

PROBLEMS OF EDUCATIONAL GROWTH
IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES
A STUDY OF THE QUANTITY-QUALITY DILEMMA
IN THE AFRO-ASIAN REGION

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Initial interest in the subject stemmed from working with Dr. Richard Seddon, formerly with the South Pacific Commission and latterly Professor and Head of the School of Education, Macquarie University, Sydney, and from a study of the work of Dr. C.E. Beeby on the quality of education in developing countries.(1) Several of Beeby's conclusions and the evidence contained in Unesco reports of education in various Afro-Asian countries appeared to cast grave doubts on the merits of the Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans as suitable guides for the future development of education in those regions. This was particularly so with respect to the strong emphasis placed on the rapid expansion of education, especially at the primary level. Beeby and P.H. Coombs(2) have also focussed attention on the internal dynamics of education systems and their potential for growth, and a closer study of the subject seemed particularly relevant to the doubts expressed about the Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans. The past two decades have seen a great expansion of schooling in Africa and Asia but the level of educational wastage as judged by the number of pupils who drop out prematurely from school or who repeat grades still remains depressingly high and shortages of competent teachers, adequate school buildings and classroom equipment remain as acute as ever. Regrettably, one is forced to conclude that many of the human and financial resources that have been used to expand educational opportunities in underdeveloped countries since the early 1950s seem to have been wasted.

Since the second world war there has been an unprecedented social demand throughout the world for greater educational opportunities based on the concept of human rights. At the same time, education has become widely recognised as an essential component in the promotion of social and economic development. The Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans were expressions of these two beliefs. Both plans were designed to encourage rapid educational growth on a broad front over a twenty-year period. The Karachi Plan aimed at free and compulsory schooling of seven years duration for all children by 1980 in fifteen Asian countries. The Addis Ababa Plan similarly aimed at universal primary schooling of six years duration throughout Africa by the same date.

1. C.E. Beeby: The Quality of Education in Developing Countries, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1966.

2. P.H. Coombs: The World Educational Crisis. A systems analysis. Oxford University Press, New York, 1968.

These targets confronted all participant countries with a gigantic task. In Asia, it was estimated that primary enrolments would need to rise from 66 to 237 million by 1980.(3) About 9 million additional teachers would be required(4) and the total recurrent and capital cost was tentatively put at 56,000 million American dollars.(5) In Africa, it was calculated that primary enrolments would need to increase from approximately 11.5 million to about 33 million over the same period.(6) No overall costing was attempted but it was described as 'staggering'. All African countries were urged to raise the percentage of their national income earmarked for financing education to a minimum of 6 per cent of their gross national expenditure by 1980.(7) In both plans it was recognised that vast amounts of foreign aid would be needed if the targets were to be reached. The quality of education was not ignored but it was greatly overshadowed by the emphasis placed on growth. Neither document was a plan in the strict sense of the word but both served to define targets to be reached at the national level and to highlight the immense magnitude of the educational problems facing each region.

To assess the appropriateness of the plans as national guides, detailed studies were made of education in Ethiopia, Cameroon, Tanzania, Indonesia and Thailand. These countries were chosen partly on grounds of access to primary source material but also because they were thought to be representative of the various stages of educational development to be found within the countries of the Afro-Asian region. Space precludes any detailed account of these studies but several general conclusions emerged. To a greater or lesser extent there were serious qualitative deficiencies in the schooling provided, especially at the initial stage of the primary level. Consequently the wastage rate was high. The supply of well-educated and trained teachers was also woefully inadequate. Schooling also suffered from inadequate and overcrowded buildings, a dearth of teaching materials, lack of regular inspection, and dull, factual and formal instruction. Language difficulties also presented a major barrier to progress especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. Lack of finance was clearly a fundamental problem in each country but manpower shortages and long-established cultural attitudes towards education also contributed substantially to the poor overall quality of schooling. In each country studied the same basic conclusion was reached - that the Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans were not appropriate models on which to base future educational development.

The second half of the study looked more closely at the wastage problem and at the internal dynamics of education systems in general, in order to assess the feasibility of expanding the size of an education system rapidly and simultaneously maintaining an acceptable balance between the quantity and quality of schooling. Economic reasons were clearly of major importance in contributing to the wastage problem but perhaps more research needs to be done into the cultural and educational reasons for pupils leaving school before they have completed their basic education. Both Adam Curle and John Cameron have stressed the unpleasantness associated with school for many young

3. The Needs of Asia in Primary Education. A Plan for the Provision of Compulsory Primary Education in the Region. Educational Studies and Documents No. 41. Unesco, Paris 1961. p.8.

4. Ibid., p.15.

5. Ibid., p.28.

6. Outline of a Plan for African Educational Development, Addis Ababa, 1961. p.14.

7. Ibid., p.19.

children. Classes are often overcrowded, discipline is harsh, and the teaching is dull. In short, 'The children have a tough and unpleasant time at school'.(8) As Cameron has commented, children all over the world 'play hookey' for substantially the same reasons and researchers looking into the causes of wastage might be well advised to begin their work by re-reading Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.(9) The dull and formal teaching encountered in so many schools is only to be expected when the majority of teachers are untrained and poorly educated. Moreover, in many cases teachers have only turned to teaching as a career after having failed to obtain more lucrative and acceptable employment elsewhere. The unfortunate classroom experiences of children are doubtless also responsible for the irregular attendance of many pupils which in turn contributes to the frequent repetition of grades.

The internal dynamics of education systems were looked at in relation to the factors which seem to govern the qualitative growth of schooling and thereby the speed with which an education system can be expanded profitably. The factors were grouped under seven headings - teachers, pupils, schools, language problems, administration and control of education, finance, and public and professional attitudes to education. While each heading was dealt with separately it is necessary to bear in mind constantly that the factors are all closely related and that it is their combined effect which ultimately determines the quality of education prevailing at any one time.

The section on teachers dealt with the problem of recruitment and training, salaries and salary structures, career opportunities, the employment of men as opposed to women, conditions of service, shortages of teachers in specific areas such as science and technical subjects, and the social and economic pressures bearing on the work done by teachers. The section on pupils dealt specifically with the influence of home backgrounds on schooling, the attitudes of illiterate parents towards their children's schooling, the contrasting and often conflicting pressures exerted on pupils by the school and the home, and the impact on student behaviour, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, of the fear of failure. The section on schools included an analysis of the nature of school buildings and general classroom conditions, and the availability of teaching equipment and pupil texts. As Howard Hayden has said of Asian schools, 'In many instances a trained teacher is sent into a school equipped solely with a blackboard, a stick of chalk and his own courage'.(10) In many cases even blackboards and chalk are difficult to procure and children have to use slates or write in the sand because there is no paper. This means that the recording of work becomes impossible. Hence the emphasis is on rote memorization. Overcrowded classes are another characteristic of many schools. Pierre Rondiere has referred to 'The Wall' of repeating students which progressively paralyze the already weak educational system by blocking the promotion of new pupils from below and also the admission of new entrants.(11) The subject matter taught in the schools is also still frequently entrenched firmly in the cultural mould of the colonial era. Finally, the urban or rural location of schools may have a major bearing on the quality of schooling offered.

8. Adam Curle: Educational Problems of Developing Societies, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1969, p.52.

9. John Cameron: Wastage in Tanganyika with special reference to Primary Schools, Teacher Education in New Countries, Vol.6, No.2 Nov. 1965, pp.113-114.

10. Howard Hayden: 'Director's Report', Vol.1, Higher Education and Development in South-East Asia, p.57.

11. Pierre Rondiere, Education ... But for Whom? ... and How? Unesco Courier, 23rd Year, Jan. 1970, p.8.

Hayden has suggested that the language difficulty is the most important factor retarding the advancement of educational standards in Asia.(12) Quite apart from the wide variety of indigenous languages spoken in most underdeveloped countries, there is the inescapable necessity to master a European language like English or French in order to advance to secondary or tertiary levels. Moreover, the basic difficulties that most students experience in learning a foreign language are compounded in underdeveloped countries by the poor quality of teaching.

The quality of education is also directly influenced by the way the schools are administered and controlled. Under colonial rule, the government generally established an administrative and legal framework for education but left the setting up and daily running of the schools to private initiative. This system operated well enough when there was limited demand for education but since the emergence of independent states in the late 1950s, the scene has changed radically. Nowadays, governments in most underdeveloped countries have assumed responsibility for the development of education. This in turn has created a problem of who shall administer and control the schools. If education is to be planned and scarce resources are to be used efficiently it is imperative that a government has the ability to initiate and control educational development at all stages, but this may not be compatible with the continued existence of private schooling. The need for an inspectorate to enforce minimum standards of schooling is also essential if the quality of education is to be safeguarded and upgraded. This section of the study also looked into the advantages and disadvantages of centralised as opposed to decentralised control and at the problems created by regional variations in educational provisions.

The section on finance was primarily concerned with the high unit costs imposed by high wastage rates, the problems associated with the recurrent cost structure of education systems, and the particular problems associated with teachers' salaries in relation to other skilled manpower groups and the wage structure generally in underdeveloped countries. As P.H. Coombs has commented, if teachers' salaries do not keep pace with those of other comparable groups then an educational version of "Gresham's Law" goes to work, and the quality of the teaching force deteriorates still further.(13)

The section on public and professional attitudes towards education drew on the colonial legacy and Beeby's work on the causes of professional conservatism in education.(14) Paradoxical though it may seem, it is the education systems in underdeveloped countries which appear to be the most resistant to change. Many people in Africa and Asia still cling tenaciously to the educational ideals of former colonial days. This is reflected in the continued reluctance to abandon traditional academic courses in favour of practical or technical subjects. To go to the city to further one's studies and then return to live in the village is still unthinkable in many countries - it would be an admission of failure. By the same token, as long as society continues to condone a liberal, academic type of education as the principal means to top administrative jobs and the social status that goes with them, people will seek it whatever the arguments advanced in support of alternatives.

12. Op.cit., p.240.

13. Op.cit., p.129.

14. Op.cit., pp.29-47.

This study was made approximately a decade after the Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans were drawn up and adopted. During that time commendable progress was made in expanding educational opportunities in the Afro-Asian region but even as early as the mid sixties international concern was being expressed at the qualitative shortcomings of education in Africa and Asia. In 1965, Asian ministers of education meeting in Bangkok expressed misgivings at the high drop-out rates and shortages of qualified teachers. The trend was continued in 1968 at the fourth Commonwealth Education Conference at Lagos and at the meeting of African ministers of education in Nairobi. The quality of education was also the principal theme at a Unesco-sponsored conference in Paris, in the same year. Finally, a similar concern was voiced at the meeting of Asian ministers of education held at Singapore in 1971. By the early 1970s it was apparent that the Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans had outlived their usefulness. No doubt they had served a useful purpose in the early 1960s in focussing attention on the need for more education but by the early seventies educational planning was entering a new phase in which concern for quality was assuming a new emphasis. The experience of the 1960s demonstrated in unmistakable terms that 'In education more than elsewhere quantity is often the enemy of quality'.(15) Perhaps Guy Hunter best summed up the situation regarding education in underdeveloped countries at the end of the sixties when he stated that it was necessary 'to put a driving belt on the wheel, now beginning to spin wildly'.(16)

In the concluding section of this study a survey was made of various attempts being made in Malaysia, Thailand, Ceylon, India, Laos and Tanzania, to reduce the wastage problem. Many factors are involved in upgrading the quality of education but none is more vital than improving the training of teachers, but this is a difficult and time-consuming process. Moreover, the new subject-centred approach to learning in which the basic aim is to help the child discover the structure of subjects and knowledge for himself imposes new burdens on teachers and makes the task of teaching more sophisticated than previously. In future, teachers will need a much deeper appreciation of both their subject and the pupils they are teaching than was necessary for drilling a class in the rote memorizing of a set of relatively disconnected facts. Furthermore, modern technology may help teachers to do their job more efficiently but it can never replace them and so far there is little positive proof to suggest that new teaching methods can save money. Finally, experience has shown that if educational planning is to be effective the education system must be viewed as an organic whole in which each level and component is intimately related.

A university may be the crown of the educational pyramid but if the imposing concrete buildings of the university rest on rather shaky timber in the high schools, and they again on the flimsiest bushpoles and kunai grass in the villages, the structure will be decidedly unstable.(17)

15. Louis Francois, The Right to Education, Unesco, Paris, 1968, p.39.

16. Guy Hunter, The Best of Two Worlds? - A Challenge on Development Policies in Africa, p.97.

17. Report of the Commission on Higher Education in Papua and New Guinea, Canberra, 1964. p.30