

Relevance of Formal Education to Third World Countries National Development

Mr John Mpofu,
Senior Lecturer, Zimbabwe Open University

Abstract: *The relevance of formal education to Third World economies has been a subject of debate for a long time. Most Third World Countries (TWC) inherited colonial education and did not do much in terms of transforming the educational systems so that they would be relevant to the needs of their respective communities. Zimbabwe introduced vocational education from Grade 8 to 12 as a parallel programme to the academic Form 1 to 6. Though the vocational education laid a sound foundation for the development of practical skills in students, most parents had the misconception that vocational education was inferior to academic education. This research paper highlights the challenges that TWCs continue to face due to inheriting a colonial type of education. After independence, most TWCs embarked on a massive expansion of education. Universities were also expanded but these institutions of higher learning have failed to transform the lives of their communities. The economy of Zimbabwe is deteriorating, 86% of the population is unemployed. Although most Zimbabwean are educated, this education has failed to transform the lives of the people for the better.*

I. Introduction

Most developing countries are rural in character, with agriculture as the main economic activity of the people. In order to develop the rural areas there is need for system of education that is relevant to the needs of the community so that the children can maximize their “learning potential and take care of the rural areas in relation to resources and future changes.” (Ekanaye 1990 :116 quoting Anders 1969.) This research paper explain the type of formal education introduced in TWCs and analyzes how relevant the formal education has been stimulating and accelerating development. The paper will evaluate the extent vocationally oriented programmes introduced in the TWCs have been relevant to the needs of the people. Finally we will discuss the reasons for the success or failure of formal education in encouraging national development.

Viswanatan (1990) stated that the formal levels of schooling in TWNS were a continuation of colonial education. The TWNs inherited an education system and only made cosmetic changes to the curriculum. Most TWNs expanded their educational systems, the assumptions being that growth in education would lead to national development. The expectations of national planners did not materialize because instead of developing the country, expansion in education led to rapid rise of unemployed school leavers, a large section of whom where schooled illiterates. Evans (1981) argued that the introduction of universal primary education did not necessarily lead to equity and improved income distribution particularly in rural areas. Evans (1981:223) quotes John Simmons (1980), who argued that “the educational system while not the only factor contributing to increased inequality, serves to legitimize the process the process by which a small minority is chosen for high status of high occupations”

Statement of the problem

The relevance and transformative nature of education to national development has been a subject of debate for some time. Whilst it is clear that education has a role to play to national development, it is difficult to assess to what extent different forms of education have led to the development and transformation of TWNs’ economies.

Research questions

- What role has primary education played in transforming rural societies where the majority of people live?
- To what extent has vocational education driven the economies of TWNs forward?
- How has education in general fueled the development of TWNs’ economies?

Research questions

- To discuss the role that primary education has played in transforming TWNs.
- To examine the extent to which vocational education has led to industrialization of TWNs.
- To debate the role of education in the development process.

II. Research Methodology

Theories of education and Development

Granted that education has a certain value of its own, we must still ask ourselves what role we shall assign it in national development. Educational systems are expensive and must be weighed against other possible development projects in drawing up a list of priorities for developing countries. It is necessary, therefore, to establish clearly the relationship between education and development.

During the past two decades there have been at least four major shifts in the way this relationship has been perceived by development theorists and economists. An understanding of these shifts is crucial if anyone wishes to comprehend the changes in development policy throughout the Third World in the last twenty years and, more specifically, the educational decisions that were made in the TWNs. The theories that we will review here have had, and are still having, a profound effect on the course of educational planning in TWNs.

It should be noted that for most of the period with which we are concerned here, development was generally identified with economic development. This is borne out by the fact that the most common indices of "development" during the 1960s and before were: 1) growth of Gross National Product, 2) technological advance and rate of industrialization, 3) improved living standards. Present-day thinking, however, is less disposed to regard development as only an abbreviated form of economic development. The meaning of development has been broadened to embrace more than merely economic growth, as will be seen. While this may be an enrichment of a term, the task of defining a changing relationship is none the easier when the meaning of one of the terms of the relationship is itself shifting.

Disregard of Education

In the post-war years, education was generally neglected as a factor in the economic development of what later came to be called the Third World countries. While education was always regarded as humanizing and desirable for all people, it was seen as something of a luxury for those countries struggling to produce enough to feed their populations. The real imperative for these countries was an increase in productivity, and this meant modernization of productive methods-factories, utilization of resources, and so forth. The principal means of achieving this was the formation of sufficient capital in the country to permit industrialization and development of the infrastructure. Accumulation of savings from within the country, or adequate inflow of foreign aid from abroad, was the prerequisites for economic development. Several studies (the most popular of which was Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth*) purported to show the close correlation between capital formation and economic growth in the industrialized nations of the West. This was assumed to hold equally true for non-industrialized, more traditional countries elsewhere.

Investment in Man

During the early 1960s a startling reversal of development theory took place. More intensive studies of economic growth revealed that only a part of it could be explained by the amount of capital investment. Other factors seemed to be at least as important in development. One correlation that loomed large in the studies by economists at this time was that between the level of education and economic growth. Some found a close relationship between elementary education and GNP; others maintained that higher education was the decisive factor; still others argued that general literacy was the important element. Assuming that the level of education bore a causal relationship to economic growth, economists tended to see "investment in human resources" as the essential condition for economic development. This meant, in practice, that foreign aid to developing countries was to be allocated primarily for hospitals and schools rather than for factories.

The justification for this reversal of development theory went thus: No economic development can take place in a society until the people embrace values favorable to modernization and progress and until they are trained in the basic skills needed in a transitional society. The "crust of custom" needed to be broken before change could occur. Traditional attitudes which discouraged development had to be properly shaken, and there was no better way to do this than to wet the material appetites of the people. This would lead them in time to turn to Western patterns of production and use of resources.

For other theorists, the primary place of education in development was more a matter of recognizing the value of capital investment in human beings. Gunnar Myrdal, whose *Asian Drama* reflects in great part the thinking of this period, quotes a representative statement: "Countries are underdeveloped because most of their people are underdeveloped, having had no opportunity of expanding their potential capital in the service of society."

The thinking on economic development had undergone this shift: the cause of economic growth was seen as the "capacity to create wealth rather than the creation of wealth itself." Thus, every graduate of a school in a developing country was regarded as a valuable resource capable of making a significant contribution to economic development. In time, the investment in his education would be returned to the country many times over.

Rejection of the Panacea

By the late 1960s it had become clear that investment in education and health did not in itself guarantee development any more than capital formation did. Education, which had once been neglected in development, had thereafter been given the dominant place in aid programs to developing countries. Neither approach proved a spectacular success. Critics soon warned of taking education out of the context of the multiple and complex forces at work in a society and assigning it too great an importance in development. They cautioned that something more than insecticides, tractors, and education were needed for increasing agricultural productivity. Other sorts of institutional reforms—for example, land reform programs—were recognized as a necessary ingredient of development. If education was a prerequisite for economic growth, it was by no means the only one and perhaps not even the most important.

Critics of the "Investment in Man" theory of development pointed out that education could hinder rather than promote economic growth. A case study of Kerala, one of the states of India, showed how educational expansion could lead to political instability, social unrest, and retardation of economic growth in certain circumstances. The older idea governing educational acceleration in developing countries—"There can never be too much of a good thing."—was now under fire from many quarters. In its place came the idea of "controlled education" for developing countries. Educational expansion must take place within the limits imposed by capital formation in the country. It must not outpace the ability of the economy to absorb its products.

This led to another question being raised. If education could actually set back economic development, when allowed to run wild, might not it also retard social development in certain instances? A balance was required between the educational thrust and the development of other institutions in the Third World. Otherwise, education might well be counterproductive in terms of over-all development. Education, therefore, was no longer seen as an unqualified good.

Education as Barrier to Development

By the beginning of this decade a small but growing number of social critics were heard to proclaim that formal education was not a mixed blessing at all for Third World countries; it was a real obstacle to development. For Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire and others who were at the vanguard of this movement, "development" had acquired a new definition. The measure of development was no longer an increased productivity and more dollars. National and individual wealth was now seen as secondary to a sense of power—the ability to make real choices and shape one's own future. A certain level of national affluence is the condition for achieving this power, provided it does not lead to domination by the wealthy world powers.

Just as development means freedom from national impotence, it also implies liberation from powerlessness for all social groups within the country. The elimination of social inequality takes on special prominence in this concept of development. And here is where formal education, as embodied in the Western school, comes under severe attack. By sorting people out into categories of its own making (PhDs, ABs, high school graduates, dropouts), it leads to class stratification and actually promotes social inequality. Formal education systems, the critics charge, produce a sense of dependence and helplessness among those whom they purport to help. People learn to mistrust their own power to engage in meaningful learning outside of a school. The Western school, Illich maintains, is as much the product of an industrialized society—and therefore just as inappropriate to many developing countries—as the skyscraper and the fast express train. His quarrel is not with education as such, but with the costly types of formal education that devour a large chunk of the national budget for the benefit of an elite representing only a tiny fraction of the national population. Others contend that the supposed economic gains from education are largely illusory. The consumption of the educated eventually outstrips their productivity, education being not the least expensive of the commodities they learn to consume. The result is a society outdoing itself to keep up with educational demands.

In the last analysis, the system of formal education transplanted in developing countries from foreign shores is self-defeating as a means of achieving development.

It would be hard to conceive of a greater fluctuation in theories than that which has taken place within the past twenty years. Education, which was at first ignored as a force in development, then became the magic key to attaining economic growth. Not long afterwards it was demystified, although still accorded an important place in national development. Now, as the disenchantment with the results of development during the 1960s grows, education (or at least the formal education with which we are most familiar) is, in the eyes of some, a real obstacle to a more broadly defined development.

One of the purposes of studying history is to assist us in relativizing the dogmas of a particular age so that we can discern what is of lasting value. This is particularly important for us as we attempt to focus on the meaning of education in overall development. Our schools in Micronesia were built on the limited theoretical foundations of the early 1960s, and they are being attacked from other limited premises that we work from today. It is impossible for educators to ignore the critical question of the relationship between education and

overall development, and unwise for us to see only a little bit of the question. Perhaps this survey will help us gain a larger perspective.

Relevance of primary education

Children from poor families are disadvantaged because they do not get the opportunities for schooling similar to children of middle class and rich families. Martin (1991) in a case study at Zapopan in Mexico clearly demonstrates how children from poor families fail to improve their lot through the provisions of education. He explains how San Francisco, a poor section of the community in Mexico could not provide a good school for their children as opposed to San Margarita where a reasonable good school withdrawn from school in order to supplement the family income. Martin (1991) explains that part of the reason for low performance is due to the home environment and the poor type of school where these children learnt. On the other hand the children at Santa Margarita had a good school which was supported by their parents. The Santa Margarita set up ensured that the parents had more secure and regular jobs as a result the children are freer from parental demands on their time. These children spent their time completing homework. Although formal education is provided to both rich and poor children, the benefits are not the same. The poor communities strive to get basic needs before sending children to school. Evans (1981) quotes Colclough and Hallak (1975) who argued that the continued expansion of the educational system to include the poor sections of the community will not necessarily improve their position in society.

Evans (1981) outlines a number of non- school factors which determine success or failure at school which include nutrition, quality of the home environment, education level of the parents and the language spoken at home. The other factor highlighted by Evans (1981) is the repetition of certain grades. This influences the self-concept of the student and her/his attitude towards school. Evans (1981) quotes Coombs (1968) who argued that that fewer than 10 % of the children in rural areas in TWNs finish primary school.

In another study Robson (1987) in a case study of Kiribati wanted to determine whether schooling alienated students from village life. From this case study Robson (1987) concluded that most of the generalizations that schooling alienated students from village life were not true. Most students leave the village not because they do not want to associate with it, but because the village does not have the infra- structure to provide a job. This argument is collaborated by Foster (1989) with Robson who argued that schooling does not necessarily estrange the student from the village community. Foster (1989) highlighted what transpired in Ghana and Zimbabwe where the educated visited their villages regularly to participate in family and religious rituals. Foster (1989:521) states that "Rather than view education in terms of detachment we should emphasize the symbiotic relationship that exists between the village and the migrant and note that in Southern and West Africa at least a high proportion of such migrants return home on retirement having continuously contributed to the community in earlier years."

+9 Foster (1989) states that in most TWNs primary and secondary education does not give the graduates any jobs however most parents send their children to school with the belief that when they have an education, their chances of getting a good job are better than someone without any education. Although it is clear from the argument presented above that universal education does not lead to equity and development but there is a relationship between the number of years in school and agricultural production. Fosters (1989) states that four years of schooling raises productivity by 8%. People with four years schooling introduce new crop varieties and the use of equipment. Colclough (1980) argued that the introduction of primary education in poor countries led to reduction in fertility rates. Inkeles found that those that went to school long were not only better informed but they participated more in community affairs and were open to new ideas.

Vocationally Oriented education

The advocates of vocationally oriented curriculum believed that the reasons why TWNs produced unemployed youths after secondary education was because these graduates did not have skills. As a result they advocated for vocational skills to their graduates. The assumption was that if the educational system was transformed and a workable education –oriented labor market was introduced, then this might help school leavers to get jobs, even work on the land in the rural areas. Tanzania was one of the countries to vocationalize their curriculum. Tanzania's national policy was clearly articulated in the philosophy of Ujamaa. (Socialism for Self- reliance explained in the Arusha declaration.)

The context for the education for self-reliance was slightly revised in the Musoma Declaration of 1974. The main policy change was that of placing emphasis on technical and vocational education. The schools were supposed to become productive centers. Nyerere believed that the school had to raise 25% of its running costs. Four vocational courses were supposed to be introduced in the curriculum. These subjects included commerce, agriculture, domestic science and technical subjects. The upper forms of Form 5 and 6 would continue to offer academic subjects in order to prepare students for university entry. In 1983 Tanzanian schools had enrolled 39 737 students on a technical curriculum. The technical curricula was supposed to train skills of craftsmanship in the electrical and engineering fields.

Relevance of vocational oriented education in TWNs.

Urevho (1988) observes that the vocational oriented education has not been successful in fulfilling the objectives it was set up to achieve. It has not led to less demand for post- secondary schooling. It did not lead to more students in TWNs doing commercial and agricultural training courses. He explains that not many students are interested in working in the field they will have specialized at secondary school. Psacharopoulos (1987) states that the main reason why the policy of vocationalizing the curriculum failed in the TWNs is because the parents and students did not support the concept. The perception of both parent and student was that their children needed to perform well in academic work so that they can successfully earn huge large salaries after getting employed in large corporations. The other assumption in vocationalizing the curriculum was that after completion of the course the candidates would become entrepreneurs rather than employees. Data from Tanzania does not support the assumption that graduates from the vocational schools would become employees at graduation. Psacharopoulos (1987) states that a year after graduation 16% of the commercial and agricultural graduates were unemployed as opposed to 13% from the academic curriculum.

Zachariah (1988) argues that some of the reasons for the failure of vocationally oriented curriculum was that the teachers were not completely trained to teach the new subjects as a result the graduates completed the course without having acquired the skills of the trade. At times appropriate laboratory equipment were not provided. Some machinery was donated from the Western countries to Zimbabwe but was not utilized by the schools because there were no personnel skilled to use these machines. Some teachers who taught academic subjects despised vocational subjects as inferior subjects as a result some students did not put a lot of effort in learning these subjects.

Some school administrators had negative attitudes towards these vocational subjects such that they would refuse to allocate adequate funding for practical to be done. Urevho (1988) argues that in Tanzania the introduction of technical and vocational subjects was more a political decision than the relevance of the curriculum to the economy or even the needs of the individuals.

In Zimbabwe and other TWNs, the pupils who did not perform well in academic oriented curriculum were selected to do the vocational curriculum. The vocational education was structured in such a way that the graduate could not proceed to university or any higher institution. As a result the parents and students associated the vocational oriented curriculum with failure. Viswanthan (1988:136) argues that “vocational education was marginalized and stigmatized as an inferior and low status form of education tied up with a track record of being at the bottom of the elitist education system accompanied with low pay and poor working conditions.” In most TWNs including Zimbabwe, the high paying professional and technocratic jobs are given to graduates of academically oriented education. The higher institutions in Zimbabwe accept students with academic qualifications as result both students and parents aspire to acquire qualifications which give them access to the University and other higher institutions.

Colclough (1980) argues that education is being used as a screening device by some employers because they get too many applicants who look for jobs after completing their academic qualifications. In Zimbabwe due to the world recession and the scarcity of jobs, employers do not look at educational qualifications but employ applicants because of their personal recommendations or political patronage. This shows that education qualifications have no relevance for the job market. Proponents of vocational education might have made the proposal for vocational education with the assumption that industries were developing and other down-stream industries would be constructed. But in Zimbabwe at present the few industries that are operational, most of them are operating at 30%. Owners of industries are relocating to neighboring countries where capital is readily available to invest in the industries. Viswanthan (1988) proposes that it is important for a country to assess the needs of a job market before introducing vocationally oriented education. Viswanthan (1988 :138) quotes Hussein (1976) who stated that “ Educational qualifications serve as a basis of selection for occupants, it is not the educational system which actually channels into occupations. The volume, categories and terms of employment are determined not inside but outside the educational system.” He concludes by suggesting that the link between education and work is very loose especially in a world where technology changes every time. The marketability of vocationally oriented graduates is vulnerable as it is at the mercy of the employers’ demand. For a country to formulate a relevant curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the country it is important to first make a needs assessment of the public sector and private sector. Even a country like Zimbabwe that has an agrarian economy it is crucial for education to integrate academic and vocational curriculum that is relevant rather than have a dual curriculum. Vulliamy (1988) explains how Papua New Guinea managed to do what Viswanathan (1988) has proposed namely integrating the vocational and academic curriculum so as to design a relevant curriculum.

After inheriting a colonial model of education from Australia in 1975 Papua New Guinea’s main objective was to expand secondary and tertiary education at the expense of primary education in order to train indigenous people to take over managerial posts which were held by expatriate administrators. Since the government was committed to rural development where 80% of the population lives in 1977 SSCEP project was initiated. The aim of the project was to provide an appropriate relevant rural education which avoided a dual

curriculum. Between 1979-1983 the project was introduced to eight schools. The schools identified projects in rural areas which would be done in conjunction with the study of four academic subjects namely English, Maths, Science and Social science. Apart from developing academic skills the projects would also develop the student's practical skills in areas relevant to the development of the community. e.g. At grade 10 a unit on Chemical Technology was adopted to include water treatment. This project made a direct use of the village water supply to teach students scientific concepts and skills. Students developed practical skills of installing the water supply with the help from villagers.

Valliamy (1988) explains that the SSCEP project integrated the curriculum in such a way that students wrote the same exams with the students doing academic curriculum. Students were motivated to do the vocational subjects because they helped them in their academic subjects. Although the SSCEP project was an innovation in integrating academic and vocational subjects, there were problems. Teachers who were supposed to teach the core projects had no relevant skills. The attempt to assess students' practical skills and leadership skills were not practical. The SSCEP project gained support from students, teachers and parents. The experience of SSCEP showed how crucial it is to support an innovation with financial support and relate it with people's development needs.

Benefits accrued from education

Although difficult to document statistically expansion in education has contributed to economic growth in some areas. According to Todaro research done in TWNs expansion of education has created a more productive labor force and endowed it with increased knowledge and skills. The education sector has also provided the TWNs with employment opportunities for teachers, school and construction workers and other supportive jobs. It has led to the creation of a group of educated leaders who fill government and private organization positions. The education sector has provided the different sectors of the economy with literacy skills and other basic skills that go with education.

Education inequality and poverty

Simmons (1974) has highlighted the views of the poor in the community and the challenges they continue to face. Schooling the poor communities in TWNs as a means of escaping poverty is a tall order since only a few benefit. Simmons (1974) argues that research has shown that the poor are the first to drop out of school since they need to go out of school and find a job to raise a little money in order to meet basic needs of food. The poor are the first to be pushed out of school because they fall asleep in class as a result of malnourishment. They are the first to fail their English tests because upper income children have better opportunities at home to speak the language and watch programmes that improve their language proficiency. So whilst education will benefit few poor people to leave their poverty, the majority of the poor remain poor.

Education and Brain Drain in TWNs

One of the major problems facing TWNs is the question of brain drain. Instead of the educated elite providing expertise to the communities in TWNs to deal with issues of poverty, most scientists, physicians, architects, engineers and academics thrive on exploiting the poor by charging huge sums of money if they ask for their services. When the economies of the TWNs are performing badly thousands of the educated elite relocate to the West where they sell their labor. Those in the medical field go to Western countries where they specialize in complicated heart disease and are not concerned to research on tropical diseases that affect the TWNs. Architects design brilliant designs and monuments that never benefit the ordinary poor people. The major problem with the education in Third world countries is that whilst it has developed skills and even developed the educated elite, it has failed to develop a crop of individuals who are concerned for the development of TWNs.

III. Conclusion and Recommendation

In this research paper we have attempted to argue that most TWNs expanded their educational systems rapidly without changing it to ensure that it was relevant to the needs of the community. Although universal primary education was introduced in most TWNs, it did not bring about equity especially among the poor. A person with primary education to a certain extent will produce more agricultural produce than a person without an education. People with a general primary education live a better way of life than people without an education. Schooling has been shown not to have alienated people from the village, but school graduates go to urban areas to look for work but continue to be attached to the village where they finally go for retirement. We also showed that vocational education tended to be expensive and was not popular with the parents and graduates.

TWNs are confronted with a number of choices by continuing to develop the formal education system that countries inherited from colonial masters. Whilst this form of education is relevant by providing literacy skills, develop thinking skills most of it has not managed to solve the daily challenges faced by the rural poor.

There is need for TWNs to deliberately reform the education system so that it caters for the needs of the rural poor as well. Evidence from TWNs shows that if we take the first option, the problems of unemployment, poverty, inequality rural stagnation international intellectual dominance will remain with us. Our only option is to transform the education system so that whilst we are developing academics we also design an educational curriculum that deals with life threatening issues that affects societies in rural TWNs.

References

- [1]. Evans , David R. (1981) "The educational Policy dilemma for rural areas" *Comparative Education Review* pp 329- 348 Vol.35 1981
- [2]. Colclough C. (1980)The impact of primary schooling on economic development
- [3]. Foster P. (1989) "Why the issue of relevance is not so relevant" in *Comparative Education Review* 33 No 4 1989pp 519- 524
- [4]. Ekanayake S.B. (1990) Rural pedagogy : a grassroots to rural development in *Prospects* vol20no1 1990 pp116
- [5]. Psachopoulos G. "To vocationalize or not to vocationalize that is the curriculum question" *International Review of Education* Vol 33 1987 pp 189-198
- [6]. Urevho A.O. (1988) "Vocationalizing the secondary school curriculum: the African experience" *International Review of Education* Vol 34 1988 pp260-272
- [7]. Vulliamy G. (1988) Adopting secondary school science for rural development: some lessons from Papua new Guinea *Compare* vol 18 No 1(1988)pp 79- 87
- [8]. Viswanathan S. (1988) Limits to vocational oriented education in the TWNs. *InternationalJournal of Educational Development* Vol.8 No 2 pp 129-143.
- [9]. Simmons John (1974) "Education Poverty and Development" World Bank staffing working papers No 188 Washington D C
- [10]. Zachariah (1988) Continuity between school, curriculum and vocation" *InternationalReview of Education* Vol 34 1988 pp 207-223.