

The Politics of Vocational and Technical Education Curriculum: An Analysis of the Implementation of Vocational and Technical Education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study sought to analyse pre-colonial era system of vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe in contrast with the post-independence period. It defined Curriculum and Politics in educational issues. The paper looked at the hurdles in the implementation of vocational and technical education, citing human interests and attitudes towards vocational and technical education. The study used the interpretivist methodology based on the case study survey design. Open ended in-depth interviews were used to gather data. The study found that there was no real and clear government policy on vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe's education system except in theory and on paper. It concluded that it would take decades and decades before true vocationalisation found its way into the country's education system. The following were the main recommendations: Government should appoint a panel of educationists to formulate policy on vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe. Ministry of Finance should set aside adequate funds to implement vocational and technical education programmes.

Background to the Study

Pre-colonial Era

Before the arrival of the Europeans (whitemen) in Zimbabwe, Africans were socially organised according to tribes and that the traditional indigenous education system was that of learning by seeing and doing. It was more oral than literature intensive, more like a hereditary apprenticeship type of education where education and technical skills would be transferred from generation to generation literally unrecorded. The implementation of such a system would take the format of shared social responsibility passed via various channels such as the nuclear family, the extended family, the clan, the tribe and traditional statutes. According to Nherera (2000), any vocational and technical human preoccupation would included such artisanry as forging,

ironmongering, wood sculpture, stone curving, art and printing, basketry, pottery, architecture and weaving. In 1890, during what has now been dubbed 'The scramble for Africa' Cecil John Rhodes led a group of Europeans called the Pioneer Column – a British South African Company into Zimbabwe, (then Monomotapa Empire) and after the invasion, he named the country Rhodesia. The group proceeded Northwards and arrived at Harare Kopje on 12 September, 1890. The period after 1890 saw more arrivals of white settlers from Europe which was also the introduction of the Western culture among the indigenous people (Hill, 2003).

The Colonial Era

It is important to appreciate the relevance of the period before the country's independence and the type of education system that existed then. The Europeans introduced 'formal' education – the school, which then established itself by its epitomized cultural values. From that time, schooling became very much part of African way of life and difficult to change because of its necessity as the greatest instrument mankind applies for development (Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006). The later colonial administrators in Rhodesia now Zimbabwe believed that indigenous people became critically skeptical about the type of education provided by the missionaries. They felt that African people should be given education which had a practical bias towards such activities as agriculture, carpentry and building to prepare them as labourers. They also believed that the indigenous Africans were not supposed to compete with Europeans. So the missionaries were discouraged, if not barred, from offering Africans education for intellectual development. Yet a serious school curriculum should serve as a reflection of the power struggle which characterises societal diversity. It reflects all the ideology of the ruling elite. According to Taylor and Francis (2006) a national curriculum is a matter of politics, powerful knowledge and regulation of learning. A vocational curriculum can therefore be regarded as a theory of academic and vocational integration connecting learning to the world of work. Integrating academic and vocational education is a better way of educating students and alerting them to the complexities of the world and the nature of the physical, social, political, and economic realities confronting them (Kincheloe, 1995). The colonial education planners during colonial era did not overtly subscribe to this kind of mentality. In modern times when we think of education we consider the whole human being in a holistic manner.

According to Ryan (2012), promoting or forcing one's own political views among people is what is called politics. This view was shared by Zvobgo (1997:9) who argued that "it has to be

understood that education is live politics and is not just about teaching and learning, it is about deciding who controls politics of a class struggle". Just as the situation prevails today, education in the pre-independence era was heavily influenced by racial politics. Therefore politics, as applied in this article, refers to the involvement in vocational and technical skills implementation in the education system in Zimbabwe. For example, the decision on the number and type of vocational and technical training institutions to be constructed and their location as well as the curriculum to be followed are all preserve of political power even in post colonial era. Politics itself can also be generally considered as the overall organisation and development of human life.

During the colonial rule the white settlers introduced two systems of education based on racial social stratification. One system saved the interests of white people while the other saved the interests of the black people. The main objective was to avoid intellectual competition between the white children and black indigenous children. The colonial system allowed black children to be schooled only to a level that would enable them to read and write so that the children could read the instructions of the white masters (Matsika, 2012). The African education curriculum was centred on literacy, religion and industrial subjects which included farming, carpentry, building, metalwork for boys, then dressmaking, cookery and housekeeping for girls (Mungazi, 1982). This culminated in the introduction of vocational and technical education which saw the establishment of Domboshawa Training Centre in 1921 and Tjolotjo in 1922 (Zvobgo, 1996).

In the early 1970s, the Rhodesian government introduced two types of secondary education, the F1 and F2. F1 was meant for the whites and F2 for the blacks. This created a stigma on the F2 system as being that of dull people. It was meant for less able children who could not cope with the rigours of academic work and as a result it was resented by both pupils and teachers. Only the top 12.5% of the black primary school children would proceed to F1 schools. This type of education was established to prepare the Africans for more subservient roles under their European masters (Zvobgo, 1997).

Education in post-colonial era

Zimbabwe attained independence on 18 April, 1980. The new African government embarked on expanding the provision of education and in that process abolished the F2 system of secondary education. This was replaced by the establishment of Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in all the 10 provinces in Zimbabwe. After phasing out the F2 system, the government tried to adopt the philosophy of 'Education for Self Reliance' and called it Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP). This programme had elements of vocational skills as it combined theory and practice in the curricula. Like many other experimental innovations, ZIMFEP slowly drifted towards the conventional curricula and became more and more academic over the years (MoHTE, 2005). This move did not help the situation of stigmatisation either as Zvobgo (1997) put it:

The problem in Zimbabwe today is that the system of education, while purporting to be liberative has remained largely conservative, segregatory and oppressive because of its colonial background. Inequalities still exist in the current education systems. However, these are now rooted in the class structure of society and the unequal distribution of resources to the various regions.

The Zimbabwe Education Act of (1991) made a commitment to move from quantitative to qualitative and relevance in education through the vocationalisation of the curricula. However, apart from the statements and objectives in technical subjects, syllabuses from education officers for technical subjects, there has been no single document that spells out the purpose of technical education in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. This fact was confirmed in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology document (1998), cited in Raftopoulos (2003:4), which acknowledged that:

The absence of comprehensive policy document on education and training has led to periodical political announcements, policy circulars and chief education officers' circulars that are at times confusing the course of direction to the sector.

With mixed messages from statements of objectives in syllabuses, with an emphasis on both general education and skill-oriented technical education, the official purpose of technical education in Zimbabwe is unclear. This issue needs to be debated by all concerned parties, including educators, industrialists, economists, funding agencies and politicians. Lack of consultation from some sections of the society creates resistance during the implementation of

any changes in educational programmes. As a result of the unclear policy on vocational and technical education, Zimbabwe is churning out far too many students at 'O' level whose exam results are not good enough for university entrance and no practical skills acquired during the four years of secondary education. This notion was glaringly demonstrated by the establishment of numerous private schools providing education for the affluent class in Zimbabwe and still religiously following the colonial curriculum and examined by the Cambridge School Examinations Board, avoiding the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC). This unfair practice was described by an article in local paper, *The Zimbabwe Herald*, August 28, 2014 which read:

It's every parent's dream to send one's children to top schools for the best education. The fortunate can afford such schools as Ruzawi Primary School, Hartman House or Barwick School. Some would want to have their children attend private schools like Peter House College, Lomagundi, Gifford and other so called "elite" schools that have been the envy of many Zimbabweans for years with only the well-heeled managing to send their children to these schools, usually underwritten by the parents' employers.



Fig. 1: The Rishworth House College taking shape in Borrowdale's Philadelphia area in Harare.

Source The Zimbabwe Herald (August 28, 2014).

This scenario was also echoed by Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) perspective article of January (2010) which read:

Unfortunately, the post-independence curriculum did not cater for different levels of intelligence, for different talents or for the different ways people can take advantage of opportunities. These differences were ignored – all children were to follow the same curriculum – grades 1-7, forms 1-4, all of it academic. Those who performed very well on their 'O' level exams would proceed to sixth form 'A' level. Vocational and commercial skills training streams were closed in almost all schools. There was nothing in the curriculum that covered civic education or emphasis on practical vocational or technical subjects which would have allowed the children to grow into employable citizens. The rural youth drifted to towns in droves where they joined the ranks of the unemployed.

On the political scene, the (now famous) Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Zimbabwe's system of education produced a report which, among other findings, recommended the vocationalisation of education. The main recommendations of the Nziramasanga report were:

Vocationalisation of education would start at secondary school, Primary and junior secondary school, would bring nine years of compulsory basic education. After Grade 9, all students would be allocated to academic, commercial or vocational and technical streams. In the last two streams more than half the timetable would consist of commercial or technical training. Furthermore, attachments to appropriate companies or other productive units would be included to give pupils a chance to do practical work within the normal curriculum. The curriculum would not be the same for the whole country, but would be changed to fit the particular economic activities of each region. Rural schools would concentrate on those productive sectors in their area – whether agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining etc. The curriculum from pre-school level was to be practical to make pupils productive citizens.

With the persistent closure or collapse of industrial and commercial enterprise, the country naturally dries out of facilities for internship and practical experience.

The idea is for the curriculum to introduce practical activities from as early as pre-school but this could never be achieved. WOZA (2010) aptly posited: "By now providing 'education for all' was too difficult and by publishing the report, government would be publicly admitting guilt and failure. The minister found it easier to hide the report and forget about it".

Fifteen years have gone past and the famous 1999 Nziramasanga report has reincarnated and is very much in the news again. More money has been spent for over a month deliberating on what and how to implement – this is the politics of the curriculum in essence.

According to the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA, 2003) ‘The African Power Elite’ pointed out that:

The last decade and half across Africa has witnessed various processes of transition from single party to military rule and to multi-party forms of politics. This development has, however, tended to prevent scholars from addressing critical questions about elites that exercise and wield political power on the continent and beyond banal generation about (neo) partrimonialism and the post-colony. The challenge of systematically studying the African power elite and the mode by which it governs has become urgent not only because of the conceptual and theoretical dead-ends to which much of the current received wisdom leads, but also because a better understanding of the nature, composition and renewal of the elite is critical to our understanding of the governance of the public sphere.

The above passage is merely to demonstrate that the power elite wield political power and they can dictate or manipulate the curriculum content to suit their class, more so when it comes to the inclusion of vocational and technical education elements in the programme. The colonial mentality on ‘academic pursuit’ for white-collar jobs is still very much the ambition of both students and parents alike. It will take yet a while for this ‘mindset’ to change.

Proposed inclusion of Vocational and Technical Education in the Curriculum

The Deputy Minister of Education in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education recently said:

Starting from January next year (2016), all Ordinary Level students will be required to attend a five month industrial attachment after completing their November examinations. The five-month industrial programme will see the academic calendar for Advanced’ Level students being shortened to 16 months, with Lower Six classes beginning in May instead of March. Those who fail to undergo the five month programme will not proceed either to Advanced Level or any college of tertiary learning as the attachment will conclude Ordinary Level. These developments are part of the curriculum framework that was recently adopted by Cabinet and will

guide the education sector for the next seven years (The Zimbabwe Sunday Mail: 4 October, 2015).

These kinds of pronouncements do not reflect the situating prevailing in Zimbabwe's education system in 2016, and it typifies the non-consultation element in the system. To begin with, there are no funds to finance the proposed attachment programmes. Secondly, there is currently no such industry to attach the vast numbers of 'O' Level graduates. It is common knowledge, and a fact, that the bulk of Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry has wound-up and shut down business due to economic downturn. Therefore one wonders as to which industry the Deputy Minister was referring to for the attachments. This is typical of the confusing utterances by Education Officers and Ministers at various fora which amount to mere rhetoric than reality. Thirdly, there was no readily available manpower for the proposed innovation. This prompted the Director of one of the teachers' unions in Zimbabwe to say:

Lack of consultation and engagement from some sections of the society was likely to create resistance for the blueprint. There was need for intensive training of teachers in both training institutions and those already in the profession. The progress of the new curriculum may be slowed down by human resource capacity in the country. At the moment, teachers are divorced from what is happening and we hear the curriculum is going to be implemented beginning next January (2016). Teachers, both at training institutions and those in the profession are not trained in line with the new curriculum (The Zimbabwe Sunday Mail: 4 October, 2015).

Research Findings

The study found that:

1. There was no clear government policy on vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe.
2. Even the pseudo-policy statements and pronouncements on vocational and technical education often chanted by ministers and their deputies at various fora since 1980 to-date, enjoy no implementation.
3. The now outspoken Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into education and training in Zimbabwe had to be shelved into dusty shelves of hibernation by the ministry's successive ministers for over a decade yet some people are calling for its revival.

4. Vocational and technical education has received lip-service since the attainment of independence.
5. The stigmatisation and stereotyping over the F2 secondary education programme, though still prevalent, is now largely instigated by socio-economic status rather than racial factors.
6. Children of the more affluent social groups are often seen enjoying the luxury of attending the so-called superior private colleges and schools likened to Eton College or Oxford of England.
7. Elitist attitude still haunts the minds of the general populace in Zimbabwe.

Conclusions

The researchers concluded that:

- a) People in Zimbabwe seem not to be bothered much about vocational and technical education as compared to other countries in Africa.
- b) Government ministers seem to enjoy rhetorical pronouncements on policy-making without enforcement strategies.
- c) The Nziramasanga recommendations have been found useful and exploited by other neighbouring states.
- d) The writers, having administered VTCs for over a decade as curriculum officers, feel that the stigmatisation of the F2 secondary education programme which was based on racial grounds during the Rhodesian era still persists, but this time it is based on class stratification within Zimbabwe's populace.
- e) Paradoxically Zimbabwe's education and literacy rate is rated among if not above the very high in the continent.

Recommendations

The following are the major recommendations

- a) There is urgent need for more action-packed approach than words if the vocation and technical aspect of the curriculum is to thrive.

- b) The government, through the ministry of education must extract those valid tenets of the Nziramasanga recommendations and incorporate them into a reviewed curriculum and enforce immediate implementation.
- c) There is need to combat and rout out any remnants of stigmatization and myths among learners and parents regarding attitude towards vocational and technical education.
- d) Curriculum development must focus more on pluralism instead of concentrating on elitism.
- e) The workforce entrusted with responsibility over vocational and technical education in the ministry must be men and women esteemed qualification.

Summary

The study has attempted to analyse the education system followed during colonial era contrasted with modern school of thought. The paper gave chronological events of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and the introduction of western type of vocational education in schools. It defined specific terms used in the text in order to reaffirm the context in which they were applied. The researchers finally listed their findings, made conclusions and gave recommendations to the relevant stakeholders. The paper echoed the sad loss of opportunity when the government failed to implement the Nziramasanga recommendations of 1999.

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