symbolically and materially important. By ranking education as the highest priority, the survey assured a central place in the 2030 Agenda and for education became a standalone goal.
- My research shows that SDG4’s formulation occurred along two distinct pathways, which ran in parallel but at times intersected. Both were important in the formulation of SDG4, although the first pathway is arguably the most dominant because of the influence of the OWG in structuring the overall 2030

agenda. My analysis nevertheless points to the education pathway also having influence.

- UN Member States were represented in pathway one mainly through the OWG (a Member State led process) and a few through the HLP, and also in pathway two through the UNESCO Member States. This meant a lot of overlap for countries in both pathways, allowing for influence in both. As I suggest in the conclusion to this thesis, it would be interesting to undertake research specifically with country level representatives to understand how these processes worked and how they could be strengthened.

#### *5.4.1.b. Power struggles*

- My findings highlight power struggles between UN agencies, and alliances with influential education donor governments and other governments. These were driven not only by a desire for effectiveness but also by specific political visions for SDG4 of 'learning for all' versus education for all (see below). Personal connections and ambition also added to this dynamic.

#### *5.4.1.d. Ideological contestations and policy text compromise*

- Tracing the genesis of SDG4 reveals the complexity of ideas and assumptions at play, the permeation of competing discourses, the voices of different actors and the explicit and implicit struggles that shaped SDG4. In particular, my findings highlight tensions over the scope of education post-2015 which reflected competing visions and different ideological positions and the conception of education in society. This divide reflected longstanding differences between HCT conception and a rights-based approach.
- The findings in this chapter also show the power of diplomacy and of policy compromise. This is demonstrated by the final text of SDG4, which appears to bridge the divisions of one of the central debates between a goal focused on learning and one focused on quality. It includes a focus on cognitive skills and skills for work, but also includes global citizenships and rights; the targets reflect a wide scope while calling for specific measurable outcomes. In this sense, the

text proposes a broader scope including affective elements, however it also pushes strongly towards a human capital model of education.

- These findings also show that a considerable amount of the final SDG4 language is proposed as early as 2013, and more or less complete by 2014. This again points to the power of policy compromise, although there are some notable differences and omissions (and as chapter 6 reveals, there is also equivocation)

Exploring the processes of SDG4 formation is only part of the picture; deconstructing the text brings additional insights to SDG4, suggesting the compromise achieved hides continuing struggles. In the following chapter I present the findings of my critical review of SDG4.

## Chapter 6 - A critical analysis of SDG4

### 6.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, SDG4 was constructed through multiple processes over a number of years before its adoption, as part of the wider 2030 agenda, by the UN General Assembly in 2016. In this chapter, I undertake a critical analysis of SDG4, considering its content, structure, the language of the goal and targets and reflecting on how these create meaning and frame priorities. I consider the internal coherence of the SDG4 goal and its targets, as well as their relationship to the wider 2030 agenda. I look beyond the text itself and consider how the global indicator framework, devised after SDG4's adoption, reforms existing meanings and frameworks and creates new ones.

On a first reading, SDG4 offers a broad vision of education, with its goal framed as quality education and learning throughout life. However, a deeper critical reading and analysis of the text highlights ambiguities and suggests that the holistic language of the goal obscures ongoing struggles over its scope and purpose. Through a critical reading of the text I address the second of my research questions **(RQ2) 'how quality education is conceptualised in SDG4.**

The final text of SDG4 is comprised of an overarching goal with 10 targets (see appendix F for the full text). I have taken a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, analysing the content, structure and the language used in SDG4 to highlight how meaning and values are asserted and how priorities are conveyed. I also draw on data from my semi-structured interviews to bring in expert perspectives to inform my analysis.

Codd (1988, cited in Ball, 1993) argues that *"for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings"* and to an extent the analysis in this chapter is just one subjective reading of it. Nonetheless, I also believe policy creates meaning

and influence that transcends individual readers, in which the “certain possibilities for thought are constructed” (Ball, 1993, p. 14).

In this chapter, I explore how SDG4 reproduces a particular concept of education and frames its value in relation to sustainable development and society. The chapter is structured into 6 main sections, including this introduction (section 6.1). Section 6.2 considers the goal, highlighting changes during its formulation. Section 6.3. reviews selected targets to discuss how they reflect on the key concepts of quality, learning, inclusion and equity. This section also considers the single target on financing and its implication for equity. In Section 6.4. I look beyond the text itself and consider how new meanings created through the global. In section 6.5, I summarise the key findings of this chapter.

## 6.2. The SDG4 Goal

In this section I consider the overarching goal of SDG4, what it tells us about the global agenda for education and what its evolution tells us about the process of its formulation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, elements of the final SDG4 are seen as early as March 2013 in the goal proposed at the global thematic meeting (see section 5.3.2), which *“remarkably managed to survive the whole UN process”* (Interviewee). All of the language proposed makes it into the final iteration of the overarching SDG4 goal. This gives weight to the view expressed in the previous chapter that the education pathway was also influential. In 2014, the proposal from the 2014 GEM was closer still to the final version, calling for governments to *“Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030* (UNESCO, 2014c). Ultimately, it was the second proposal of the OWG in 2014 that became the final goal itself. In June 2014, just after Muscat, the OWG issued their zero draft goals. Education’s goal was to *“Provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all”* (OWG, 2014) and by July 2014 the OWG issued their final proposal for the SDG goals,

and that second OWG goal remains as the final SDG4 goal. The final version of SDG4 reads:

*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* (UN, 2015).

What is striking is how early on in the process the overarching goal took shape, and how the changes from the thematic consultation, through Muscat and the OWG to the final text of SDG4 are minimal. Although minor, they are worth reflecting on and I use Muscat as my benchmark because it is seen as the education community's best proposal. As one interviewee said passionately of the Muscat agreement *"I still think it is the best education agenda"* (interviewee).

The first change from Muscat is the word order. In the Muscat proposal 'equitable' comes first followed by 'inclusive quality'; in the final goal, 'inclusive' comes first and 'equitable' is paired with 'quality'. Although inclusive and equitable may be read as having the same meaning, this shift was obviously intentional and can be read in different ways. A positive reading of the change in word order can be seen as emphasising the notion of inclusion as it relates to children and young people with disabilities, as well as other marginalised groups. Alternatively, the shift in word order can be seen as a choice to decrease the emphasis on equity as a concept in its own right. Given equity is defined as fairness (OCED, 2008), taking an equity perspective means focusing on inequalities and can imply a need to rectifying existing inequity through targeted measures.

The second difference between Muscat and the final goal is the insertion of the word 'promote' in addition to the verb 'ensure'. The choice of the two separate verbs immediately frames the goal in two halves and signifies priorities. It separates the objects of the goal and suggests two levels of action.

The use of verb 'ensure' in the first half signals an imperative regarding the 'inclusive and equitable quality education' aspect of the goal, suggesting a need for priority action

in regard to formal education. This can be interpreted as reflecting government obligations for the right to education. Governments have a legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education, to take immediate action to fulfil the right to primary education and the progressive realisation of secondary education.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the emphasis to ‘ensure’ formal schooling can be interpreted as focusing this as a priority. It is in the detail of the targets that the link to the right to education becomes more apparent, reinforced with the use of words such as ‘free’ and ‘complete’ for primary and secondary, compared to ‘access’ for other levels of education/learning. This is a plausible explanation; that said, there are no explicit references to the right to education in the goal or its targets and the link to rights may not have been intentional in this sense.

The second half of the goal, with the insertion of ‘promote’ in referring to the lifelong learning opportunities, renders the second part of the goal desirable but arguably less essential. The word ‘learning’ can be both a verb and a noun. In this construction it is used as a noun, leaving the object that will be learnt unspecified at the level of the goal. Located in the second half of the goal, its framing by the words ‘lifelong’ on one side and ‘opportunities’ learning would appear to be focused on post-secondary, vocation, skills for work, tertiary and youth and adult literacy, and possibly pre-primary. Importantly, it also serves to place ‘learning’ as central in SDG4 through the its use in the overarching goal.

The emphasis and meaning particular words create extends to the adjectives used. By using the words ‘inclusion’ and ‘all’ as well as ‘equitable’, the goal is effectively saying the same things in different ways. In this sense it is tautological. Given the attention to the drafting process, rather than this being a fault in style, it is fair to conclude this is deliberate choice by drafters. It can be understood as a means by which to emphasise the theme of ‘leave no one behind’, a central thread of the SDGs. ‘Inclusive, ‘equitable’ and ‘all’ reinforce the message that SDG4 is universal and inalienable, emphasising non-

---

<sup>29</sup> The progressive realisation of access to tertiary is also a human right, the language of the CRC can be read as less empathic in relation to tertiary education, although the ICESCR places equal obligations for all levels.

discrimination. The choice of 'equitable' is important as it implies the need for targeted actions by governments and their international partners to address the discrepancies in access, completion or learning facing the most marginalised groups as a result of social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or other identities.

The use of different words that to the layperson may read as synonymous also reflects specialised understandings and particular traditions within the education community. In the goal, equitable and quality are undivided by punctuation, implying one concept. However, from a human rights perspective 'equitable quality' would also be considered a tautology because 'quality' education would necessarily mean equitable, and also inclusive. If education is not inclusive and equitable, then it cannot be considered quality. Education that is not responsive to different groups in terms of access, experience and learning cannot reasonably be identified as quality.

In the second half of the goal, the use of the word 'lifelong' suggests learning as something that can occur throughout life. This is a change from the MDG for education, which only focused on primary education, and can be seen as continuing the broader EFA legacy. It was largely welcomed, as one of the interviewees notes:

*One thing about the SDG agenda which maybe is very naïve in a sense but also optimistic is that SDG4 education is about lifelong learning. It's about adults, it's about a life-cycle approach, it is about attention from birth to the grave, it does recognise that learning is an activity that has to respond to the changing world and [ . . . ] requires a new way of thinking about learning from a lifelong perspective (Interviewee).*

Although another interviewee felt 'lifelong learning' was more aspirational than meaningful:

*You have this aspirational language in the goal which is pointing towards a need to shift towards a view of education that is of value at every single moment in your life, from birth to early childhood, through primary and secondary, into being adults and learning at every stage in your life but actually the targets and the indicators end up being about the formal education system [ . . . ] so there is a mismatch (Interviewee).*



Both interpretations have validity, and SDG4 does include a focus on education and learning from pre-primary through to adult literacy. However, the pairing with ‘promote’, and the word ‘opportunities’, and how it reflected in the targets and indicators, signal “lifelong” as desired but not necessarily essential.

Importantly, the overarching SDG4 goal appears to resolve the struggles that played out in SDG4’s formulation. It offers a holistic vision of education, bridging divisions over quality education and learning demonstrating how policy is often the result of compromise (as discussed in chapter 3). It includes key buzz words such as inclusion and equitable quality.

The overarching goal, creates a sense of consensus, offering an expansive umbrella under a universal agenda for north and south. However, it is also an equivocation and the critical reading of the targets suggests that, rather than a true compromise, the goal is instead a diplomatic masking of ongoing struggles that play out in the targets and in the global indicators.

### 6.3. The SDG4 Targets

As discussed in chapter 2, millions of children and young people are still denied their right to education and millions of adults lack basic literacy skills. Addressing these challenges will depend on the political will of governments and their international partners, and also by how they interpret and act on the detailed commitments of the SDG4 targets. Below, I offer a critical reading of the targets in relation to key concepts central to SDG4, namely learning, quality, inclusion and equity.

Before beginning my analysis, it is important to reflect on the structure of the targets as this has implications for their place in the overall goal. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), notes that SDG4 is comprised of *“ten targets encompassing many different aspects of education. Among them, there are seven targets which are expected outcomes and three targets which are means of achieving these outcomes.”* (UIS,

2018b, p. 7). In short, targets 4.1- 4.7 are considered the ‘outcome’ targets and 4.a - 4.c the ‘means of implementation’ (MOI) targets. This division between outcome and implementation targets is common across SDG goals 1-16, with SDG17 focused solely on implementation (cf. UN 2015).

Despite the similar structure across the 2030 agenda, this division was not universally welcomed or without criticism. Bartram *et al.*, (2018) argue the MOI targets “are imperfectly conceptualised and inconsistently formulated; and tracking of their indicators will be difficult because many are not quantitative” (Ibid, p.1). They go on to illustrate this point, arguing for example that SDG10c (which is a means of implementation target) in fact resembles an outcome target, and that SDG6.5 (which is an outcome target) resembles a means of implementation target (Ibid).

My analysis (later in this chapter shows) two of the MOI targets for SDG4 are controversial, albeit for very different reasons. There are 3 MOI targets for education, however, as one of my interviewees argues they are often over looked:

*Intellectually I like the thought of there being a set of issues that are recognised as preconditions for the other top targets. Theoretically it makes sense, and I also very much support the notion of financial as well as non-financial means of implementation which the G77 also talked a lot about. Looking now at how the agenda has ended up being communicated, very many leave out the means of implementation target completely, [ . . . ] seems to make some separation between these “real” targets and other targets (interviewee).*

This quote highlights how MOI targets, intended as the preconditions for achieving the ‘outcome’ goals, are often overlooked. The interviewee goes on to explain that the MOI targets “‘was the main dividing line throughout those negotiations and I think the G77 was very clear on there being no point having an agenda if it wasn’t accompanied by this implementation, they had envisaged actual commitments” (Ibid).

The SDG4 targets sharpen the intent of the overarching goal. Rather than provide a critical analysis of each target, I instead focus on selected targets - targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.4,

4.5, 4.7 , 4b and 4.c - to illustrate how these concepts are addressed and in doing so point to what aspects are valued or diminished. Some of the targets are given a greater focus, and I also include a brief discussion of the global indicators.<sup>30</sup> Through the analysis below I offer insights into how education is conceptualised and its role in sustainable development.

### 6.3.1. Quality Education and SDG4

As mentioned above, many of the targets focus on outcomes from the education provided, such as target 4.1 *“relevant and effective learning”*, and target 4.2 *“ready for primary education”*. As well as target 4.4 *“relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”*; and target 4.6 *“literacy and numeracy”* and also 4.7 *“acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.”* In this sense ‘outcomes’ are the overwhelming focus of the targets. Given this, it is important to look at how quality is portrayed in the targets and how and if the centrality of quality in the goal is carried through.

At the level of the goal, quality is preceded by the words inclusive and, paired with the word equitable, which suggests a broad understanding. At the level of target the language changes. For example, target 4.1 refers to *‘equitable and quality’*, the word inclusive is dropped. This still suggests a more expansive vision of quality; however, a critical reading of the targets brings this into question (see below). Exactly what quality means is never explicitly defined. This may be the result of a policy ‘fudge’, whereby compromise appears to have been reached, although differences have not been fully reconciled.

While a generic understanding of the word quality implies a standard of excellence, within the lexicon of education policy (and practice) there is no single agreed definition.

---

<sup>30</sup> Each target has one or more associated global indicators to keep track of its respective progress, which I will highlight in relation to key issues in my analysis. There are also thematic and national level indicators associated with each target. However, I limit my discussions to global indicators given their central place in monitoring and evaluation across countries.

It is a highly contested concept within education. Many definitions of quality education associate it with pedagogy and the full development of the child, not just outcomes (UNICEF, 2000; UN, 2001; UNESCO, 2005). From a human rights perspective, quality education entails more than basic skills, and the right to education obliges a focus on knowledge of human rights (cf. UN Convention Rights of the Child). Such descriptions suggest that quality education is complex, multifaceted, child-centred, and rights-based. However, understandings of quality are not uniform. For example, the behaviourist tradition of education defines quality as “*standardized, externally defined and controlled curricula*” where learning is testing, and examinations are central (cf. UNESCO, 2005, p. 33). The ambiguity in SDG4 is not benign: it masks ideological differences that render readings of the text open to vastly different interpretations.

Interesting, the UNESCO paper that first galvanised attention to the learning crisis, was clear that “‘[q]uality learning’ encompasses processes through which people acquire the breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to fully engage in their communities, express their ideas and talents and contribute positively to their societies.” (UNESCO, 2013a, p. 1). In this view it is not just outcomes that define quality, but process also matters. However, in the momentum that followed the release of those figures, it seems the processes aspect was lost, displaced by the centrality of learning outcomes. As one of my interviewees notes:

*I do think that that famous 250 million children figure that the GMR identified, that that ended up having enormous impact, and it would actually be really interesting to go back and just do a kind of analysis from the GMR being printed and the kind of journey that 250 million figure had in first probably being part of every press release that the GMR team put out, then being part of all the materials that UNESCO and UNICEF put out, then being picked up by Brookings who already did all their learning stuff[ . . . ] of course, it was so easily linked to somehow outcomes and the broader notion of education leading to the outcomes that then allow us to get jobs, allow us to be active, good citizens, allow us to pretty much do anything in life (interviewee).*

As the above quote highlights, the GMR ‘learning crisis’ had an enormous impact, however, outcomes became the main focus and rendered the dynamic processes that

happen in the classroom, of teaching and learning, invisible. Alexander (2015) suggests that “*classroom processes and outcomes that are truly transformative for our children*” were also not adequately captured in EFA. McLean (2014), writing before Muscat and the OWG goals, noted that in many debates there was “*a tendency to talk about learning as if it were disconnected from teaching, detached from teachers [ . . . ]*” and made the point that “*quality outcomes depend on quality teachers, quality tools and quality learning environments*” (Ibid). This point is made by more than one of my interviewees, for example:

*all the[targets] and indicators in the SDGs are so outcome focused, so you then miss the importance of inputs and processes and structural indicators. And that was always the danger, the slippery ‘oh lets only talk about outcomes’ as if these outcomes appear magically and are not the outcomes of clear inputs and processes and to deny the measurement and tracking of clear inputs and processes is a very dangerous thing to do (interviewee).*

Outcomes do not occur in a vacuum – inputs and processes matter. What happens in the classroom matters and teachers play an important part. One means by which to analyse quality, then, can be through the target on teachers, given there is significant evidence to support the claim that teachers are key to improving education quality and learning outcomes (UIS, 2016). Therefore, a commitment to quality should be reflected in how SDG4 positions teachers, and the value they are given. In this sub-section below, I continue my analysis of how quality is represented in SDG4 by looking at the MOI target on teachers.

#### *6.3.1.1 Teachers as a proxy for quality*

Teachers are the focus on MOI target 4c, which reads: ‘*By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.*’. The inclusion of teachers as MOI targets was controversial and generated debate. On the other hand, it is claimed that some groups did not want any mention of teachers in SDG4 at all:

*there was a definite group of individuals and agencies around – what became goal 4 – that had a definite agenda, that agenda did not include adult and lifelong learning, that agenda did not include teachers or inputs or environments (Interviewee).*

This information is in some ways shocking, teachers are central to education, and yet it suggests that specific groups and agencies wanted no mention of teachers. In earlier discussions that predated the final SDG4 framework, a target for teachers was articulated as “*Target 6: By 2030, all governments ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers*” (Muscat Declaration, 2014). This particular formation did not make it into the final iteration of SDG4, the most likely explanation is to reduce government obligations and possible associated costs. Another plausible explanation links back to the middle period of EFA and a growth in ‘para-teachers’. These were unqualified teachers, which had support from influential actors, including the World Bank. With the increasing involvement of the private sector in delivering education in low-resource setting (with the backing of influential actors such as the World Bank and influential education donors), it seems feasible that references to qualified teachers were fought against to allow unqualified teachers, and/or technology to replace qualified teachers.

In the end a fractious consensus was reached, and teachers were included as an MOI target. According to more than one interviewee, the lobbying of teachers’ unions was key in teachers being included at all:

*they were quite influential in [getting] 4c in SDG4, they were not that happy that it was seen as means of implementation, they thought it should be separate target and not means of implementation target. That was also agreed [by the] EFA steering committee but I think they [the teachers’ unions] were ok they were able to get it under SDG4 if not where they wanted it most (Interviewee).*

This quotation, which is not from a teachers’ union or civil society representative, alludes to a need to advocate for more recognition of teachers’ contribution to SDG4.

The final decision to include teachers in the means of implementation targets was resisted, as one interviewee explains:

*there was a lot of resistance on teachers being a target under implementation; for teachers to be in the implementation strategy 4c, not only from the teachers' unions but from others who felt teachers should be standalone target within core SDG4, but I remember cautioning people within the OWG if we do not have teachers as part of implementation we would lose it altogether. One of the arguments was whatever the targets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 - teachers were critical to all the other targets, so how could you have a separate target? So, the compromise was putting it the means of implementation, you still gave it recognition as a feature but then the advocacy would have to be just as you have the infrastructure teachers are a critical element to all 7 [outcome] targets (Interviewee).*

This position sees a logic to include teachers as a MOI target, another interviewee was less convinced:

*Many were and are still so excited about the fact that there is a teacher target that there wasn't as much critical reflection around what it actually meant to have that target as a means of implementation target. Let me put it this way, most people wouldn't be familiar enough with the SDGs and everything around it to be able to have that more critical reflection around whether or not teachers should be part, or where they should be placed, people are just very pleased that there is a commitment to teachers. (interviewee).*

The inclusion of teachers as a MOI target can be considered logical given teachers are not an outcome of education. However, the risk is that seeing teachers as a means to end, denies them agency. Although not explicitly articulated, this points towards a behaviourist concept of quality. Teachers become a tool in an education focused on outcomes. If teachers or learners do not have space to create knowledge, they simply deposit and receive knowledge. This type of teaching and learning has been described as 'banking education' (Freire, 1996). It has been claimed that "[t]he quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers." (McKinsey report, 2007, p.13), equally learning does not occur in the absence of teachers and quality teaching (cf. Husbands 2013).

Overall, having teachers as an MOI, is arguably better than no reference to teachers at all, and the targets also call for teachers to be qualified. This is of course central, teachers need training and recognised qualification, additionally having motivated and supported teachers is also important for quality and international law recognises these rights. The joint ILO/UNESCO ‘Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers’ (1966) calls for provisions on teacher preparation, employment, career advance and promotion, security or tenure. Tomaševski (2001) argues that teachers education, recruitment, labour rights, trade union freedoms all contribute to making education “available” under human rights standards (ibid, p. 12, box 1.). The decision not to include any attention to teacher’s working conditions in the final text arguably reflects different ideological position on inputs and/or process and has implications for quality. Teachers are a key to education, through their pedagogical practice, in creating knowledge and sharing values of tolerance and non-discrimination, at their best they are important role models. That is not to say every teacher embodies these characteristics or values, however, these are qualities that teachers can bring to the classroom and to education as whole.<sup>31</sup>

Teachers should also be reflective of the population at large e.g. female teachers, and in respect to teachers with disabilities, this is more than desirable, it is a human rights obligation with State Parties called on to take *“appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.”* (Article 24.4, CRPD, 2006). However, target 4.c. offers no direction on this and there is no requirement to disaggregate data on teachers by sex or disability, undermining equity and inclusion which are central to quality (at least from a rights-based perspective).

In summary, taking teachers as proxy for quality in SDG4 suggests the understanding leans less towards a human rights-based approach and instead to a narrower understanding of quality. If teacher motivation, experience, conditions and rights are

---

<sup>31</sup> I acknowledge that teachers do not always uphold the values of inclusion, equality or quality either through lack of good practice or more sinister actions that amount to abuse and a violation of children’s right. For the purpose of this discussion on policy I offer what can be considered best practice.



neglected, it is hard for quality education to thrive. As Tomaševski points out there are *“a myriad of human rights issues which particularly affect teachers [ . . . ] if the rights of teachers are not respected and protected, it is impossible to imagine that this may be different for the rights of children.”* (Tomaševski, 2001, p 23). This argument by Tomaševski is one that cannot be ignored.

#### 6.3.1.2. Summary of this section

Overall, my analysis leads me to conclude that that quality is weakly defined if not completely ambiguous in the targets of SDG4. At best this is the result of a fudge to achieve compromise, more cynically it might be argued that the word quality is dropped into targets as a discursive distraction from the narrow focus on outcomes, which ultimately are seen as the proxy for quality.

#### 6.3.2. Hierarchies of Learning

Although there was a consistent push to make learning central to the post-2015 education agenda, other than in the goal, the word ‘learning’ is only used twice more, once in the general outcome target 4.1. and once in the MOI target 4a, where it refers to learning environments. However, although the word is not used it is often implied through the focus on outcomes. In this section I analyse how learning is framed in the ‘outcome’ targets and consider the how this framing reflects what is valued by policy makers in relation to educational outcomes. I do this through deconstructing the framing of learning in target 4.1 and in target 4.7, I also refer to target 4.4 (other targets are discussed later in this chapter). I also make reference to the global indicators where relevant, with a more detailed discussion later in this chapter (see section 6.4 below).

In this section, as its title indicates, I talk about ‘hierarchies of learning’, based on my findings when undertaking this analysis of learning in SDG4. I was not consciously thinking of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning (Bloom et al., 1956), however, I realise it is useful to explain how I am using this term and how, if at all, this relates to the pyramid of learning described by Bloom et al. (ibid). Through my analysis I found

that not all learning is equally valued in SDG4. Through the deployment of certain words some learning is elevated and prioritised, and this led me to conclude that a hierarchy of learning exists within SDG4. Arguably, what is valued is the cognitive domain, the knowledge and skills in target 4.1 and 4.4, with the affective learning of 4.7 relegated as a residual target. What is more, the learning at the top of the SDG4 hierarchy is from the bottom layers of Bloom's pyramid of cognitive skills: 'knowledge' and 'comprehension' (ibid) – or as a revised version of the taxonomy described it, 'remember' and 'understand' (Anderson, Krathwohl et al., 2001) – assessed through standardised assessment (see section 6.4). Although this comparison is not a central feature of my analysis, it is nonetheless interesting to bear in mind when considering what learning is valued in SDG4. Below, I offer my general analysis of how learning is valued and prioritised in SDG4.

Target 4.1. reads: *“By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”*. This is the only time the term *‘learning outcomes’* is specifically used, although outcomes are implied in 4 other targets as UIS (2018a). Target 4.1 makes *‘learning outcomes’* central in SDG4, not just because of its explicit language but because it relates to the outcomes at primary and secondary levels of education.

This is also the only target that governments are called on to ensure is completed and is free. Taking the different aspects of the target together, the experience children and young people have at these levels has major implications for the wider sustainable agenda and for education's role in society. How and what these children and young people learn will be key for their futures and for the achievement of sustainable development overall. Target 4.1 is the only place the word *‘free’* appears in SDG4. This is considered an important achievement *“[w]inning free, winning secondary, tracking rural indigenous girls, gender equality – all of that will be transformative”* (interviewee). However, notably, at a global level the portion of students participating in *‘free’* education will not be tracked (discussed below).

The learning outcomes in target 4.1 are described as “relevant and effective,” giving them increased and central value. These adjectives have been carefully chosen and suggest that outcomes from this target are the most useful outcomes from education. At the level of the target, what this encompasses is left unspecified. On the one hand this is logical, as spelling out every aspect of learning that is relevant would be cumbersome, however, the ambiguity leaves space open for interpretation. During the negotiation process there was wide support for describing learning as ‘relevant’ from both civil society and member states. At that time its use was understood as relevant to the context or to specific groups:

*relevant ended up being one of the words which everybody could agree on, it allowed us to avoid the question of literacy and numeracy, because everybody agreed they were relevant, it allowed us to import the indigenous peoples demand on indigenous knowledge being covered [ . . . ] now we’ve seen what people have done with relevant, it was short-sighted because we should’ve realised the word relevant – as much as it allows us as civil society to put everything into that word – it also allows members states implementing the agenda to do whatever they want (interviewee).*

Rather than lead to the broad and holistic inclusive conception of education civil society had envisioned, the word ‘relevant’ was instead left ambiguous, leaving space for the term to be co-opted and new meanings created. Although not defined in the target, the global indicator for 4.1 (discussed in more detail in section 6.4) refers only to reading and maths. These are the outcomes valued as ‘relevant’ and ‘effective’ at primary and secondary level. This narrow focus is the exact opposite of what civil society had intended when lobbying for the word relevant.

Literacy and numeracy are without doubt key foundational skills, they are empowering and as such relevant and effective. But it is not simply the ability to read the words, what matters is the ability to critically analyse and question those words: that is arguably what make literacy and numeracy relevant and effective. The measurement of ‘success’ for 4.1 will be “achieving at least a minimum proficiency level”. Going back to the revised version of Bloom’s taxonomy, this would require students to ‘remember’ and possibly ‘understand’, but not to ‘analyse’ or ‘evaluate’ or ‘create’ (Anderson,

Krathwohl et al., 2001). Alone, this does not necessarily equip learners with skills to think critically, nor prevent prejudice and discrimination. As I have argued elsewhere, *“while short term improvements in literacy and numeracy test scores can act as a proxy for cognitive development and education improvement, they do not necessarily reflect a child’s ability to comprehend or apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt”* (Oswald and Moriarty, 2009). Literacy and numeracy are also the focus of target 4.6, this time for adult women and men, in this instance it is not described as relevant.

In addition to 4.1, target 4.4 also uses the word ‘relevant’: *“By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”*. The relevant skills here are those for work and economy, reportedly driven by concerns in countries with growing youth population (interviewee). As another interviewee noted:

*There was the very economist narrative of skills for work, and I think many member states were pushing that because they were struggling with incredibly high youth unemployment figures, so there was a kind of, a big part of the discussion in the education goals. (interviewee).*

The push for youth and adult skills is legitimate and, as the above quotations highlight, grounded in national contexts, particularly where the youth population was large. However, skills for work are not sufficient to address the multiple challenges countries face, such as violence, conflict, ethnic and religious tensions, gender discrimination, homo- and trans-phobia. The ability to respect diversity and human rights are also highly relevant for the vision of sustainable development outlined in the 2030 agenda, within which SDG4 sits.

Those latter skills are found in 4.7 which commits the signatories to:

*ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development by 2030 (target 4.7).*

This target is immediately identifiable with the wider sustainable development agenda. However, in contrast to the learning outcomes of target 4.1 described as ‘relevant and effective’, the areas of learning covered in target 4.7 are described as ‘promoting’ and ‘contributing’ to sustainable development. This suggests that they would be welcome but not essential.

By using these contrasting descriptions of learning, a hierarchy of learning is created. The separation of the learning into two categories – “relevant” and “contributing” – points to underlying assumptions of what is important and necessary for sustainable development. For example, human rights education (one theme in target 4.7), is not considered as a ‘relevant and effective learning outcomes’ in SDG4. This is despite the fact that human rights treaties on the right to education all call for the following:

*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms [ . . . ] (Article 13(1) ICESCR, UN, 1966).*

The UDHR and the CRC also make understanding of human rights a central aspect of the right to education. The failure of SDG4 to describe human rights education as ‘relevant’ raises questions about the commitment to respecting human rights frameworks, although this is repeatedly emphasised in the wider 2030 agenda, and in the Education 2030 FFA. It raises questions about how education is conceptualised as adding value to the wider sustainable development framework.

There is a disconnect between the overall 2030 sustainable development framework, which envisages “*a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; [ . . . ] A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world*” (UN, 2015, paragraph 8) and what in the SDG4 targets is considered as ‘relevant’ outcomes.

Target 4.7 does signal a more expansive idea of learning – the ‘affective’ that Bloom et al. (1956) talk about – and this is to be welcomed. Furthermore, to be fair to the drafters, the verb used in relation to 4.7 is ‘ensure’ which as I have argued earlier (in this chapter) places a strong emphasis for governments to act. Nonetheless, in choosing not to use the word relevant two tiers of learning are created; one type of learning that is relevant for sustainable development and another which can help promote sustainable development, thus a hierarchy of learning is created. Semantically, this gives different weight and value to the learning in 4.1 compared to the knowledge and skills in 4.7. What’s more, the order of the targets, adds to this perception, even if not openly intended. For example, when reading lists, there is a tendency to see priority in their order. Although there is no explicit acknowledgement that the order of the targets of SDG4 denote importance, target 4.1 with its ‘relevant and effective’ learning comes first and the learning in 4.7 comes last (in the outcome targets). It might be easy when reading the text of SDG4 to conclude that target 4.1 being first in a list of targets has greater weight, when compared to 4.7 which comes last.

It would be more consistent with the wider agenda if knowledge and skills in target 4.7 were also considered ‘relevant and effective’, as they are central to the vision of the 2030 agenda. It appears that 4.7 may be the result of a fudge, rather than finding a consensual way to encapsulate a range of these ideas and risks the target being deprioritised. Combining such a large group of themes in target 4.7, makes this target seem too complex, and as such risks being deprioritised by governments, who may see it as *“too broad and too many concepts ... difficult for people to grasp, especially for politicians [ . . . ]* (interviewee).

Added to the grouping together of so many areas entails a lack of conceptual clarity, further increasing the risk it will be deprioritised:

*you had the education relative to education for sustainable development and global citizenship was new, so that received a lot of attention, but it wasn’t clear what it meant theoretically, practically or how it would fit within the new agenda, so [ . . . ] 4.7 became a catch all for a lot of things (interviewee).*

A lack of clarity is likely to lead to the targets or aspects of it being overlooked. It has been argued that EFA goal 3 on life skills “*failed to gain traction over the past 15 years due to lack of common agreement on how ‘life skills’ should be defined.*” (Rose, 2015, p. 290). The implications of this mean that 4.7 is also at risk. The broad scope and lack of clarity of target 4.7 puts it at risk of being marginalised. As such, it becomes largely symbolic and less likely to be a priority for government action and investment.

The subtle word choices and more explicit associations made through the targets are powerful discursive signifiers. The language used in targets 4.1, 4.4 and 4.7, as well as their place in the formation of the goal, assigns values and focuses intent. It points to a particular type of learning outcome being valued as relevant, and others as lesser priorities. It prioritises education that delivers a certain type of learning and skills that is functional, and work orientated, as the description of ‘a good education’ in the MyWorld survey also signalled. This points to an understanding of education’s primary function as developing human capital, where the role of education in strengthening rights, citizenship and/or environmental and sustainable lifestyles take a back seat. In prioritising these work-related skills, the drafters are sending a message of education’s role in future development. As one informant stated,

*...so, for almost all of them, while they may recognise the other social skills, global citizenship and so on, their priority is skills for work, it may seem from more developmental perspective very limited but that is the priority for every single minister for education and its pressure from their finance ministers because in a way whenever they ask for more budget they are instructed to spend more on skills for work (interviewee).*

A critical analysis of targets 4.1, 4.4 and 4.7 signals a hierarchy of learning, where ‘affective learning’ can contribute to but is not as ‘relevant’ or ‘effective’ as basic cognitive skills.

### 6.3.3. Leave No One Behind: Inclusion and Equity in SDG4

A key message of the wider 2030 agenda is to 'leave no one behind' (UN, 2015) and the Incheon Declaration stated clearly that 'no education target would be considered met unless met for all' (UNESCO 2015). Weighting these promises against the challenges of millions out of children out of school and not completing primary and/or secondary education - most often due to poverty, discrimination and conflict - requires SDG4 policy to be clear and robust in this area. How effectively these issues are tackled will depend on political will, increased resourcing and changing attitudes, however, the targets of SDG4 set the standard for what must be achieved.

In this section, I critically analyse a number of targets and ask can they deliver on the holistic vision of education set out in the overarching goal and promise from Incheon. I look at target 4.5 on gender discrimination and other forms of marginalisation. I consider target 4.2 on pre-primary education, and target 4.b (the only target on financing) and consider these in relation to inclusion and equity.

#### 6.3.3.1. Inclusion in SDG4 targets

In addition to system and resources challenges, discrimination is a major cause of exclusion from education. In this sub-section, I undertake a critical reading of target 4.5, my analysis is focused primarily on gender discrimination, although I touch on other forms of exclusions

Globally, a higher proportion of girls are out of schools than boys and although in some contexts it is boys are being left behind, overall *"girls remain far more likely to be disadvantaged at the primary education level in the poorest countries, where they make up a much larger share of those who will never even go to school"* (UNESCO, 2018b, p.

1) Ending gender inequality in education is central to target 4.5, which calls on governments to *"eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"* by 2030.



This commitment has been carried through from the MDG goal 3 and EFA goal 5, and although considerable progress has been made, even at primary level gender parity is still not universal. However, one of my interviewees notes that there was a split between countries in relation to this target, reporting that the:

*donor community and [the] Global Partnership for Education, Malala Fund have kept focus on girls and equity and gender but for many ministers in developing countries I don't think it is a committed priority, for them they have seen a lot of advance on access to education so for them there is a lessening of the priority (interviewee).<sup>32</sup>*

This is an interesting observation which may reflect differing social, cultural and political realities. Another research informant reflecting on the discourse of the economic benefits of education suggested this is a motivating factor, arguing “[ . . . ] that mentality of education having this financial return [ . . . ] why girls education is suddenly of value because economists have said it yields great rates of return” (interviewee).

While the target is an important one, it is also limited. When girls are left behind it is most often because they are girls. Violations of girls right to education are continuing despite the 2030 agenda and suggests a shift in attitudes is needed. Discrimination against girls is often the result of social and cultural norms. Girls' education can be seen as having less value or even prohibited by certain beliefs, meaning their education is not valued. In extreme cases girls are targeted for going to school, such as Malala Yousafzai or the girls kidnapped from school in Chibok, Nigeria, to give just two examples of many. Although target 4.5 is an important commitment, there is a lack of coherence across the SDG4 targets. To tackle gender discrimination, children, young people and adults need to understand their rights and the rights of others. They need to participate in an education that promotes tolerance. Yet as discussed in the previous section the knowledge and skills set out in target 4.7, are not among the outcomes that are considered relevant and effective. If target 4.5 is to be achieved, changing attitudes and educating children and young people about their rights is key. Target 4.7 takes on

---

<sup>32</sup> As I have mentioned elsewhere, I worked for the Malala Fund in 2015 and 2016 and girl's education was the key focus of my work.

increased significance and is undoubtedly relevant to underpinning gender equity in education.

The latter half of the target 4.5 is also focused on inequity, calling on governments to *“ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations”*. This is of course positive, however, the focus on access alone (as the MDGs have shown) does not lead to inclusion or equity in education. For example, for children with disabilities participation in education is not just a matter of enrolment, it requires inclusive practice and pedagogy, and when necessary, adapted curriculum, learning materials and assistive devices. It is clear that this target is not sufficient to address the enormous challenges that leave half of all school-aged children with disabilities worldwide out of school (Education Commission, 2016). The global indicator for target 4.5 calls for tracking of *“[p]arity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated”*. It is unclear why this level of disaggregation is not simply articulated in all the other targets, this would arguably keep a greater spotlight on the challenges facing children, young people and adults with disabilities, as well as other marginalised groups.

This target also has a focus on children living in vulnerable situation, which arguably include those affected by violence, conflict and humanitarian emergencies. Inclusion and equity of access for these children is key as a recent estimate suggest that *“over one-fifth of children in these countries will still not complete primary education on current trends”* by 2030 (Theirworld, 2018). However, access alone will not be enough. Equity in the classroom and critical pedagogy are also important in supporting children in such contexts. Research from Jordan suggests *“alternative educational practice for Syrian refugees, underpinning the idea of critical consciousness, mutual respect and dignity while providing highly valued certification, [...] may offer the hope for a stable*

*livelihood in both the short and intermediate term”* (Magee and Pherali, 2017, p. 14).

However, as with target 4.7, the grouping together of different forms of discrimination may risk this target being deprioritised as one of my interviewees notes:

*one target getting a bit lost is target 4.5, it seems like we are hoping it will get addressed in one of the other targets without concerted effort on it, even the kind of indicators are not in-depth enough. There needs to be much more qualitative work around target 4.5 [ . . . ] In terms of leaving no-one behind we still have to concentrate on primary kinds of exclusions which would be again by country contexts [ . . . ] I think the primary issues still remains in the intersection between socio-economic status and gender, socio-economic status and location in some countries, the poorest in rural areas are still worse [ . . . ]* (interviewee).

In highlighting the intersection of socio-economic status with gender and with location - and I would add disability, displacement, etc. - the informant shines a light on poverty as one of the major barriers to education, and how it intersects with other forms of marginalisation. It is for this reason that free education is so critical to leaving no one behind, however, the ‘free’ aspects of education will not currently be tracked in relation to target 4.1. and as discussed below SDG4 does not call for pre-primary education (seen as critical for equity) to be free.

Target 4.5 does not fully reflect the inclusion and equitable quality which the overarching goal promises. Policy needs to be clear and where necessary call for proactive targeted measures, as the interviewee who spoke about the intersectionality of marginalisation (see quote above) argued:

*to use an example from the US which is not well regarded, there has to be affirmative action for excluded groups and that will depend on what countries want to do [ . . . ] so in terms of leaving no-one behind we have to look at both reporting in ways that are both nuanced at the intersecting disadvantages and exclusions and the kind of actions that are more costly but necessary (ibid).*

Calling equity in access is not in itself sufficient, the challenges facing the most marginalised groups as a result of social class, gender, ethnicity, disability,

displacement, etc., require targeted actions by governments and their international partners.

#### 6.3.3.2. Equity in SDG4 targets

In any policy, every word matters. Omissions create meaning (Ball, 1993) and can speak volumes in terms of priorities and commitments. In this section I look at target 4.2 and critically analyse what this target signals for equity.

Target 4.2 calls on governments to “[ . . . ] *ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*”. Pre-primary education has benefits for progression and achievement in education and long-term health and financial benefits (cf. Naudeau et al., 2011), and investing in ECD and pre-primary mitigates inequities (cf. Heckman; GMR 2007/8). Notably, however, the word ‘free’, used in target 4.1, is omitted from this target. Given that ECD and pre-primary education are critical to “tackling the intertwined challenges of the learning crisis and inequality faced by disadvantaged children as they progress through the education system” (Zubairi and Rose, 2017, p. 13), this omission speaks volumes. Without free provision to support the most marginalised children it seems less than probable that this target can be fulfilled. 85% of children in LICs are not accessing any form of pre-primary education (Ibid), not making pre-primary education free risks them being left behind. This arguably leaves a gap that could be filled by private provision, increasing costs to households and creating further barriers for children from low-income households. This means there is gap between the language of inclusion and equity in the overarching goal is diminished in the targets.

Furthermore, one of the global indicators for target 4.2 risks making children with disabilities invisible. This target has two indicators, the first 4.2.1, ‘proportion of children developmentally on track’ is positive in terms of inclusion and may help identify developmental delays and disabilities in young children. The other Indicator 4.2.2 calls for measurement of ‘participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)’, however, it only calls for disaggregation of the data by sex

and not by disability. Global tracking of inclusion at pre-primary level would send a clear message that no child should be left behind. While those responsible for monitoring and measuring progress on SDG4 might argue that other indicators, such as 4.5. or thematic and national indicators, include disaggregation by disability, the failure to explicitly call for target 4.2.2 to track the participation of children with disabilities risks exacerbating already high levels of exclusion.

### 6.3.3.3 Financing in SDG4: the implications for equity

In this section I analyse the financing commitment made in SDG4 target 4.b and consider this in relation to the ambitious change that is signalled by the overarching goal. I begin this section with a brief consideration of financing for SDG4 more broadly.

Although SDG17, has 5 targets under the heading of finance, financing was separated from the 2030 agenda and instead addressed through the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), adopted shortly before the SDGs themselves in 2015. The 2030 agenda makes it clear that the AAAA is key for realisation of the SDGs. It is therefore reasonable to argue that SDG4 did not need a target on financing, although the Addis Agenda contains very limited financing commitments to education. It is also criticised for failing to highlight the need for increased domestic resources (King, 2015). However, financing was not absent from the other goals of the 2030 agenda. 10.b, 11.c, and 15, all call for additional financing of one kind or another. SDG3c, one of the health goals MOI targets calls on governments to “substantially increase health financing [ . . .]” (SDG3c). Arguably this could also have been the same in SDG4, however, despite the strong advocacy leading up to the adoption of the SDG framework, and a target in the Muscat Declaration which called for 4-6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to be spent on education (UNESCO, 2014), there is no specific target relating to the overall financing of SDG4.

In the final text of SDG4 there are two references to financing are made in the targets. The teachers target (discussed above) makes an indirect reference to financing, when it says: “[...] including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing

*countries*”. This can be read as a commitment that external funding will be made available to address the teachers’ shortage. The use of the word ‘including’ implies this will be in addition to domestic financing. There is no further detail on any international or domestic financing and no requirement of how this element will be tracked in the global indicators. The second is target 4b, however, it is very limited in terms of the areas of education it supports. As I noted above, the MOI targets have been criticised and this education MOI target 4.b is certainly controversial. It is the only SDG4 target focused solely on financing, yet it does not support the goal in its entirety, nor even a range of targets, in fact it does not even support one target in its entirety. This target prioritises scholarship funding and reads:

*By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries (Target 4.b).*

University education is of course important – including for teacher education – and there are scholarships schemes that benefit marginalised groups, such as refugees, which is also positive. Nonetheless, this target will only benefit a tiny percentage of students. It will do little to address equity more broadly.

In the section above, I argued that the omission of the word ‘free’ from target 4.2 would further exacerbate the lack of pre-primary education for the poorest children in low-income countries. Zubairi and Rose (2017), whose work I highlighted above, include a very illustrative figure in their research:

*Donor governments also give 26 times more to scholarships to help students study in rich countries in 2015 than to pre-primary. This approach means governments and donors are effectively subsidising education for the richest families. Poor children missing out on early years education are much less likely to reach higher education. (Ibid, p. 6).*

However, rather than address this imbalance and prioritise free pre-primary education, the only financing pledge in SDG4 is for higher education scholarships, which will benefit only a very small minority of students.

The choice of policy makers to prioritise scholarships as the main financing commitment in SDG4 arguably undermines inclusion and equity. Having a MOI target that only pledges to finance one aspect of education lacks coherence with the broad and inclusive sentiment expressed in the goal. It raises the question of why this particular target is included. One explanation is that this is a result of a ‘fudge’ and this target came from a mixture of debates, including a call for targets on higher education. Another motivation, as more than one of my interviewees note, is that for some donor countries without the scholarships their Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) for education would be incredibly low:

*Where we differed from the New York process was on the means of implementation target, 4.b the scholarship part, which we did not feel was the right target to have in the agenda as it was too specific and also a target that could be promoting inequity because it's elites in developing countries who benefit from the scholarship process. [ . . . ] In general I would not say all targets should have the same priority – still I think 4.b is a different sort of target and if you look at ODA I think a lot of countries are paying for scholarships which benefit their own universities (interviewee).*

The quote also brings to the fore an important observation that, in this case, the New York process (pathway 1 discussed in chapter 5) exerted greater influence when it came to this decision. Prioritising the financing of scholarships over other areas of education finance arguably shines a spotlight on both the personal and political priorities of policy makers. The assessment of another of my interviewees is much blunter, arguing the inclusion of the scholarship was motivated by “*rich elite ambassadors thinking about their own children going to Cambridge*” (Interviewee). In this case it seems to be a direct reference to the OWG members, led by UN diplomats.

The inclusion of MOI target 4.b raises the question of priorities and whose interests are being served. It elevates financing for a tiny percentage of young people/adults and has

a shorter deadline of 2020. This according to one research informant seen as betrayal: *“we had good language on financing [ . . . ] it felt like real betrayal”* (interviewee). This target is at odds with the overall promise of SDG4, it will maintain inequality by supporting only a handful of students – even if individually those students might warrant support – while other marginalised students do not receive targeted financial support.

Moreover, the omission of a broad financing target in SDG4 raises questions about the depth of commitment to achieving the ambitious agenda for education until 2030. It has previously been suggested that the MDG/EFA goals were not actually meant to succeed:

*The major decades-long shortfall of resources for UPE, other EFA targets, and MDGs implies that our efforts have not been serious [ . . . ] but instead are the result of the successful functioning of an inequitable world system”* (Klees, 2013. p. 27).

The above assertion, that the lack of progress on previous global education agendas were in fact the working of a system that was never designed to succeed, brings to the fore the issue of political will and resourcing. While many may disagree with the above analysis, not having a broad financing target for SDG4 raises questions about the depth of commitment of achieving SDG4. It also leaves a potential gap, a gap that brings additional risks according to one interviewee:

*the risk is no one does anything, it is business as usual, donors continue trends away from education [ . . . ] people will look for other options and the main option they will look for is charging other people and business loves that, because then that’s market shares they can capture and develop and they can call it entrepreneurship. I think there is a huge risk if governments can’t deliver by 2030 and they will say, well we tried so now just let the market, like Liberia, people are going to start outsourcing their whole system* (interviewee).

The lack of a financing commitment can then arguably be seen as creating increased space for the private sector, which is increasingly seen as the solution to address resource gaps or to become the de-fault option:



*The fact that the state does not properly attend an increasing educational demand opens a big window of economic opportunity for private education providers. This privatization- by-default mechanism seems to be especially relevant in southern regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia (Verger, Fontdevila and Zancajo, in Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken (Eds.), 2017, p. 266).*

The lack of details on financing for education arguably increases the risk of the private sector filling the spaces. This is made more likely by an increasingly accepted argument that the private sector can replace the role of the state and step in to fill the gaps in education provision in low-resource settings (Tooley and Longfield, 2015). Overall, the 2030 agenda elevates the private sector as an equal partner, which makes the possibility of the private sector filling such gaps more viable. For education this was made clear from the outset, with the description of ‘a good education’ including the sentence: *“Governments and the private sector should work together to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development for adults.”* (MyWorld, UN 2012). This rise in private sector engagement in SDG4 has major implication for the right to education. If governments relinquish their obligations, particularly at primary and secondary level this would constitute a failure in their responsibilities under human rights law (Moumné and Saudemont, 2015). What is more it could risk increased discrimination against children from low-income households, given the benefits of private schools are weakly evidenced, especially in terms of equity (Day *et al.*, 2014).

#### *6.3.4. Key issues emerging from the above critical review of SDG4 targets*

The critical analysis of selected targets above points to a lack of internal coherence in SDG4. The goal offers a broad and holistic vision of education, yet aspects of this are hollowed out by the choices made in relation to the scope and focus of the targets, how the targets are framed and, importantly, by omissions. In some cases, compromise appears to have led to a ‘fudge’, where meaning is less obvious and open to interpretation. Elsewhere, the targets reveal that the holistic language of the goal masks a narrower focus and purpose. Hierarchies are created, establishing a more limited vision of the way in which education is conceived of contributing to sustainable

development. Although often subtle, there is a lack of coherence between the goal and the targets in relation to inclusion and equity. What may seem like small omissions, such as the word ‘free’ at pre-primary level, when scholarship funding is prioritised as one of only three MOI targets it is hard to see how these policy choices will increase inclusion and equity promised in the goal.

As I said in the introduction to this section above, overcoming the challenges facing education globally and achieving SDG4 will depend on political will and interpretation of the targets. While there is still much to be welcomed in the SDG4 targets, it is clear that a deeper reading reveals priorities and values not immediately apparent in the goal. This becomes more apparent when considering how progress will be tracked for the SDG4 targets as the section below on global indicators highlights.

#### 6.4. SDG4 Global Indicators: redefining the targets through measurement

As Ball (2006) noted, policy texts are “*not necessarily clear or closed or complete*”, and this is true for SDG4. In this section I take a closer look at one of the global indicators and argue that it has changed the meaning of SDG4 and narrowed the agenda of learning and quality. I limit my analysis to the level of global indicators and the majority of my discussion is focused on global indicator 4.1.1, expanding on the discussion above (section 6.3.1) as global indicator 4.1.1 in particular illustrates how what is measured shapes a particular concept of what outcomes are ‘relevant’ for wider sustainable development agenda.

As I have argued elsewhere, the decisions on global indicators are political choices that will have an impact on the goal and targets (Moriarty, 2016). Put another way:

*Indicator development is associated with politics and values. So, the Education 2030 agenda along with its construction of assessment markets is bound to involve indicator politics [ . . . ] Measurement is power, for better and for worse. (Sørensen, 2015).*

The phrase ‘measurement is power’, captures the reason the analysis of the global indicators and their impact on the goal and targets is important. While the goal and targets of SDG4 are designed to set the scope, decisions about what will be measured as progress will also shape action.

Measurement of progress for the SDGs, including SDG4, will be guided by four levels of indicators: global, regional, thematic and national. While all are theoretically important, globally governments will be accountable to report only on the global indicators, and as such these arguably represent a boiling down of priorities. The thematic indicators are intended to guide data collection; however, they will not require the same level of international accountability as the global indicators. What is more, having global and thematic indicators is problematic in the opinion of one interviewee:

*[ . . . ] this is a parallel process on the indicators, where you have the IAEG that decides on global indicators and the education community that decides on the thematic ones. (Interviewee).*

Regional indicators will reflect “priorities and issues of common interest that are shared by countries in a particular region “ (UIS, 2018, p. 9) and “[n]ational level monitoring of SDG4 is linked to the needs of national and sub-national governments in developing education sector plans and informing policies.” (Ibid, p. 10). This latter position suggests that the choice of indicators should be:

*up to national context and resources of the national governments to put in place a system for monitoring this and of course will get more attention than others but they will come down to local political contexts [ . . . ] (interviewee).*

How this will evolve is not yet fully known, however, the global indicators as the only set of common indicators to which all governments are accountable become immensely influential . I am not opposed to measurement per se, but the choices over measurement are not neutral and have consequences. While the development of the SDGs, including SDG4, was a political process of intergovernmental negotiations, the development of the global indicators was described as a technical process. It was led by

the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), comprised largely of statistical experts from a range of countries. In this sense it was made up of technical, not political, elites. One of my interviewees described the process:

*I think the indicator process has been [chaos].<sup>33</sup> Disappointing doesn't even describe half of it. It's been a demonstration of very poor governance in the sense that there wasn't really a clear decision-making structure. It started with the member states concluding that the statistical commission could sort this out [ . . . ] And then the statistical commission decided to put together this expert group, and they've had a really tough time as well, because they've been faced with this mammoth task [ . . . ] They've gone for feasibility and accessibility of data rather than actually looking at what the target has set out to do, which means you have a number of indicators that are not measuring the correct thing, which is really serious when you look at the funding that is available (interviewee).*

While, it is fair to say that the work of the IAEG-SDGs was heavily influenced by available data, feasibility of data collection and other methodological considerations, to portray this as a merely technical process is misleading. Ultimately the choice of what to measure are political choices, they establish what counts as success, what is valued. As Winkler and Satterthwaite (2017) argue, the indicators are “*not just technical, but political, and hugely influential. Indicators determine what data will be gathered, what we will know about inequalities and ultimately ‘what matters’ in the implementation of the SDGs by concentrating effort and attention.*” (Ibid, p. 1025).

The global indicators define the focus of what counts as success for SDG4, and in doing so reshape the agenda. This is most starkly illustrated by the global indicator for target 4.1. Although the target is multifaceted, there is currently only one global indicator, which measures only one aspect of the target, the learning outcomes. The global indicator 4.1.1 reads: “*Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex*” (IAEG-SDGs, 2016).

---

<sup>33</sup> The interviewee used more colourful language.

Only learning outcomes will be measured, there is no measurement of completion, quality or equity (beyond disaggregation by sex). As one of my interviewees reflects:

*At the moment there are no global indicators on children in or out of schools or completion, no indicator on numbers of children and personally I think this is wrong, we are missing something (interviewee).*

Furthermore, the global indicator 4.1.1 does not attempt to track progress on providing free (public) education despite the evidence that fees and other school costs remain a significant barrier to education. I have also argued elsewhere that only calling for disaggregate data other than by sex will “*hide the inequity of learning outcomes between groups*” (Moriarty, 2016, p. 124). There is considerable evidence on the relationship between household income and learning outcome that will not be made visible. For example, only 1% of the poorest girls in low income countries complete upper secondary school (UNESCO, 2016).

The same interviewee who expressed the view (above) that the indicator process was chaos, also pointed out that there has been some progress and there is now a proposal “*that 2020 will have two more indicators under 4.1. One of them is “free”, the other one is, I don’t remember, it might be “completion”*” (interviewee). This is an important development and will, once those additional indicators are belatedly in place, help render a more comprehensive picture of progress on target 4.1. Although, by the time they are operational, a significant portion of the SDG period will already have elapsed.

What will not change is how learning is assessed, this will remain as “*minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics (global indicator 4.1.1)*”. As touched on in the section on quality in this chapter, learning is not simply about outcomes, Alexander (2015) argued that:

*education for the period post-2015 needs a radical and properly informed debate about indicators and measures in relation to the black box, or black hole, of teaching and learning, for classrooms are the true front line in the quest for educational quality. The proper sequence, surely, is not to make do*

*with the odd measure that happens to have featured in a number of school effectiveness studies but to start with a rounded account of the educational process and the purposes it serves (Ibid, p. 253).*

This is an important argument, what happens in the classroom matters, pedagogy is important, the role of school and teacher (as looked at above) in these processes is vital. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that children do not learn simply because they are assessed - they learn if assessment information results in changes and improvements in the quality of education, including pedagogy. Parents and students alike also place value (albeit for a variety of reasons) on measuring progress, this might be in relation to education qualifications as a 'positional good' or for more comprehensive understanding of the value that formative assessment can provide. Learning focused on outcomes only has limited policy purchase if it does not result in improvements in classroom practice. Such a technocratic approach runs the risk of losing sight of the idea that improving learning does not come about by assessment per se or the frequency of assessment (Kanjee and Sayed 2013). The issue of measuring a narrow set of learning outcome is one recognised by a number of my interviewees as controversial:

*from the beginning we began to see a divergence of views on learning assessment, even though there was agreement there needed to be greater attention to learning outcomes, there was from the outset a positing around what it meant in terms of learning outcomes, on one side there was a clear push for greater learning assessment – particular attention to global assessment, assessment of literacy and numeracy, on the other side, largely represented by civil society, teachers' unions, and some academics, a critique was emerging of the narrowing of the learning agenda but we could already see by 2014/15 diverging views on how to assess learning, what comprise that [. . .] continues to some extent even now (interviewee).*

The indicators shape the targets and the goal, they bring back arguments made in the formation of SDG4 that did not get reflected in the goal or targets.

The drive to global comparable data, was driven by powerful donors (according to one interviewee) concerned with results.

It arguably brings a risk that ownership and control of the agenda will be ceded to international organisations and education development consultancy firms. It is argued this is exactly what the OECD hoped to achieve in its proposal that its PISA assessment *“should be extended to the entire globe to monitor and drive that “all youth acquire basic skills” [ . . . .] The first aspiration of organisations is to increase their influence and through that the values giving direction to its initiatives”* (Sørensen, 2015).

Organisations, such as the OECD were influential in setting the parameters of what was measured. This is picked up by one of my interviewees who parodied discussions of what should be measured within the education community:

*they just look at learning outcomes and to them it was math test, reading test, what about completion? “oh, completion doesn’t really matter”, what, completion doesn’t matter, since when? What about free? “oh yeah we can put that in the thematic” – “we can only have one global indicator for 4.1, we can only have one” Oh so you’ve decided it’s going be this one? “oh yeah, we didn’t tell you? The agencies got together, and we decided it was going be reading and math “oh really “, well OECD would like it to be for end of lower secondary, 15 years old because guess what they measure!*  
(interviewee).

Another explanation can be found by asking who stands to gain from an increased focus on assessing learning. Highly standardised assessment requires globally comparable data and is arguably driven in part by a global industry in testing, the largest global market in education after textbook production. This is big business. In a blog entitled *‘Always Earning’* which parodied the mantra of one of the largest of this type of private education businesses, Pearson, it is argued that few people realise what enormous influence such companies have (Nagler, 2014). The role of the so-called ‘edu-business’ has been explored in depth by Ball (2012) who argues they have increasing influence in shaping education policy. SDG4 by virtue of the assessment and measuring required to monitor progress is likely to give impetus to such an industry and risks further intensifying the current privatisation of education in its different aspects. With increasing use of results-based financing (promoted by the Education Commission, 2016) governments will be keen to show progression in these global indicators.

The dominance of international organisation and/or the private sector runs the risk of disempowering national education actors (state and non-state) and citizens. After all, policy traction and accountability provided by global targets only work if national governments use the information from monitoring progress to put in place education policy reforms to improve education quality and learning, and if, first and foremost, national governments are accountable to their citizens. Governments and, more fundamentally, teachers and schools should therefore be in the driver's seat in developing measures of accountability that are politically acceptable, professionally sound, and administratively manageable. Reducing learning in this way based on quantitative approach, which uses test results to verify effectiveness and quality, is problematic (Bivens et al, 2009).

This section has sought to highlight how SDG4 is being reshaped after its adoption by the global indicator, where 'relevant learning outcomes' in target 4.1 become 'minimum proficiency in reading and maths' at the end of primary and lower secondary. This creates a new agenda within SDG4, and it is fair to conclude that those who had sought a narrower goal focused on learning have to a large degree achieved this through target 4.1 and its global indicator. As noted by one of my research informants, *"certain groups didn't get the targets they wanted then they pushed for the indicators to pick the part of the target they want"* (interviewee). For those who argued against the SDG goal for education being focused only on a narrow conception of learning – as per the so-called "Dakar Wars" of 2013 (see chapter 5) – it appears that they won the battle but lost the war.

In summary, the above critical reading of the global indicator 4.1.1 illustrates how the agenda for education. Progress for target 4.1 is seen only as outcomes in literacy and numeracy. This undermines a broader conception of quality and learning, limiting the ability of education to unlock a child's full potential. Learning, if it is of quality, must be understood as a process, a skill, not only measured by very narrow summative outcomes.



## 6.5 Conclusion to this chapter

In this chapter I have critically analysed the final version of SDG4, focusing on the overarching goal, and selected targets to discuss the key concepts of learning, and considered the intertextual impact of the global indicators for target 4.1.

Below I summarise a number of points that stand out from this critical analysis. In doing so I have sought to deconstruct the meanings ascribed to key concepts such as quality, learning, inclusion and equity in SDG4 and highlight how certain assumptions and discourses reflected and reinforced to address the second of my research questions, **‘how quality education is conceptualised in SDG4 (RQ2)’**.

### 6.5.1 Key research findings

#### *6.5.1.a Narrow vision of quality*

- The holistic goal of SDG4 is hollowed out at the level of targets. While the overarching goal sought to bridge divisions that arose during its construction, its expansive language is weakened at the level of the targets. The structure and the language of the targets set priorities beyond those that are immediately evident. Quality is left undefined and overall the targets suggest a narrow vision of quality, focused on measurable outcomes, with no reference to pedagogy and where teachers’ contribution is devoid of agency.
- Although inclusion and equity are central in the goal and reiterated in the targets, a critical reading of the targets points to an inconsistency between rhetoric and priorities. For example, pre-primary education – which is well evidenced as improving equity throughout the education cycle – is not required to be free, whereas donor governments committing to substantially increase scholarships disproportionately benefits children from wealthier families. This does not reflect a rights-based understanding of quality, in which inclusion and equity are central.

#### 6.5.1.b *Hierarchy of learning*

- While some learning, such as literacy and numeracy and “*skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship*” are described as ‘relevant’, other learning, such as rights and global citizenship are not. This creates a hierarchy of learning, where the basic cognitive skills are valued above affective learning. This undermines human rights treaties on the right to education which included knowledge of human rights as an essential part of quality education. Understanding rights and experiencing rights in practice in the classroom and wider school is critical for the sustainable societies proposed in the 2030 agenda. This suggests a narrow conception of what is important as an outcome from education, one focused primarily on basic skills and skills for work.

#### 6.5.1.c. *Narrow and utilitarian vision focused on outcomes*

- Success at primary and secondary education will be measured by a narrow set of outcomes in reading and math measured through standardised tests. SDG4 hollows out the contribution of pedagogy and diminishes the agency of teachers and learners.
- All of the overt or subtle choices that were made in SDG4 fuel a conception of education that is directed towards easy to measure, functional outcomes. The narrow focus of what is considered ‘relevant’ in SDG4 places limits on the ambition of the goal. It points to a conception of education as primarily for the production of human capital, rather than a broader rights-based conception, that values not just outcomes but also process and participation.
- These findings shed light on how education is conceptualised within SDG4 and point to narrow utilitarian conception of education emerging as dominant within SDG4, more in line with an HCT approach to quality education than a rights-based approach. This gives weight to the theory of Lingard and Rawolle (2011) who suggest that education has been ‘economised’, seen as ‘national capital’ that countries seek (discussed in chapter 3).

*6.5.1.d. Silences and gaps*

- The narrow scope of the only financing target, the MIO 4.b on scholarships will not support implementation of the whole goal, nor even multiple targets, instead it will support the implementation of part of one target. This suggests that the political will from governments and donors alike to commit to more than just words was lacking.
- The targets fails to reflect the central importance of pedagogy or child-centred, rights-based learning.

In the following and final chapter of this thesis, I offer a summary and synthesis of my research findings from this chapter (6) and the previous chapter (5).

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) sets the global policy agenda for education until 2030, committing governments to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all’ (UN, 2015). As one of the 17 goals of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, SDG4 is part of a global commitment to ‘transforming our world’ (Ibid). Given its importance, the intention of this research was to untangle the interplay of complex influences and global discourses that shaped SDG4 and are reflected in it. My research was driven by an interest in the potential for SDG4 to contribute to this radical vision of transformation promised in the 2030 agenda, to understand what influences and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and, whether they support a transformative vision of global education.

In this conclusion to my thesis, I summarise and discuss my findings in relation to my two sub-research questions (7.2) and synthesise my main findings (7.3). I make recommendations for policy and practice (7.4) along with recommendations for future research (7.5). I set out the contribution this study has made to existing knowledge in this field of global education policy (7.6) and conclude this chapter with some final reflections on my research journey and how it has been shaped by, and has shaped, my own professional practice (7.7).

### 7.2. Summary and discussion of my research findings

In this section I summarise and discuss my research findings for RQ1 and RQ2, I also synthesise and theorise the overall findings of my research.

### *7.2.1. How SDG4 was formed: summary of findings of RQ1*

In chapter 5 of this thesis I answered RQ1, **how was SDG4 formed?** I described how SDG4's formulation occurred along two distinct pathways, one focused on the broad 2030 agenda and the other specifically on education, over a three-year period (see diagram 2, chapter 5). Although these pathways ran separately, they did intersect, and my findings suggest influence flowed in both directions. The first development pathway resulted in education being a standalone goal and was influential in pushing for there to be only one global agenda, of which education would be part. It was ultimately decisive in shaping the final formulation of SDG4, which survived the intergovernmental negotiations intact. The education pathway was also influential, particularly in shaping the language of the final overarching goal of SDG4, which incorporated the language proposed by the education thematic consultation in 2013. The interlinkages between the two pathways were not just the result of key 'policy moments' but also the behind the scenes discussions. UN Member States were active in both pathways, the first pathway was a UN Members State process and many of the same countries were also central in the education pathway through the UNESCO Member State delegations. As such ideas flowed to and from their capital cities (e.g. the seat of government) and between the two pathways.

Both pathways were largely 'elite' processes, driven by high ranking government officials (e.g. Ambassadors), with input and support from high level international civil servants i.e. UN personnel. Other 'elites' also included experts from civil society, trade unions and academia, as well as the private sector, which appears to be given a privileged position. Arguably, trade union 'elites' represent a wider constituent base of members, as do some civil society coalitions. Ultimately, however, it was the senior leadership of these organisations who engaged directly in the processes. The participation of ordinary people is limited but nonetheless significant, particularly through the impact of the MyWorld Survey (in pathway 1). This survey resulted in education being ranked the highest priority for the post-2015 development agenda and as a result, it became inevitable that education would have a central place in the final 2030 Agenda, and arguably led to it becoming a standalone goal.

The policy formulation process is marked by contestation and tension over the goal, targets, and the leadership of SDG4. The debates over ‘learning for all’ and quality education reflected longstanding differences between a human capital theory approach and a rights-based approach to quality education. These divisions reflected ideological differences that were played out through organisational and personal networks, in particular over the leadership of SDG4.

The overarching goal of SDG4, as policy often does, appears to offer a compromise, to bridge the tension between a narrow focus on learning and a more expansive vision of quality education. However, as Ball (2006) has theorised, while policy texts are

*the product of compromises at various stages [ . . . ] There is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process. [ . . . ] The point is that quibbling and dissensus and sometimes the effects of quibbling and dissensus result in a blurring of meanings, in public confusion and a dissemination of doubt (Ibid, p.11).*

A deeper critical reading highlights equivocation, ‘blurring’ meanings of key concepts such as quality and learning. It reveals that in fact the tensions that played out in the formulation have not been resolved, and that ambiguity allows meaning to be reshaped, even after SDG4 has been finalised (see next section).

### *7.2.2. How quality education is conceptualised in SDG4: summary of findings from RQ2*

In chapter 6 of this thesis I described and critically analysed SDG4’s overarching goal, selected targets and global indicators in relation to concepts central in SDG4 – quality, learning, inclusion and equity – to answer, RQ2 **how is quality education conceptualised in SDG4?**

The holistic vision of the overarching goal is hollowed out at the level of the targets, in particular in relation to quality, with a strong focus on outcomes and no reference to pedagogy.

Only some learning and skills are described as relevant and effective: as such these areas are privileged, and a hierarchy of learning is created. Basic cognitive skills are valued above affective skills, and with the adoption of global indicator 4.1.1., minimum proficiency in reading and maths become the ‘relevant learning outcomes’ for primary and secondary education. The global indicators redefine SDG4 after its adoption, further narrowing what is meant by relevant learning. They impact on SDG4, highlighting the fluid and discursive nature of policy.

The promise to ‘leave no one behind’ – a prominent mantra, in the SDGs and in the education pathway, and reflected in the words ‘inclusion’ and ‘equitable’ in the overarching goal – is, however, weakened by choices at the level of targets and global indicators. This is illustrated by the choice to substantially increase scholarships that disproportionately benefit children from wealthier families, while not calling for pre-primary education to be free, despite the known benefits on equity throughout education and later life.

Despite consistent references to human rights in both pathways, knowledge of human rights and other learning in target 4.7. is not included in the category of ‘relevant’ learning. This runs the risk of undermining the right to education, which includes knowledge of human rights as an essential part of quality education.

My findings point to SDG4 (and global indicators) prioritising a narrow, utilitarian conception of education. One in which easily measurable outcomes, focused on basic cognitive skills or skills for work are prioritised, and is arguably more in line with a human capital theory approach to quality education than a rights-based approach.

### 7.3. Synthesis of my research findings

My thesis was structured around two main questions which looked at the process (chapter 5) and deconstructed the content of SDG4 (chapter 6), the findings of which

are summarised above. My two questions were designed to address my overarching research concern of what influences, and discourses shaped the formulation of SDG4 and whether they support a transformative vision of global education. In this section I present a synthesis of my key research findings.

### *7.3.1. Policy continuity and change.*

My research points to SDG4 as both continuity and change.

It confirms the view that “*antecedents and pressures [lead] to the development of a specific policy*” (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p. 12). SDG4 is both a legacy of EFA and marks the end of it. There is now just one detailed agenda for education within the broader 2030 agenda (which is itself the legacy of the MDGs).

SDG4 is now the only global policy agenda for education. It is a universal agenda to which all UN Member States have committed, this marks a change from the MDG and EFA, which were focused on countries in the Global South, and not seen as applicable to countries in the Global North. In this sense it signals a wider shift in understanding development from an end point which some countries have achieved and others have not, to an understanding that in all countries, inequity continues and needs to be addressed so that no one is left behind. This is important because in countries where universal enrolment has been achieved, discrimination persists. Children from low-income households, children from some minority groups and children with disabilities (among others) still face multiple barriers and discrimination in education (supporting Bourdieu’s theory that education favours the ‘habitus’ of children from middle-class households).

The SDGs, including SDG4, also signal a continuation of a theory of change where global goals are seen to drive action. The SDGs claim to respect human rights, however, SDG4 fails to identify human rights education as relevant.



### *7.3.2. Policy making is an elite domain*

My research clearly shows that SDG4 is, ultimately, the product of elite voices.

My research shows that while the voices of ordinary people helped secure education's place in the global agenda as a free-standing goal, the finer details of SDG4 text was the result of a struggle between the senior level elites of different nationalities and different political persuasions and of different multilateral organisations.

It shows that although policy formulation processes were marked by greater participation and transparency, behind the scenes discussions and manoeuvring took place with influential donors using their positions to greater advantage (e.g. over the leadership of SDG4).

SDG4 highlights the power of diplomacy, where compromise appears – at least on a first reading – to bridge tensions and ideological differences. However, my research revealed that the compromise is not as deep as it appears (see next section). Instead it masks the ongoing unresolved tensions that play out even after the adoption of SDG4.

Non-governmental groups also influenced through the formalised policy processes and lobbying. But even within these groups, it is policy elites who led the lobbying and attended to the detail. My research highlights a privileging of 'private sector' within this policy space.

Less present, almost unheard, were the voices of children or parents. Although SDG4 has the power to affect the lives of hundreds of millions of children, adolescents, and adults (adult learners and teachers) the vast majority will never have heard of SDG4, let alone have a say in shaping this global education policy that impacts them directly.

### *7.3.3. A narrow learning agenda*

My research shows how the holistic vision of quality education that the overarching goal appears to promise is narrowed and hollowed out at the level of targets and through the global indicators.

My research reveals that the debates that surfaced during the post-2015 policy processes replayed long standing divisions between human capital theory and a broader quality agenda with a rights-based approach. Although offering a rights-based vision of quality education in the overarching goal and also through the inclusion of the 'affective' learning in target 4.7., SDG4 ultimately prioritises a narrow set of functional and/or work focused skills.

SDG4 creates a hierarchy of learning, where human rights knowledge and other 'affective' learning is seen as less important despite the global context of discrimination, rights violations and conflict. Whilst the inclusion of target 4.7 is symbolically important, it is essentially a residual target in which many of the learning needs identified by diverse stakeholder groups are lumped together in a single target and as such it risks being marginalised (see chapter 6).

Standardised measurable learning outcomes become the proxy for quality. Any reference to pedagogy, child-centred rights-based teaching and learning (set out in the UNCRC) is absent, creating a greater likelihood of what Freire (1996) describes as 'banking education' (Ibid).

My research clearly shows that the tensions over the 'learning for all' goal and a broader rights-based approach to education were not resolved. Rather those who favoured an agenda focused on narrow learning outcomes achieved it in the end, even after SDG4's adoption (as part of the wider 2030 agenda).

### *7.3.4. Organisational and person alliances intersect with ideology in the policy process*

My research highlights that the tensions over the scope and focus of SDG4, which largely reflect ideological differences, were also fuelled by a desire for increased organisational or personal power.

This is seen in the struggle for the leadership of SDG4 between UNESCO and UNICEF. UNESCO (arguably with reason) was seen as bureaucratic and slow, whereas UNICEF was considered more nimble and able to deliver. In addition, there were also personal and organisational alliances, with close ties between UNICEF and the UK Department for International Development. Additionally, the US had withdrawn from UNESCO and was no longer a voting member. The World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education, were also aligned with UNICEF. Ambiguity within the UNESCO education sector about the new agenda also played into the leadership tensions.

Ideological differences were manifested through these alignments, with UNICEF more aligned to the 'learning for all' agenda favoured by UK DFID and USAID and the World Bank. UNESCO was strongly associated with a rights-based approach and with EFA. Key civil society actors were aligned with UNESCO, with whom there were established relationships through the EFA steering committee and UNESCO CCNGO-EFA, which gave them a strong voice on EFA matters. Civil society also saw UNESCO as more democratic because it is a Member State organisation, unlike UNICEF. UNESCO was late to openly back the call for one single unified agenda, and when it did it was seen by some as motivated in part by the personal ambition of the then Director General of UNESCO to become the Secretary General of the UN.

My research, as well as highlighting this divisions, also found that on the other hand there was also good cooperation between some key actors within UNICEF and UNESCO.

### *7.3.5 The power of globalised policy discourse*

My research points to the influence of globalised education policy in shaping SDG4. It points to what Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2012) refer to as 'global education

policy’ shaped by the influence of neoliberalism (ibid; Rizvi, 2006; Ball, 2012) as central in the formulation of this explicit global education policy.

Based on analysis of its formulation and a critical reading of the text, the ideas and assumptions of education as an economic imperative appear deeply ingrained in the value and assumptions of those who had the power to shape the agenda. Arguably these globalised discourses shape shared thinking among many elite policy makers who determined the focus and detail of SDG4. SDG4 processes and policy give priority to an economic discourse on education whereby the value of education is seen in light of its benefits for work. In other words, as Robertson (2012) argues, neo-liberalism has created a particular social imaginary as a way of framing education problems and their solutions, and my research points to this in the formulation and content of SDG4.

Although rights and a broader concept of education are also part of the discourse that shapes and is reflected in SDG4 they are seen as less relevant. SDG4 wraps the economic imperative in the language of rights and citizenship rather than fully embracing education for the role it can play in helping children reach their full potential and foster an understanding of rights and fundamental freedoms.

#### *7.3.6. Summary of this section*

The title of my thesis – ‘Developing a Transformative Vision of Global Education? Unpacking quality and learning in the policy formation and content of SDG4’ – contains a question mark, posing the question of whether SDG4 is a transformative vision for education in the way quality and learning are conceptualised.

My research points to SDG4 being constrained by its conception as an economic good rather than a social and public good, either knowingly or by the limits of the social imaginary of education policy makers. SDG4 is predominantly focused on a narrow conception of learning and learning outcomes and overall promotes a human capital approach to education quality. As such, the idea of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning remain illusory and unattainable. SDG4’s potential to

contribute to the ambitious transformation of the social, economic and environmental aspects of the 2030 agenda will be limited by this narrow focus and conceptions of education as a means to an end for employment and economic growth.

#### 7.4. Implications of my research for policy and practice

My research argues that the ambitious, holistic commitment of the SDG4 goal is at risk and that the primary value of education remains one of economic returns. This leads me to make the following recommendations for policy and practice:

##### *7.4.1. Defend the holistic vision, rights-based vision of SDG4 set out in the goal*

My findings show that the broader rights-based approach to education is at risk and national policy makers, local authorities, schools, teachers, teachers' trade unions and civil society should advocate for a broader rights-based interpretation of SDG4 at all levels of implementation. Advocates should draw on human rights treaties as the UNCRC and ICESCR to defend a rights-based approach to SDG4.

##### *7.4.2 Speed up and add to changes on global indicators*

There are ongoing discussions on global indicators and two new indicators are due to be added for target 4.1 in 2020. This process should be speeded up, particularly in relation to tracking the provision of free education, as this is critical for equity. Additionally, the current global indicator for target 4.1 could be altered to include a third measure, which I have added in bold to the original text: *'Percentage of children/young people (i) in Grade 2/3, (ii) at the end of primary, and (iii) at the end of lower achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (a) reading and (b) mathematics and (c) human rights knowledge.'*

##### *7.4.3. Create public awareness and engagement in national SDG4 processes.*

Although there was an unprecedented level of engagement in online and national consultations on the 2030 agenda, participation only represented a tiny percent of the world population. Although there are campaigns to build awareness of the 2030 agenda (i.e. Project Everyone), SDG4 remains largely unknown, therefore there should be a concerted effort to enable greater awareness and participation at national and local levels governments and other key stakeholder (civil society, teachers unions, etc.) over SDG4's implementation and monitoring. This should include a focus on teachers.

#### *7.4.4. Prioritise and track domestic spending and ODA to marginalised groups for the achievement of SDG4*

SDG4 only has one target focused on financing – to increase scholarships, which generally benefit children from wealthier families. Given SDG4 commits to equitable quality education, governments and their international partners will need to take targeted measures to ensure no child is left behind. This will require increased and targeted resources, and as such national and donor governments and international agencies should provide increased and targeted resources to support inclusion and equity in education, and to report on progress. A new global indicator could be added to address this gap for SDG4.

### *7.5. Recommendations for future research*

My research focused on the global level of policy processes in SDG4's formulation, and a critical reading of the text. It considered global processes rather than what happened in a national governments' policy discussion on SDG4. Equally, it does not look at national implementation. These areas can offer important insights in the global education policy field. This leads me to make the following recommendations for future research:

### *7.5.1 Research national level policy makers engaged in the formulation of SDG4*

While some government representatives were included in my research, I did not look at national level processes. Understanding the role of national level policy makers would shed additional light on SDG4's formulation and offer insights for future global policy processes. Future research could include interviews with national level policy makers to understand how they participated in processes that shaped SDG4, and should ensure an equal mix of participants from the global south and global north. A similar methodology as I used in my research of global policy making could be used.

### *7.5.2. Track how SDG4 is translated into national policy and priorities and implementation plans in relation to targets on learning 4.1 and 4.7*

A key finding of my research is that SDG4.1 and 4.4 are described as relevant, whereas target 4.7 is not. I have argued that this has created a hierarchy of learning, and I have also argued that because so many areas are lumped together in target 4.7 this target risks it being a residual target that is not given priority. Research into how these targets are translated down into national policy and implemented would offer insights into whether this is the case in practice. This could provide important evidence for advocacy and for future global policy processes.

### *7.5.3. Conduct research with children and youth, particularly marginalised groups, such as the poorest rural girls, youth with disabilities, children and youth in contexts of conflict and crisis, and/or refugees, to see how if at all SDG4 commitments have had any material impact on their enjoyment of the right to quality education.*

A key commitment of SDG4 is that no target should be considered met unless met for all, and target 4.5 in particular has a focus on discrimination in education. Research into the experiences of marginalised children and youth could provide important insights from the children who are the supposed beneficiaries of SDG4.

#### *7.5.5. Study other SDG global policy processes and/or compare translation and prioritisation at the national level*

Although referencing other SDGs, my research has a limited focus on how these came into being, and/or how they compare with SDG4. Understanding the dynamics of other SDGs and how they are seen at a national level would provide insights into the overall dynamics of large-scale global policy frameworks, such as the 2030 agenda and how they are dealt with at the national level. The use of other methods, such as surveys could facilitate a wider collection of data to inform future studies.

### 7.6. Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the understandings of the processes by which global policy frameworks are discursively constituted by elites within specific historic, social, economic and political spaces. It contributes to an understanding of how SDG4 was constructed and the influences and power dynamics that shaped it, on which very little literature exists. In particular, it contributes to understanding how quality education and learning are framed within this 15-year global policy for education, in relation to wider debates and literature.

Conceptually my research builds on theories that argue that national level education policy has been globalised to create a 'global education policy'. It contributes to this theory by arguing that the formulation of the global policy for education embodied by SDG4 is also influenced by these globalised ideas shaped by underlying assumption and/or acceptance of the globalised discourse of education's role in development as being primarily economic. It also contributes to an argument that there is a struggle over the social imaginary of education, between "*a dominant neo-liberal imaginary underpinning educational policy*" and "*a democratic alternative to it, conceived as a radically different way of interpreting the facts of global interconnectivity and interdependence.*" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 200). This research shows how this struggle is



reflected in SDG4 process and policy between human capital theory of education, underpinned neo-liberal imperatives and a more expansive vision of quality education shaped by a discourse of human rights and participation, between the learner as a 'economic global citizen' (Richardson 2008) or as a 'critical global citizen' (Androetti 2006) the former dominates.

My research contributes to an understanding of policy as contested. It shows that SDG4, like many policies, signals compromise, and that policy is not a fixed or static but subject to change as a result of intertextual interpretation and/or interpretation . It is contested and open to change even after its adoption, as evidenced in my research.

Methodologically my research is specific to this study, drawing on the voices of 'policy elites' who had been closely involved in the development of SDG4, either inside or as external lobbyist close to the processes. It brings the voices of these experienced and knowledgeable actors to critically reflect on a very recent process and offers specific insider insights into the dynamics and ideas that shaped SDG4

### Reflections on research journey

This thesis is the culmination of my doctorate in international education, a research programme designed for professionals working in the field of education. I started my research journey in June 2013 while working at UNESCO, as Chief of Section for Human Rights and Peace Education. During that time, I contributed to the formulation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> GEFI priority on global citizenship in that role and this interest in reflected in my Critical Analytical Study (CAS), which is the first stage in the doctorate programme. During the course of working on my CAS I became increasing interested in the policy process. This led me to shift focus to look at the policy formulation of SDG4 and what ideas and assumptions shaped this process and how are these ideas reflected in SDG4, ultimately resulting in this thesis.

Undertaking this research shaped my professional practice, helping me understand the importance of rigor in research processes, which will support my ability to undertake more policy research. I have gained a greater insight into the political dynamics of policy making and discourses, which are deeply engrained in the social imaginary of education policy. Both of the above will strengthen my work in policy research and advocacy. This doctorate has further strengthened my commitment to work for the right to education; something I will continue to strive for in my professional life and activism.

SDG4 is an important reiteration of a global commitment to education, and in this sense it is to be welcomed. However, like Freire (1996) I believe in the power of education to bring transformation; education should be rights-based and rights-focused, and enable children and young people not to just read the word but to also read the world. Only then will global education be transformative.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, R. J. (2015). Teaching and learning for all? The quality imperative revisited. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 250–258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.012>
- Alkhateeb, M. (2018). Using Skype as a Qualitative Interview Medium within the Context of Saudi Arabia. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(10), 2253–2260.
- Anderson L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P.W, Cruikshank, K.A., Mayer, R.E., Pintrich P.R., Raths,J. (2001). *Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Abridged Edition. US. Pearson.
- Anderson-Levitt, K. (2003). *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan
- Andreotti, V. de O. (2011). The political economy of global citizenship education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(3–4), 307–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.602292>
- Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?* New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Archer, D. (2014). *[The role of civil society in the Dakar World Education Forum. UNESCO World Education Blog](https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/the-role-of-civil-society-in-the-dakar-world-education-forum/)*. 10 September 2014. Available at: <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/the-role-of-civil-society-in-the-dakar-world-education-forum/>

- Aubry, S., & Dorsi, D. (2016). Towards a human rights framework to advance the debate on the role of private actors in education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(5), 612–628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2016.1224301>
- Avelar, M. (2016). Interview with Stephen J. Ball: Analyzing his contribution to education policy research. *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 24(24).
- Bacchi, C. (2000). Policy as Discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(1), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300050005493>
- Ball, S. J. (1993). WHAT IS POLICY? TEXTS, TRAJECTORIES AND TOOLBOXES. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13(2), 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630930130203>
- Ball, S. J. (1997). Policy Sociology and Critical Social Research: a personal review of recent education policy and policy research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(3), 257–274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192970230302>
- Ball, S. J. (2006). *Education policy and social class: the selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global education inc: new policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge.
- Barrett, A. M. (2011). A Millennium Learning Goal for education post-2015: a question of outcomes or processes. *Comparative Education*, 47(1), 119–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.541682>
- Barrett, A. M, Sayed, Y., Schweisfurth, M, and Tikly, L. (2015) *Learning, pedagogy and the post-2015 education and development agenda*. *International Journal of Educational development* 40: 231-263.

- Bartram, J., Brocklehurst, C., Bradley, D., Muller, M., & Evans, B. (2018). Policy review of the means of implementation targets and indicators for the sustainable development goal for water and sanitation. *Npj Clean Water*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41545-018-0003-0>
- Batteson, C., & Ball, S. J. (1995). Autobiographies and interviews as means of 'access' to elite policy making in education <sup>1</sup>. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 43(2), 201–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.1995.9974030>
- Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human Capital: a theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research; distributed by Columbia University Press, 1964.
- Becker, G.S. (1992). *Human Capital and the Economy*. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 1 March 1992, Vol.136(1), pp.85-92
- Bell, L., & Stevenson, H. (2006). *Education policy: process, themes and impact*. London. Routledge.
- Bennell, P. (1996). Rates of return to education: Does the conventional pattern prevail in sub-Saharan Africa? *World Development*, 24(1), 183–199. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00115-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00115-S)
- Bentley, M., Fleury, S. C., & Garrison, J. (2007a). Critical Constructivism for Teaching and Learning in a Democratic Society. *Journal of Thought*, 42(3–4), 9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jthought.42.3-4.9>
- BES. (2017). 'AN INTRODUCTION TO POLICY IN THE UK'. UK. British Ecological Society <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/An-introduction-to-policy-making-in-the-UK.pdf>

Bivens, F., Moriarty, K., & Taylor, P. (2009). Transformative Education and its Potential for Changing the Lives of Children in Disempowering Contexts. *IDS Bulletin*, 40(1), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2009.00014.x>

Bloom, B.S. (Ed.). Engelhart, M.D., Furst, E.J., Hill, W.H., Krathwohl, D.R. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co Inc.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Sage. Beverly Hill, California.

Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming education and changing schools: case studies in policy sociology*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>

Breeze, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis and its critics. *Pragmatics*, 21(4), 493–525. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.21.4.01bre>

Brookings (2011) *A global compact on learning: Taking action on education in developing countries*. Washington, DC. Brookings Institute.

Bryman, A. (2007). The Research Question in Social Research: What is its Role? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 10(1), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570600655282>

Bryman, A. (2008). Of methods and methodology. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 3(2), 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640810900568>

- Case, A., & Deaton, A. (1999). School Inputs and Educational Outcomes in South Africa. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114(3), 1047–1084. <https://doi.org/10.1162/003355399556124>
- Carant, J.B. (2017). Unheard voices: a critical discourse analysis of the Millennium Development Goals' evolution into the Sustainable Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(1), 16–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166944>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed). London. Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed). London ; New York: Routledge.
- Corbin, J. M., Strauss, A. L., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed). Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cowhey, M. (2006). *Black ants and buddhists: thinking critically and teaching differently in the primary grades*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Day, L.A., Mcloughlin, C., Aslam, M., Engel, J., Wales, J., Rawal,S., Batley, R., Kingdon, G., Nicolai, S., and Rose, P. (2014). *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries. Education Rigorous Literature Review*. UK. DFID.
- Dale, R. (1999). Specifying globalization effects on national policy: a focus on the mechanisms. *Journal of Education Policy*, 14(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026809399286468>

- Delors, J.(Eds.). (1996). *Learning, the treasure within: report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- DFID (2011). *Multilateral Aid Review: Assessment of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)*. UK. Department of International Development (DFID).
- Diem, S., & Young, M. D. (2015). Considering critical turns in research on educational leadership and policy. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(7), 838–850. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2015-0060>
- Dodds, F., Donoghue, D., & Leiva Roesch, J. (2017). *Negotiating the sustainable development goals: a transformational agenda for an insecure world*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Educate a Child (2016). *Education and the SDGs*. Qatar. Educate a Child.
- Education Commission (2016). *The Learning Generation: Investing in education for changing world'*. New York. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity.
- Edwards, D. (2018) "What's wrong with the World Bank's Human Capital Index?". Blog post for Education International available at [https://worldsofeducation.org/en/woe\\_homepage/woe\\_detail/16022/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-with-the-world-bank%E2%80%99s-human-capital-index-by-david-edwards](https://worldsofeducation.org/en/woe_homepage/woe_detail/16022/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-with-the-world-bank%E2%80%99s-human-capital-index-by-david-edwards)
- Elkind, D. (2005). Response to Objectivism and Education. *The Educational Forum*, 69(4), 328–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720508984706>



Evans, A., and Steven, D. (2012) *Beyond the Millennium Development Goals Agreeing a Post-2015 Development Framework: An MGO Working Paper*. US. Brookings, CISAC Stanford and CIC, NYU.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. UK. Longman.

Faure, E., Herrera, F., & Kaddoura, A.-R. (Eds.). (1975). *Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow* (6. impr). Paris: UNESCO.

Filmer, D., Hasan, A., & Pritchett, L. (2006). A Millennium Learning Goal: Measuring Real Progress in Education. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.982968>

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?* Winchester: O Books.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New rev. ed). London: Penguin Books.

Fukuda-Parr, S. (2016). From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: shifts in purpose, concept, and politics of global goal setting for development. *Gender & Development*, 24(1), 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1145895>

Gale, T (1999) Policy Trajectories: treading the discursive path of policy analysis, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 20:3, 393-407, DOI: 10.1080/0159630990200304

Gale, T. (2001). Critical policy sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(5), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930110071002>

Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6), 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x>

- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008a). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291–295. <https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192>
- Glynos, J., Howarth, D., Norval, A., & Speed, E. (2009). *Discourse Analysis: varieties and methods* (Working Paper). NCRM. Retrieved from <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/796/>
- Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597–606.
- Goldstein, H. (2004). Education for all: the globalization of learning targets. *Comparative Education*, 40(1), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000184854>
- Green, D. (Ed). *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States Can Change the World*. OXFAM International, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-85598-593-6(pbk)
- Grek, S. (2011). Interviewing the Education Policy elite in Scotland: A changing Picture? *European Educational Research Journal*, 10(2), 233-241. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eej.2011.10.2.233>
- Griffiths, M. (2009). *Critical Approaches in Qualitative Educational Research : The Relation of Some Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to these Issues*. Working paper. Scotland. Edinburgh Research Explorer. University of Edinburgh available at [https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/critical-approaches-in-qualitative-educational-research\(50b48a48-9f95-4a68-94fb-3f9968ab108c\).html](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/critical-approaches-in-qualitative-educational-research(50b48a48-9f95-4a68-94fb-3f9968ab108c).html)
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2007). *The Role Of Education Quality For Economic Growth*. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-4122>

Heckman, J. (2008). The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children.

<https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Heckman20Investing20in20Young20Children.pdf>

Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.

Hill, M. J. (2013). *The public policy process* (Sixth edition). Harlow, England. Pearson.

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. (2003). *Inside Interviewing*. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984492>

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Human Rights Watch. (2018). *Leave No Girl Behind In Africa: Discrimination in Education Against Pregnant Girls and Adolescent Mothers*. New York. Human Rights Watch. Available on line at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/06/14/leave-no-girl-behind-africa/discrimination-education-against-pregnant-girls-and>

Husbands, C. (2013). 'Great teachers or great teaching? Why McKinsey got it wrong'. Institute of Education blog post. <https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/10/great-teachers-or-great-teaching-why-mckinsey-got-it-wrong/> (accessed August 2018).

IISD. (2014). *OWG Co-Chairs Issue Zero Draft with 17 SDGs*. Available at <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/owg-co-chairs-issue-zero-draft-with-17-sdgs/>

Janks, H. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3), 329–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180302>

- Jolly, R. (2010). The MDGs in Historical Perspective. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(1), 48–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00103.x>
- Kamau, M., Chasek, P. S., & O'Connor, D. C. (2018). *Transforming multilateral diplomacy: the inside story of the sustainable development goals*. London New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Kanjee, A., & Sayed, Y. (2013). Assessment policy in post-apartheid South Africa: challenges for improving education quality and learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 20(4), 442–469. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2013.838541>
- Kharas, H, (2009). “The Financial Crisis, a Development Emergency, and the Need for Aid. OP-ED Brookings  
<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-financial-crisis-a-development-emergency-and-the-need-for-aid/> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019)
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical constructivism primer*. New York: P. Lang.
- King, K. (2015). *What Happened to Education in the Financing for Development Conference, 13-16 July 2015, Addis Ababa?* <https://www.norrag.org/what-happened-to-education-in-the-financing-for-development-conference-13-16-july-2015-addis-ababa/>
- King, K. and Palmer, R. (2013). *Post-2015 Agendas: Northern Tsunami, Southern Ripple? The Case of Education and Skills*. *International Journal of Educational Development* 33 (5): 409–25. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2013.06.001.
- Klees, S. (2013). A Radical Post-2015 Agenda. *Norrag News*, 49, 26-28. Available at <http://www.norrag.org/en/publications/norrag-news/online-version/education-and-development-in-the-post-2015-landscapes/detail/a-radical-post-2015-agenda.html>

- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Lancaster, K. (2017a). Confidentiality, anonymity and power relations in elite interviewing: conducting qualitative policy research in a politicised domain. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(1), 93–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1123555>
- Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J-A, and Halsey, A. H. (Eds.). (2006) *Education, Globalization and Social Change*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 4(3), 324. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.161306>
- Lewin, K.M. (2015). *Goals and Indicators for Education and Development: Consolidating the Architectures*. UK. Open Society Foundations
- Lilleker, D. (2003). *Interviewing the Political elite: navigating a potential minefield*. *Politics*, Sep 2003, Vol.23(3), pp 207-214.
- Lingard, B. and Ozga, J. (Ed.). (2007). *The Routledge Falmer reader in education policy and politics*. London: Routledge.
- Lingard, B., & Rawolle, S. (2011). New scalar politics: implications for education policy. *Comparative Education*, 47(4), 489–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.555941>

- Lingard, B., Sellar, S., & Baroutsis, A. (2015). Researching the habitus of global policy actors in education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(1), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.988686>
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services* (30th anniversary expanded ed). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Logan, H., Sumsion J., & F Press, F. (2014) Uncovering hidden dimensions of Australian early childhood policy history: insights from interviews with policy ‘elites’, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22:5, 711-722, DOI: [10.1080/1350293X.2014.969086](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.969086)
- Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (1994). Researching politics and the politics of research: recent qualitative studies in the UK. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7(3), 269–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839940070307>
- Malala Fund. (2018). *Full Force: Why the world works better when girls go to school*. Washington. DC. Malala Fund.
- Magee, A and Pherali, T. (2017). Freirean critical consciousness in a refugee context: a case study of Syrian refugees in Jordan. UK. Compare, 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1403312>
- Mayo, P. (1993) *When does it work? Freire's pedagogy in context*. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 25(1), 11-20.
- McGrath, S. (2014). The post-2015 debate and the place of education in development thinking. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39, 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.05.002>
- McLean, H. (2014). *Who Owns Learning?* <https://www.norrag.org/who-owns-learning/>

- McMahon, W. W., & Wagner, A. P. (1981). Expected Returns to Investment in Higher Education. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 16(2), 274. <https://doi.org/10.2307/145512>
- Menashy, F. (2013). Interrogating an omission: the absence of a rights-based approach to education in World Bank policy discourse. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(5), 749–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.728368>
- Mincer, J. (1974). *Schooling, experience, and earnings*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research; distributed by Columbia University Press.
- Mir, R., & Watson, A. (2001). Critical realism and constructivism in strategy research: toward a synthesis. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22(12), 1169–1173. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.200>
- Mizunoya, S., Mitra, S., & Yamasaki, I. (2016). Towards Inclusive Education: The Impact of Disability on School Attendance in Developing Countries. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2782430>
- Moriarty, K. Critical Analytical Study: Citizenship and Social Transformation in the Post-2015 Global Education Framework. Unpublished.
- Moriarty, K. (2016). 'Rewriting the Ambition of SDG4: The Risk of Narrow Global Indicators'. NORRAG NEWS 54.
- Morris, Z. S. (2009). The Truth about Interviewing Elites. *Politics*, 29(3), 209–217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2009.01357.x>
- Moumné, R. and Saudemont, C. (2015). *Overview of the Role of Private Providers in Education in Light of Existing International Legal Framework: Investments in Private Education: Undermining or Contributing to the Full Development of the Human Right to Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

- Mundy, K., & Verger, A. (2015). The World Bank and the global governance of education in a changing world order. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.021>
- Nagler, P.C. ( 2014) *Pearson: Always Earning*. Association, B. (n.d.). Badass Teachers Association. Blog available at <http://badassteachers.blogspot.com/2014/12/pearson-earning-by-casey-nagler-pearson.html>
- Nash, R. (1990). *Bourdieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction*. British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1990), pp. 431-447. UK. Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
- Naudeau, S., Kataoka, N., Valerio, A., Neuman, M. and Elder, L. (2011). *Investing in Young Children: An Early Childhood Development Guide for Policy Dialogue and Project Preparation*. Washington DC. World Bank.
- NGOs-Beyond-2014 (2014). *Summary of 12th Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG-12) as it relates to sexual and reproductive health and rights*. Online summary available at <http://ngosbeyond2014.org/articles/2014/6/25/summary-of-12th-session-of-the-open-working-group-on-sustain.html>
- Novelli, M. (2010). *The new geopolitics of education aid: From Cold war to Holy Wars?* International Journal of Educational development, Vol. 30(5), 453-459.
- OECD. (2008). *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. Policy Brief. Paris. OECD
- Olssen, M., Codd, J. and O'Neill, A. (2004) *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship and Democracy*, London: Sage.
- Osstveit, S. (2000). Ten Years After Jomtien. *Prospects*, 2000, Vol.30(1),pp.97-103.



- Oswald, K., & Moriarty, K. (2009). Transforming Children's Lives Through Innovation in Quality Education: Implications for Policy and Practice. *IDS Practice Papers*, 2009(4), 01-29. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0225.2009.00004\\_2.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0225.2009.00004_2.x)
- OWG (2013a) 'Co-Chairs' Summary bullet points from OWG-4'.  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1871cochairssummary.pdf>
- OWG (2013b). *Progress report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*. New York. UN  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3238summaryallowg.pdf>
- OWG. (2014). *Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*. New York. UN.  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf>
- Ozga, J. (1999). *Policy research in educational settings: contested terrain*. Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Ozisik, S. (2015). *Education in Sierra Leone*. The Borgen Project. January 25, 2015. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/education-sierra-leone/>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed). Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Prior, L. (2008). *Repositioning Documents in Social Research*. *Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 5, Special Issue on The Future of the Research Relationship (OCTOBER 2008), pp. 821-836. UK. Sage Publications, Ltd.
- Psacharopoulos, G. (1972). Rates of Return to Investment in Education around the World. *Comparative Education Review*, 16(1), 54-67. <https://doi.org/10.1086/445569>

- Qu, S.Q., and Dumay, J. (2011) "The qualitative research interview", *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, Vol. 8 Issue: 3, pp.238-264,
- Richardson, G. (2008). Conflicting imaginaries: Global citizenship education in Canada as a site of contestation. In M. Peters, A. Britton & H. Blee (Eds.), *Global citizenship education: philosophy, theory and pedagogy* (pp. 115-131). Rotterdam: Sense.
- Rizvi, F. (2006). Imagination and the globalisation of educational policy research. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4(2), 193–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720600752551>
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. London ; New York, NY: Routledge
- Robertson, S. L. (2012). *Researching global education policy: Angles in/on/out...* Bristol: Centre for Globalisation, Education and Societies, University of Bristol.
- Rogers, R., Malancharuvi-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., & Joseph, G. O. (2005). Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 365–416. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543075003365>
- Rose, P. (2002). *Is the Non-State Education Sector Serving the Needs of the Poor? Prepared and Presented at the 'Making Services Work for Poor People*. Oxford Workshop held at Eynsham Hall for World Development Report (WDR) 2003/04.
- Rose, P. (2015). *Three lessons for educational quality in post-2015 goals and targets: Clarity, measurability and equity*. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 289–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.006>
- Rose, P. and Alcott, B (2015) *How can education systems become equitable by 2030? DFID think pieces – Learning and equity*. UK. HEART. DFID.

- Save the Children. (2008). *Last in Line, Last in School 2008. How donors can support education for children affected by conflict and emergencies*. London. Save the Children
- Save the Children. (2015). *What do children want in times of emergency and crisis? they want an education*. London: Save the Children.
- Sayed, Y. (2011). 'After 2015: time for an education quality goal?' *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 41(1), 129–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2011.534847>
- Sayed, Y., & Ahmed, R. (2015). Education quality, and teaching and learning in the post-2015 education agenda. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 330–338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.005>
- Schulz, W., & International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. (2010). *ICCS 2009 International Report: civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary school students in 38 countries*. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.
- Shonkoff, J.P. and Garner, A.S. (2012) 'The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress'. *Pediatrics*. January 2012, VOLUME 129 / ISSUE 1. US. American Academy of Pediatrics Technical Report
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction* (3rd ed). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.
- Simons, M., Olssen, M., & Peters, M. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Re-Reading education policies: a handbook studying the policy agenda of the 21st century*. Rotterdam [u.a]: Sense Publishers.

- Sørensen, B. (2015). *The Politics of Indicator Development in the Education 2030 Framework for Action* <https://www.norrag.org/the-politics-of-indicator-development-in-the-education-2030-framework-for-action/>
- Sotto, E. (1994). *When teaching becomes learning: a theory and practice of teaching*. London ; New York: Cassell.
- Steinberg, S. R., & Kincheloe, J. L. (2010). Power, Emancipation, and Complexity: Employing Critical Theory. *Power and Education*, 2(2), 140–151. <https://doi.org/10.2304/power.2010.2.2.140>
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Waldow, F. (Eds.). (2012). *Policy borrowing and lending in education*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. London : New York: Routledge.
- Theirworld. (2018). *SAFE SCHOOLS: THE HIDDEN CRISIS A framework for action to deliver Safe, Non-violent, Inclusive and Effective Learning Environments*. London. Theirworld.
- Tierney, W. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1997). *Representation and the text: re-framing the narrative voice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (Eds.). (2013). *Education quality and social justice in the global South: challenges for policy, practice, and research*. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- Tooley, J., & Longfield, D. (2015). *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: A response to the DFID- commissioned 'rigorous Literature review'*. Pearson.
- Tomasevski, K. (2001). *Human rights obligations: making education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable*. Right to Education Primer.

Tomasevski, K. (2004) *Manual on rights-based education: global human rights requirements made simple*. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok.

Theirworld (2018). *Safe School: The Hidden Crisis*. London. Theirworld.

UN. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Paris. UN

UN. (1966). *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). New York. UN.

UN *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD). New York. UN.

UN. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. (CEDAW). New York. UN.

UN. (1986) *The Declaration on the Right to Development*. New York. UN.

UN. (1989). *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (CRC). New York. UN.

UN. (2000). *United Nations Millennium Declaration*. New York. UN.

UN. (2001). *Road Map towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*. New York: UN

UN. (2001). Committee of the Right of the Child. General comment No. 1 (2001) Article 29 (1): *The Aims of Education*. New York. UN.

UN (2010). *When Spotlights Are Switched Off, Says Secretary-General as Millennium Development Goals Summit Closes, World Attention Quickly Moves on; 'We Cannot Let*

*that Happen*. Secretary General Statement SG/SM/13133-GA/10995-DEV/2833. 22 SEPTEMBER 2010. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2010/sgsm13133.doc.htm>

UN. (2012a). *The Future We Want*. Resolution 66/288. New York. United Nations.

UN. (2012b). *My World: The United Nations Global Survey for a Better World*. Available at <http://vote.myworld2015.org/#why-vote>

UN. (2013) My Analytics: Overview. Available at <http://data.myworld2015.org/>

UN. (2014). *Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*. UN.

UN (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. New York. UN.

UN (2017). Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/71/313. New York. UN.

UNDESA (2013) *TST Issues Brief: EDUCATION and CULTURE*. The Technical Support Team (TST). New York. UNDESA.

UNDG. 2013. *A Million Voices: The World We Want. A Sustainable Future with Dignity for All*. New York. UNDG.

UN HLP. (2013). *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. New York: UN.

UNESCO. (1990). *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet basic Learning Needs*. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2000). *Dakar Framework for Action Education For All: Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2005). *Education for All - The Quality Imperative*. EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO (2012). *About the Global Education First Initiative*. Web Page available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/about>

UNESCO (2013a). *The Global Learning Crisis: Why every child deserves a quality education*. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2013b). Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Agenda: Summary of Outcomes 18-19 March – Dakar, Senegal. Web page available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/post-2015-summaryoutcomes.pdf>

UNESCO (2014a). *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all*. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2014b) Progress in getting all children to school stalls but some countries show the way forward. Policy Paper 14 / Fact Sheet 28, UNESCO, Paris.

UNESCO (2014c) *2014 GEM Final Statement: The Muscat Agreement*. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO. (2014d). Position Paper on Education Post-2015. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2015a). Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO (2015b). *Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. Paris. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2015c) *How long will it take to achieve universal primary and secondary education? Technical background note for the Framework for Action on the post-2015 education agenda*. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO. (2015d). *Collective Commitments: The role of civil society in the Education for All movement 2000-2015*. UNESCO. Paris.

UNESCO (2015e). *A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark*. POLICY PAPER 22 / FACT SHEET 31, UNESCO, Paris.

UNESCO. (2015f). *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO (2016a). *Aid to education stagnates, jeopardising global targets*. Policy Paper 25. UNESCO, Paris.

UNESCO (2016b). *Education for people and planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All*. Global Education Monitoring report. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO. (2017). *Aid to education is stagnating and not going to countries most in need*. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO (2018a). *Aid to education: a return to growth? Policy Paper*. 36. Paris. UNESCO

UNESCO (2018b). *Achieving gender equality in education: don't forget the boys*. Paris. UNESCO.

*UNESCO Bangkok (2013)*. UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programming. Bangkok. UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

*UNESCO and UNICEF (1993)*. *Girls Education Statistics: A Global Context*. UNESCO and UNICEF Committee on Education. UNESCO. Paris.



UNESCO and UNICEF. (2007). *A Human Rights-Based Approach to EDUCATION FOR ALL. Paris UNESCO.*

UNESCO and UNICEF. (2013). *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Paris UNESCO.*

UNICEF. (2000). *Defining Quality in Education. Working paper series. New York: UNICEF.*

UIS. (2016). *THE WORLD NEEDS ALMOST 69 MILLION NEW TEACHERS TO REACH THE 2030 EDUCATION GOALS. UIS Fact Sheet No. 39. Montreal. UIS*

UIS (2018a). *One in Five Children, Adolescents and Youth is Out of School. Montreal. UIS*

UIS (2018b). *Quick Guide to Education Indicators for SDG 4. Montreal. UIS.*

UIS and Brookings Institution. (2013). *Towards Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force. Summary Report. Montreal and Washington DC. UIS & Brookings Institution*

UN OHCHR. (2015). *Protecting the right to education against commercialization· Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh Geneva: OHCHR.*

Van Damme, D. (2013, October 23). *Smart policies matter in education.*

<http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.com/2013/10/smart-policies-matter-in-education.html>

Vandemoortele, J. (2011). The MDG Story: Intention Denied: *The MDG Story: Intention Denied. Development and Change*, 42(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01678.x>

- Te Velde, D.W and Massa, I (2009) Global Financial Crisis Discussion Series Paper 11: Donor responses to the global financial crisis – a stock take. ODI, London.
- Verger, A., Novelli, M., & Altinyelken, H. K. (Eds.). (2012). *Global education policy and international development: new agendas, issues, and policies*. New York, NY: Continuum International Pub. Group.
- Verger, A., Novelli, M., & Altinyelken, H. K. (Eds.). (2017). *Global education policy and international development: new agendas, issues and policies* (Second edition). UK. Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- von Einsiedel, S. and Pichler, A. (2017) *The Rise of High-Level Panels: Implications for the New UN Secretary-General*. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research Occasional Paper 9 January 2017. United Nations University. Japan.
- Winkler, I. T., & Satterthwaite, M. L. (2017). Leaving no one behind? Persistent inequalities in the SDGs. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(8), 1073–1097. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1348702>
- Winkler, I. T., & Williams, C. (2017). The Sustainable Development Goals and human rights: a critical early review. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(8), 1023–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1348695>
- World Bank. (2013). *Transcript: Learning for All: Ministerial Roundtable*. Washington D.C. The World Bank. Available online at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2013/04/18/transcript-learning-for-all-ministerial-roundtable>
- World Bank. (2018a). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington D.C. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>

World Bank (2018b). *The Human Capital Project*. Washington D.C. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>

Wright, C. (2014). *Engaging with EFA: Where have all the lessons gone?* UNESCO World Education Blog. November 6<sup>th</sup> 2014. Available at: <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2014/11/06/engaging-with-efa-where-have-all-the-lessons-gone/>

Wulff (forthcoming, 2019). *The twists and turns in negotiating a global education goal: A civil society perspective*. (publisher TBC).

Zubairi, A., and Rose, P. (2017). 'Bright and Early: How financing pre-primary education gives every child a fair start in life'. UK. Theirworld.

Zapp, M. (2017). The World Bank and Education: Governing (through) knowledge. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 53, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.11.007>

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Schedule (semi-structure interview questions)

#### Interview Guide:

#### Part 1: Introduction and biographical data

- Introduce myself.
- Explain aim of the research, explain interview process.
- Check the participant has received, read and understood the information sheet.
- Check the participant agrees to participate in the interview and has signed and returned the consent form.
- Explain again that all information shared will be treated confidentially and securely stored.
- Explain that an audio recording will be made, however, personal information will be recorded separately, and the audio recording of the interview will be assigned a code that only I will have access to so that it is anonymised.

\* Explain that the audio recording starts at this point

#### Part 2: Interview Questions

**The Development agenda** [explain will ask some questions concerning the overall SDG framework]

In 2016 a new framework of sustainable development goals (SDGs) was launched, what are your views on the need of such a framework?

(Do you think the sustainable development agenda is universally relevant?)

#### **The policy formation process**

What factors do you believe have been the most influential in shaping SDG4

Thinking overall, what processes were key in shaping SDG4

Who were the key actors driving the direction of education post-2015? Has there been an overall leader in this process and what has been their influence on the content of the framework?

(What has been your role /How influential do you think you have been in shaping the SDG4?)

What was the most important factor that influenced decision making in regard to content?

### **Set 3: SDG4/Education**

Would you agree that there was a shared vision for education's role in sustainable development among of the key actors involved in the process? (What was the biggest area of divergence)

Do all the targets have the same weight? (What are your views on target 4.7)

What are the gaps in SDG4

In your view how realistic is SDG4 achievable? (The framework states "leave no one behind"? Is this possible)

### **Conclusion (5 mins)**

Explain that I have reached the end of my questions **and ask is there anything else they would like to add, expand on etc.**

- Thank them and say their answers have been very informative and that I really appreciate their participation
- Reassure them again that I will treat the material confidentially and that the personal data they gave me will be kept separately.
- Ask if they have any questions about what was discussed or the process?

- Thank them again for giving time from their busy schedule.

## Appendix B: Interview Cover letter and Information Sheet



August 2016

Dear XXXXX

My name is Kate Moriarty and I am currently undertaking research on Sustainable Development Goal 4 as part of a professional doctorate in education (EdD) in the Centre for International Education at University of Sussex (see <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/>) in the United Kingdom. In addition to my part-time doctoral studies I work professionally in the field of education and international development. I am currently the Global Advocacy Manager at the Malala Fund and was previously Chief of Section for Peace and Human Rights Education at United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

As part of this doctoral programme I am required to undertake primary research and will be conducting interviews with a small number of senior level professionals who were involved in policy discussions to develop the SDGs, including SDG4. Given your role in this process I would very much welcome the opportunity to interview you as part of my research. All interviews will be treated confidentially and anonymised. If you consent to being interviewed, we can arrange a mutually convenient time over the next few weeks to hold the interview.

The interview is anticipated to take approximately one hour, (although this may vary slightly) and can be conducted via a web-based video link such as Skype or via the telephone. I attach an information sheet on the research and the interview process. I am also available to answer any additional questions via email and/or on the phone if this would be helpful. You may also contact my supervisor:

Dr Yusuf Sayed  
Reader in International Education  
University of Sussex  
[Y.Sayed@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:Y.Sayed@sussex.ac.uk)

Please be assured should you choose to cooperate with this research that all information you provide will remain anonymous and be treated confidentially.

Thank you for your time in considering this request.

---

With my highest assurances,

Kate Moriarty  
Candidate, International Doctorate in Education  
Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, Falmer, Sussex, United Kingdom  
[k.moriarty@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.moriarty@sussex.ac.uk) or [Kate@malalafund.org](mailto:Kate@malalafund.org)  
Tel: +44(0)7702575198 | Skype: [kate\\_moriarty](#) (Location, London)



## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title: Ideas and Processes in the Development of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)

### Invitation

*You are being invited to take part in a research study which forms part of an individual doctorate programme at the Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Data collected as part of this research will inform the doctoral thesis of Kathleen Moriarty.*

*Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. I would be grateful if you could please take time to read the following information carefully.*

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to examine the ideas and processes that shaped the goal and targets of SDG4 within the context of the wider sustainable development goals (SDGs). The research will analyse how and in what way SDG4 is envisaged as contributing to the ambitious social, economic and environmental change described in the broader framework, and it will look at the ideas which have informed the content of SDG4.

Data collection will be undertaken in 2016 and will involve semi-structured interviews with approximately 10 senior level informants, including diplomats from UN Member



States, UN Agencies and civil society. The interviews, along with analysis of core documents will inform the final thesis.

The identity and personal details of all interview informants will be confidential and subject to the rules and regulation of the University of Sussex and in compliance with UK data protection.

The research is part of a professional doctorate in education (EdD) in the Centre for International Education at University of Sussex (see <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/>).

### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been selected as someone who in their professional capacity has been involved in the discussions and negotiations that lead to the SDGs, including SDG4. Interview data will provide an insight into the ideas reflected in the education component of SDG4 and the factors that influenced its formulation, along with the wider SDG process.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and it *is up to you to decide whether or not to take part*.

*While you have been approached because of your knowledge and/or engagement in the SDG policy processes where you acted on behalf of your organisation or government, I will be interviewing you as an individual and not as representative of that organisation or government. Your identity will be kept confidential and none of the information provided will be attributed to you or your government or your organisation.* While all data will be treated confidentially, there is a limited risk given the small sample size (of interviewees) that particular answers could be assumed to be from a particular person although no details will be given about your identity.

*If you do decide to take part, in addition to this information sheet you will be sent a consent form that explains that you were provided with relevant information prior to the*

*interview taking place and that you participated in the interview of your own free will. This is formality of the university to ensure that all research is conducted within agreed ethical boundaries and procedures.*

*If you decide to take part you remain free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. In the case of your withdrawal from the research process I will not use any data you have given to that point, signing the consent form does not change this.*

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate I will conduct an interview with you, most likely via a web-based video call at a time that is convenient to you. This could be during your working day, an evening or the weekend, whichever time is best for you.

I anticipate the interview will last approximately 60 minutes although as each individual is unique this may vary and be slightly shorter or slightly longer. If your schedule does not permit one long block of time I am happy to split the interview into two or even three parts, as is most convenient to you.

The interview will be semi-structure and I will aim to cover a range of issues, such as the process of policy development of the SDGs, including SDG4, the role of education in the SDGs, the content of the education goal. You will be free to not answer questions if you do not feel they are relevant and/or introduce any information which you believe is relevant to the research.

With your agreement I will make an audio recording of the interview and take notes as we speak, both of which will be confidential and stored in a safe location using a coded reference system to ensure anonymity.

**Will my Identity and Details be kept confidential?**

Yes your identity and personal information will be kept strictly confidential. Once your interview data will be anonymised and assigned a code under which it will be securely stored.

Your personal information will be stored separately from the transcript or audio recordings. All notes and audio recordings will be anonymised, assigned a code before being stored in a secure location. I will not name you at any point either formally or informally. No information that you disclose will be attributed to you in the thesis or other papers by myself or by me or by any other party. Neither your name or the name of your organisation or country will appear on any of the research documents.

Any information you provide during the research process will be used for the research analysis only and I will not discuss or use the information you provide for any other purposes other than the research at hand. I will not use any of the information to enhance or further my professional career or to influence any policy discussion in my professional contexts.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

While absolutely no personal data of any kind will be included in the final thesis or any articles which originate from the doctoral work, given the relatively small number of interview informants it could be feasible for readers to deduce from some specific answers which organisation or even who the person answering is. This is a limited risk and there would be no means of verification as all the data will be treated confidentially.

There are no other identifiable risks or disadvantages to participating in the study and no monetary costs, however, as set out above the interview process will take around an hour to an hour (possibly longer) of your time. We may also wish to exchange emails to clarify any points that are unclear before or after the interview, however, I would not anticipate this will take more than an additional 30 minutes.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There are no direct personal or financial benefits for participating in the study. Your participation will, however, support analysis of the ideas underpinning current thinking on education globally and help provide an insight into the influences informing global

policy making on education. The research will be topical given its timing and will aim to shed light on the ideas shaping education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and education's relationship with development more broadly.

As the research is of an academic nature it will not offer any concrete recommendations for policy making processes, nevertheless, its findings may make a contribution to the body of academic work in the field of global education.

### **What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you are willing to participate in this research I will send you a consent form to sign and return to me. We can then arrange the interview on a date and at a time that is convenient to you.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

Once I have collected interviews from all the participants I will transcribe and analyse them. I will use this data to inform the final write up of my doctoral thesis, along with documentary analysis and a review of relevant literature. The thesis will be submitted for examination by the University of Sussex and an independent examiner.

If the thesis or parts of it are published I will be happy to provide you with a copy.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

I am conducting my research as a doctoral student at the Centre for International Education, School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex, UK. I am a self-funding student.

My supervisors are Dr Yusuf Sayed, Reader in International Education and Dr Naureen Durani, Lecturer in International Education in the same department. They are guiding my research process but will not have access to any personal or organisational details which can link you to the transcript.

**Who has approved this study?**

My research has been approved by the Social Sciences & Arts Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC), of the University of Sussex.

Contact for Further Information

If you require further information or have any questions or concerns please contact me

Kathleen Moriarty

[k.moriarty@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.moriarty@sussex.ac.uk)

Or contact my main supervisor:

Dr Yusuf Sayed

[Y.Sayed@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:Y.Sayed@sussex.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted you can also contact the Chair of the Social Sciences & Arts Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC), of the University of Sussex. University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. I hope it has clarified any questions you may have, however, please feel free to contact me should you required additional information.

Date

July 2016

## Appendix C: Interviewee Consent Form

double-click to show white space



University of Sussex

**CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS**

**PROJECT TITLE:** IDEAS AND PROCESSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 (SDG4)

**Project Approval Reference:** ER/KM367/1

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be audio taped
- Make myself available for a further follow up questions/email exchange should that be required

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will be attributed to me in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party. I understand there is a limited risk that my identity could in some way be deduced from the content of my answers.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

I understand that I can ask to see a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before being included in the write up of the research

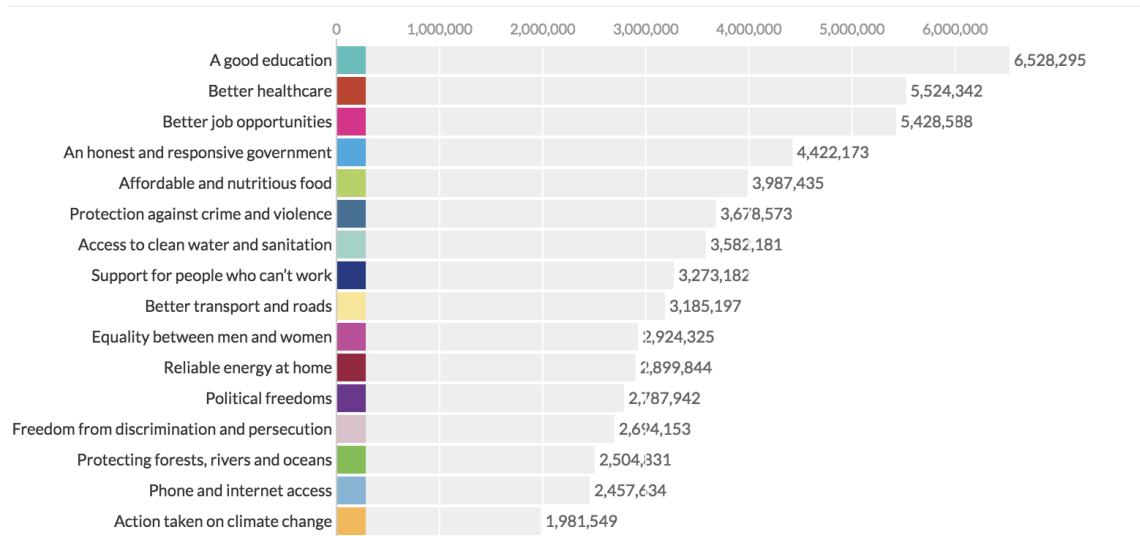
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Summary of MyWorld Survey results

**9,736,484** votes for All Countries & Country Groups / All Genders / All Education Levels / Age Group (All Age Groups)



(UN 2013)

## Appendix E: High Level Panel illustrative goal on education.

### *3. Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning*

*3a. Increase by x% the proportion of children able to access and complete pre-primary education*

*3b. Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, completes primary education able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards*

*3c. Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower secondary education and increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes to x%*

*3d. Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work by x% (HLP, 2013. p.36)*

## Appendix F: SDG4 text in full

*Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015).*

*4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*

*4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*

*4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university*

*4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship*

*4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including*



*persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*

*4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy*

*4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development*

*4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*

*4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries*

*4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.*

*(UN, 2015)*