

Research Paper

Educational Exchange Under Economic Sanction
-The Case of US-Cuba-

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS	2
2.1 Evaluations.....	2
2.2 The Case of the US and Cuba.....	3
3. EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES	4
3.1 Cultural Implications	4
3.2 Risks and Intentions.....	5
4. THE HISTORY OF US-CUBA ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES	7
4.1 The US Foreign Policy Emphasize on Educational Exchanges.....	7
4.2 The Foundation Period of Educational Exchanges.....	8
4.3 The Constructive Period of Educational Exchanges.....	9
4.4 The Disparate Period of Educational Exchanges.....	10
4.5 Educational Exchange Supported by Economic Opportunities	11
4.6 Another Disparate Period of Educational Exchanges.....	12
4.7 The Resilient Nature of Educational Exchange Under the War on Terror	13
5. CONCLUSION	15
WORKS CITED	16

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic sanctions are a foreign policy instrument that is used to alter a target's political behavior by restricting commercial trade or financial transaction. Despite frequent usage, many cases are criticized as inefficient. Especially, the case of US-Cuba, the longest economic sanction that is still in effect today, is a typical target to be criticized that economic sanction is ineffective and violates human rights. However, it is noteworthy that while economic sanctions halt from commercial trades to diplomatic relations, it is observed that the two countries have been persistently continuing educational exchanges. This demonstrates the US and Cuba have been able to hold peaceful societal contact under hostile diplomatic relations. This paper reveals the intentions of both the US and the Cuban government to host educational exchanges while identifies the roles that those exchanges play under the economic sanctions.

The examination of educational exchanges shed light on the cultural perspective of economic sanctions which is often ignored but important especially when discussing the validity of economic sanctions. In the case of the US-Cuba economic sanctions, educational exchanges exhibit resilient nature while the economic sanction policy direction of the US government has been changing. The US foreign policy emphasizes on educational exchanges can be seen as the primary reason, the shared benefits of both countries and the persistent efforts by the scholars also contributed to the educational exchanges. The history shows educational exchanges have been functioning as a catalyst that barely connects the US and Cuba under the economic sanctions.

2. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

2.1 Evaluations

The academic history had been fairly negative towards the effect of economic sanction until the first empirical large-N study conducted by Gary Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliot (abbreviated as HSE) in 1985. HSE proved that economic sanctions actually have much higher success rates compared to what had shown previously, and it does work as a reasonable alternative to military force (Pape 1997, 91-92). HSE study changed the pessimistic view of economic sanctions, but the studies of the effectiveness of economic sanctions still remain uncertain. For example, Pape (1997, 106) criticized the HSE study by arguing that the ambiguity of the definition of economic sanction, and the impossibility of excluding the threat of military force from economic sanction strictly limit the number of successful economic sanction cases. Many economic sanction cases show that they couldn't exclude the threat of military force, or they had escalated to military intervention eventually. Thus, Pape claims that these cases demonstrate the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions because economic sanctions alone could not alter a target country's policy. Further, what has remained uncertain is not only the effectiveness but also the non-violent aspects of economic sanctions. Previous studies have shown that economic sanction does have violent qualities that affect citizens. For instance, a study by Allen and Lektzian showed that economic sanction is far from being non-violent from a public health perspective. Their quantitative cross-national study of economic sanctions and public health claimed that if economic sanctions have a great impact on the target country's economy, they can cause serious public health damage to the innocent citizens, and the consequences are similar to those resulting from major military conflicts (Allen and Lektzian 2013, 129-132).

2.2 The Case of the US and Cuba

The US-Cuba economic sanctions are often criticized as failed and anachronistic policy (Lamrani 2015, 8). The sanctions were first triggered in 1960 when the US restricted the amount of brown sugar import from Cuba which followed by a sanction that bans selling all products except food and medicine to Cuba. Then in 1961, the US halted all diplomatic relations with Cuba which marked the beginning of the longest-enduring economic sanctions in history that is still in effect today. In 1962, the US further extended the sanction to the prohibition of importing all products that contain Cuban goods even if the final product is not made in Cuba. The intentions were to isolate the Castro regime and deter the wave of communist sentiment from the Soviet Union, with the eventual objective of ending the regime. Over the next decades, the Soviet Union had collapsed, but as today Cuba is still not democratized, it is hard to say the economic sanctions were successful in terms of the US policy goal. In recent years, President Obama took a great initiative to normalize the bilateral relations for the first time, but the following President Trump has reversed some policies. It is estimated that it has cost the Cuban government more than \$125 billion since the beginning of the economic sanction (Felter, Renwick and Labrador 2019), and the future outlook of the sanctions is still dismal.

3. EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

3.1 Cultural Implications

Many studies have examined economic sanctions in terms of their effectiveness, validity, financial costs or human rights, but not a lot have paid attention to cultural perspective. While economic sanctions ban various transactions, it is noteworthy that the US and Cuba have been remaining societal contacts mainly through educational exchanges. The capacity to have societal contacts, especially educational exchange has significant cultural implication when considering the validity and non-violent quality of economic sanctions. Then, how exactly a cultural perspective can be important to examine foreign policy instruments? According to Hirano (2000, 17-22), international relations can be seen as cultural relations, as modern states are built upon cultural differences. The emergence of national culture is observed in the process of formation of a nation, and the social integration of a country is based on a certain degree of cultural commonality. Therefore, it is important for us to examine economic sanction from a cultural perspective as well.

Firstly, educational exchange builds up cultural capital that contributes to the development of the country. The educational exchange itself provides learning opportunities for both countries that contribute to the development of society. Hirano (2000, 22) pointed out that studying abroad seems to be an experience based on individual decision, yet it has been more of a national project. Many countries promote exchanges of international students has been an area in which they put great effort for the purpose of modernization of the country. Students' decision of where, when and what to study is often driven by their own government's interests in building national capital. Secondly, educational exchanges are also an opportunity for promoting citizen-level cultural interaction and understanding which serve as the foundation of the political bilateral relations. Hirano (2000, 22) showed that the exchange of international students is a significant example of seeing international relations from a cultural perspective. Through the educational exchanges, the idea that both countries are important to each other in order to

prosper together can spread to the citizen level that contributes to the foundation of peacebuilding between the countries. In particular, if the countries have hostile relations or have not established diplomatic relations, the cultural exchange itself can function as a catalyst that provides opportunities to collaborate and communicate (Fukushima 2012, 39-45).

3.2 Risks and Intentions

It is important to know that having educational exchanges under economic sanctions inhibits many risks for both countries. Since the Cuban Revolution, Cuba has been an effective center of anti-Americanism or anti-democracy. It was obvious that geographically, economically, politically or by any means the US wanted Cuba to be democratized. For the US, educational exchange was one of the few ways to stay connected with Cuban society that gives the US opportunities to influence the Cuban public with American values. Despite all the ambitions of purposefully spreading American values through educational exchanges, the US did hold some risks. Johnson, Lombardo, and Davis (2012, 13) pointed out that the interactions in technology field raised concerns in the US as people worried that it might be helping the Castro regime to reinforce its military power which could threaten the US in the future. Especially, when Cuban scholars visit the US, they will be in a position to obtain information place with much more freedom in comparison to when the US scholars visit Cuba, so the US is more vulnerable to leakage. Although some institutions do avoid interactions in technology fields such as cybersecurity, the US ambitious approach shows that the US considers it is worth risking a high cost to invite foreign scholars to expose them to American value and eventually enhance the US technological competitiveness.

Likewise, Cuba perceives educational exchanges with the US as an important opportunity to gain more national power. Cuba has been actively providing education opportunities not only for Americans but also for other foreign students as well. Cuba sees the potential to improve the image of Cuba globally and contribute to the national interest (Johnson, Lombardo and Davis 2012, 11). After the economic sanction took effect, educational exchanges became even more significant to Cuba. According to Stephenson (2006, 127), Cuba has long been recognized educational exchange with the US as a measure to counter opposition against the Cuban socialist

regime. Especially since a travel ban was put in place under the economic sanction, Cuba cherished the educational exchanges with the US as a channel to foment social transformation. Since the hostility between the two countries is rooted in ideological conflict against the regime, exposing its people to different values can potentially sway the Cuban citizens away. But Cuba has gradually opened up the country to people-to-people interactions and discussion with benevolent topics that are away from political tension (Johnson, Lombardo and Davis 2012, 4).

4. THE HISTORY OF US-CUBA ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

4.1 The US Foreign Policy Emphasize on Educational Exchanges

Educational exchanges between the US and Cuba have been conducted since the early nineteenth century. Primarily through the University of Havana, the American and Cuban scholars collaborated and established relations with each other in the fields of medicine, engineering, and finance to name a few (Guggenheim and Fernández 2008, 3). In January 1959, the educational exchanges were interrupted by the Cuban Revolution which marked the beginning of the economic sanctions. Americans were generally banned to travel to Cuba by the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR) issued by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) (Sullivan 2017, 1), but section 515.560 under CACR states that a travel-related license can be granted to travelers who fall under the twelve categories to have transactions to, from and within Cuba by persons subject to US jurisdiction (U.S. Department of Treasury 1963). Educational exchanges were supported by the categories of "Educational Activities" and "Activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes". Although the US cut the official diplomatic ties with Cuba, it had the intention of preserving authorized academic interaction opportunities with Cuba from the beginning of the economic sanction imposition.

The authorization of educational exchanges under the comprehensive economic sanction might seem surprising, but the US government approach towards international education in the modern era would explain it well. After the victory of WWII, the US has found great value in investing in international education to help to reconstruct the world and make people move toward democracy, as education is an "important aspect of the society needing reconstruction and as a method for changing the ideas and habits of the people" (Davis 1970, 236). Then in the early sixties, the same time period as the relationship deterioration with Cuba, the US marked its milestone on developing government-led international education programs. President Kennedy

perceived the efforts on international education as an important aspect of the US foreign policy (Davis 1970, 237). The US started casting a spotlight on human resource development, which is represented by the enactment of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, which is also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961. Also, Peace Corp Act of 1961 was enacted to promote world peace and friendship through helping people in the world to understand American culture and providing technical assistance. In the midst of the Cold War, the US had been trying to alternatively improve the use of soft power as well as hard power. The initial purpose of the economic sanction against Cuba was to overthrow the regime and democratize the country, so it thoroughly matches with the US government attitude towards promoting international education.

The following President Johnson was also an enthusiastic advocator of international education as he believed developing talents of people is vital for an economically and culturally sustainable world. He proposed the International Education Act of 1966 with the intention of adding an international dimension and called for further cooperation in international education (Miller 1967, 186). These two international education related acts symbolize the watershed of US foreign policy in the field of international education. The economic sanction was imposed on Cuba during the blooming period of international education policy in the US, and this suggests that the educational exchange between the US and Cuba was supported not only under the economic sanction regulations but also in an even broader context of the US foreign policy.

4.2 The Foundation Period of Educational Exchanges

Other than efforts in the field of educational exchange, both government and civic groups have also devoted to humanitarian measures that are favorable to the Cuban citizens. On the legislative level, the Cuban Adjustment Act that was enacted in 1966 to grant US permanent residency to Cuban natives or citizens who have entered and stayed at least one year in the US. On the civil level, a politically motivated organization Venceremos Brigade was founded in 1969. As the longest running Cuba solidarity group in the US (Stephenson 2006, 129-130), Venceremos Brigade has conducted people-to-people exchanges, such as cutting cane and learning socialism and Cuban life, and over 8,000 people have participated. These successful

humanitarian assistance efforts by the civil group with the modest thawing between the US and Cuba by the early seventies fueled other educational exchange initiatives. Take Venceremos Brigade as a good example, increasing interests and attention had been paid by American citizens to Cuban society since the Cuban Revolution. Similarly, the interests towards the US had increased in Cuba as well, as in 1972 a course in the US history was newly created at the University of Havana (Guggenheim and Fernández 2008, 3).

4.3 The Constructive Period of Educational Exchanges

In 1974, Nixon Administration had loosened the regulations of intellectual and educational exchanges (Guggenheim and Fernández 2008, 3), and the moderate approach towards Cuba was inherited to President Ford and the regulations were further eased under Carter Administration. Carter Administration especially made a great effort that as the first president to state that the US “should attempt to achieve normalization of our relations with Cuba” (Kornbluh 2004, 5). During this time period, both the US and the Cuban government were walking towards each other for better relations. The US government lifted the restrictions on traveling to Cuba, and both governments initiated dialogue on maritime and fishing rights as well. (Martínez and Resende 2006, 32) In 1977, Interests Sections in Havana and Washington D.C. were opened to help to secure visas and acquiring information on academic cooperation (Martínez and Resende 2006, 32), and all these events show the ease of tensions between the two countries.

A symbolic event in educational exchange had occurred during this time as well. In 1976, a small group of Cuban scholars attempted to attend the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conference, which is held by the largest and most important association of Latin American studies, for the first time since the Cuban Revolution (Stephenson 2006, 131). However, the first attempt ended up with Secretary Kissinger ‘s visas denial because Cuba sent troops to Angola. A year later, the attempt was finally succeeded that a group of Cuban scholars attended the Seventh LASA Congress in Houston Texas and had meetings at several universities during their short trip (Martínez and Resende 2006, 33). This is a fruit of years-long effort by

both the American and Cuban scholars in keeping educational exchanges since the imposition of economic sanction.

During the first two decades of economic sanction, enough efforts were put to sustain the educational exchanges under hostile relations. General openness toward educational exchanges was observed in addition to the increasing trend of US foreign policy functions in favor of international education. As a result, the number of Cuban students studying in the US has spurred up, and during the academic year of 1969 to 1970, it has recorded 4487 Cuban students studying in the US which is the pinnacle over the next half-century (IIE n.d.). These two decades can be considered as the period of a constructive foundation for educational exchange, as it functions as the silver lining under the economic sanction. Backed by the US proactive approach towards international education and all the related acts enacted during this period, both the US and Cuba handled the educational exchange well in order not to deteriorate the relations between the two countries, and the scholars in both countries also managed not to lose the cooperative relations they have built.

4.4 The Disparate Period of Educational Exchanges

Continue having educational exchanges under the economic sanction was not an easy path for the scholars and government in both countries, as each party had different intentions. After the foundation period of educational exchanges, the political situation became uneasy. In 1982, Cuba was put on the list of states that support terrorism (Lutjens 2006, 66), and President Reagan reinstated travel restrictions to Cuba that eliminated legal tourist flows to Cuba. This was upheld by the US Supreme Court as the Cuban government was seen as a security threat to the US (Stephenson 2006, 151). While it still allowed traveling of US officials, people engaging in professional research, and people who have close relatives in Cuba, the restriction banned ordinary tourists and business trips that had been allowed since 1977 (Sullivan 2017, 19).

However, interestingly, despite the increased political tension between the two countries, President Reagan further expanded the Carter policy of educational exchange with Cuba (Datlof, Ugrinsky and Schmertz 1997). Not only educational but also cultural and sports interactions also

increased during this time. This disparity between the foreign policy and educational exchange policy with Cuba demonstrates educational exchange policy against an adversary country like Cuba can be independent of conventional hard power policy. The independence from conventional foreign policy shows the substantial potential of educational exchange to be functioning as an effective diplomatic measure.

The policy towards Cuba got complicated in the later years of the Reagan Administration. In 1985, President Reagan signed a presidential proclamation that restricts Cuban officials to enter the US. Further, the administration decided to start operating an anti-Castro radio station “Radio Marti” in Florida, and Castro responded to it by suspending an immigration agreement with the US (Boyd 1985). The travel restriction imposed on Cuban officials was retaliation against Castro, and the transition to the hard stance against Cuba had a significant influence on educational exchanges. As mentioned previously, the annual LASA Congress has been a significant event that reflects the US and Cuba bilateral relations. Followed by these political conflicts, a group of Cuban scholars who were going to attend the 1985 LASA Congress had their visas denied by the US, and this caused the entire Cuban scholar delegations to decide not to attend the Congress eventually (Martínez and Resende 2006, 34). Yet in the same year, the US established Central American Peace Scholarship (CAPS) program that offers opportunities for Latin American students, including Cubans, to study at vocational, community college and universities in the US (Johnson, Lombardo and Davis 2012, 12). This was a counter policy against the Soviet Union and Cuba recruiting underprivileged Latin American youth to study in Moscow for Communist Indoctrination and regular coursework (Johnson, Lombardo and Davis 2012, 12). The US had altered the educational exchange policy strategy in response to the political situation, but it is clear that the US government did not lose faith in utilizing educational exchange as a trump card in foreign policy.

4.5 Educational Exchange Supported by Economic Opportunities

In 1988 educational exchanges gained support by Berman Amendment which is an amendment to the Trading with Enemy Act. It was enacted to exemplify information and informational materials such as books, videos from the economic sanction (Mariño and Breña

2006, 16). The amendment was enacted in response to this “economic opportunities” with the enemy. As the Soviet Union, the main and the strongest economic supporter of Cuba under the US economic sanctions started falling and Cuba experienced a serious crisis. Sehgal (2015) reported that Cuba's GNP fell 40%, and there was high unemployment, epidemics of diseases, food shortages, and blackouts. As a result, the Cuban government needed to reform its economy and the US government did not miss these economic opportunities. The amendment made educational exchanges much easier, as Cuban scholars were able to attend the LASA Congress again in 1988 and the following year even though the relationship between the two countries was tense. During the eighties, the active educational exchange was not only supported by the rise of American studies in Cuba and Cuban studies in the US, but also the US strategy of taking advantage of the Cuban economic crisis.

4.6 Another Disparate Period of Educational Exchanges

The G.H. Bush Administration instilled Cuban Democracy Act in 1992 which started another period of the US government showing contradictory attitude towards economic sanction and educational exchange. The Cuban Democracy Act again tightened the trade, travel and money transaction with Cuba, yet at the same time introduced Track II which granted permission with Cuba to expand bi-national educational exchange. The contradictory attitude was due to the clear US strategy of using education as soft power to incite subversion of Cuba’s internal order (Price and Hershberg 1999). Given the political direction, in 1994 one of the major educational exchange programs, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) was founded at Harvard University to increase the knowledge about Latin America (DRCLAS website), and in 1995 American students were allowed to study at Cuban institutions for the first time. However in 1996, as Cuba shot down US planes and Helms-Burton Act was enacted to tighten economic sanction. While the political atmosphere became extremely tense, the DRCLAS program inaugurated the Cuban Studies Program in 1998 which invites visiting researchers to Harvard. The program had stated that as the US-Cuba relations will be changing in an unpredictable way, so “(r)estoring and enhancing cooperation between the U.S. and Cuban academic communities can play a significant role in promoting peaceful changes within and between the two countries” (“Cuba Studies Program” n.d.). Harvard University took partnership

with four Cuban institutions with the intention of developing collaborative projects for scientists and scholars who are interested in Cuba.

4.7 The Resilient Nature of Educational Exchange Under the War on Terror

The following Bush Administration held a firm line against Cuba from the very beginning. Not only educational but also all sorts of cultural, religious and humanitarian exchanges were extremely restricted with the purpose of isolating Cuba (Mariño and Breña 2006, 13). The administration showed distinctive interest in isolating Cuba in order to change its regime by further tightening the economic sanctions. This hardline attitude against Cuba was even worsened after 9/11. In response to the incident, the Bush Administration declared the War on Terror and the educational exchanges with Cuba were significantly limited. The laws and restrictions created to counter terrorism strictly limited the free flow of information and certainly deteriorated the relationship between the two countries. Cuban scholars got their visas denied to attend LASA conference multiple times which symbolizes the frozen period of exchange during this time. DRCLAS, on the other hand, had been successfully establishing academic and scientific exchanges and cooperative framework despite the tensions. DRCLAS played a significant role in making US policy more supportive in academic collaboration with Cuba. Since 2003, the number of visa denials to the Cuban scholars had increased remarkably because of section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (Barberia 2009, 7). However, members of DRCLAS visited the House of Representatives to discuss the visas for Cuban scholars invited to Harvard. In the following year, this effort was resulted in issuing more than 70 visas that had been pending. This showed the sustained long-term commitment to educational exchanges earned credibility from both the US and the Cuban government, and educational exchanges have the capability of influencing politics under the economic sanction.

As the resiliency of educational exchanges was evident throughout history, it needs to be addressed that exceptions could happen. For example, there are times when the denial of visas for educational exchanges cannot be avoided. This halts physical educational exchanges but it does not mean educational exchanges themselves are terminated. For example, when 65 visas for

Cuban researchers to participate LASA conference was denied in 2004, it led to a protest and panel discussion at the conference instead.

5. CONCLUSION

From the examination of the decades' long history of educational exchanges under economic sanctions between the US and Cuba, it is revealed that while holding some risks, both governments had incentives to use educational exchanges as a policy tool to influence the other country or to gain national interests. At times, the strictness of the level of sanction against Cuba corresponds with the strictness of educational exchange policy of the US, but most of the times, educational exchanges remain fairly tolerant when the economic sanctions are tightened. The resilient nature of educational exchanges under the antagonistic political climate enabled the two countries to have constant peaceful societal interactions by the citizens. This analysis from a cultural perspective shows the educational exchanges played a role like a catalyst to connect the two countries under the economic sanctions. This suggests that we can improve the potential of economic sanction as a policy tool, or make it more effective and non-violent, by actively utilizing educational exchange as soft power. The cultural capital gained through the educational exchange can benefit both the sender and target countries in terms of academic advancement and grass root understanding, then eventually, this can eventually help the government peacefully resolving the conflict.

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