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Devolution and evolution of technical/vocational education curriculum in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
The paper discusses issues related to the requirements and provision in Zimbabwe of technical/vocational curricular as it relates to current political and socio-economic demands. Early technical/vocational education in Zimbabwe developed with a strong religio-political curriculum. After independence in 1980 new political socio-economic issues became determinants of curricular development.

The specific provision of technical/vocational education as it adapts to the world of employment has been analysed. The role technical/vocational education assumes in the economy has been established. Employment opportunities for young people as they leave school have been outlined with Zimbabwe as the case study.

The curricular evolution and devolution over the years has been outlined and analysed. The style of education in the last two years of secondary technical/vocational is described. This paper notes that future technical/vocational curriculum should include, besides design and technology, trade and technical skills, an entrepreneurship training to prepare for employment and the creation of smaller businesses in the easier informal sector of the economy. This should be done without losing sight of the employment opportunities that still lie with the formal industrial sector.

Introduction
Education plays a very crucial role in our everyday life. Education, in general, is the provision and acquisition of basic skills used to adapt and solve everyday problems in life. The majority of our problems in life are socio-economic and in turn relate to the level of development. Development is used here as being a state of better and sustainable style of living measured, roughly, by the national income per person. (Colman and Nixson, 1988) Can education promote development? Many nations have used education as a vehicle for development. Many educational perspectives have been adopted to enhance development. Science and Mathematics education, occupational, vocational, industrial and technical education are current approaches used to try and solve underdevelopment and to promote development.

The inclusion of technical/vocational curricular in general education has been seen by many nations as the vehicle to solve economic and social problems, in other words, the problem of underdevelopment. (Mandebvu, 1994; Patel, 1990; Krieger, 1988; Lauglo and Lillis, 1988). Studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between education and socio-economic development. For this reason many nations have allocated much of their national budgets to education. Zimbabwe gives a handsome percentage of national budget to Education. Education is the largest budget within the 1995-6 national budget with a total of Z$3 666 million an increase of Z$421 million on last years allocation. This total budget is about 13% of the national budget. (The Herald, 28 July 1995)

The balancing of the requirements of general education, vocational/technical and occupational education has been the main problem presented to planners. Cost and points of emphasis have had serious implications in the provision of this essential education. Education, as has been the trend, educates and trains young people for the world of employment. The question is: What will most, if not all, our young people need to be able to do whatever occupation they enter?
The question touches on the very fibre of educational perspectives and economic development. Should Education provide the skills needed in the world of work or skills necessary to further learn skills for work and survival? Trends in the developed world favour a type of education that emphasises the development of qualities rather than specific skills (Mandebvu, 1994; Nicholson, 1988; in Pretorius, 1993). The developing countries tend to have craft-based vocational/technical education curriculum. (Chisman, 1987). The choice education has to take has to do with the realities in their respective worlds.

This paper examines the issues related to the evolution and devolution of technical education curriculum in Zimbabwe. The curricular innovation has to do with how technical/vocational education helps to change the prevailing situation in the country. An attempt will be made to suggest how best technical/vocational education, can alleviate the problem.

**Education and Employment**

The way education and development will be dealt with is that education is a pre-requisite to developing. The premise that education solves socio-economic problems is accepted and that only when people have an education are they then able to use the skills learnt to find employment or to use the skills in anything that enhances development. It is only when people receive earnings that they begin to improve their standard of living thus enhancing development as defined before. Education, employment and employability is then the key emphasis in this paper and Zimbabwean school leavers form the case study.

Today most of our young people on leaving school have high expectations of obtaining employment. This has remained a fantasy for many in both developed and developing world. What has the school to do with this scenario? The school has traditionally been viewed as the training ground for the job market. This has been largely what schools did and because the economies of the countries were small and unsophisticated, the population small and the job aspirations low - those who went to schools obtained paying jobs. Despite the economic and social changes today people still believe and still view education as a means of creating chances for a better life.

Over the years what has been taught in the schools, in most cases, has lagged behind what the school leavers had to do in the real world of work. Commerce and industry has advanced significantly so that schools are now finding it very difficult to keep up. Schools have been tasked to upgrade their curriculum and facilities to meet this challenge. Schools in Zimbabwe are beginning to respond, for example, some schools have started computer courses, technical/vocational colleges are procuring and updating equipment with the help of industrial organisations like Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (ZIMDEF). This trend is typical of the developed world.

Although, it may be true that education increases employability, many school leavers roam the streets with certificates in their pockets. The correlation between education and work is no longer as strong as it was. Most countries then thought that whatever education the school leavers received was the wrong type of education to meet the challenges of the day. Hence vocational, technical and occupational types of curricula became obvious and the most logical choices.

**The Technical/Vocational Curriculum and Employment**

A solution to the wide youth unemployment has to be sought. Many nations have introduced or strengthened vocational/technical subjects in a bid to prepare their young people for employment. Has this worked? In many countries, for example, in the developed world this education has indeed widened the scope of general education but only a few eventually obtain employment. Industry, and politicians have in most cases, blamed the inadequacy of the technical/vocational curricula for the lack of skills necessary for employment. A wide range of courses has been introduced in the curricula to enhance employability of the young. Studies have shown that jobs have been on the decline as industry mechanises and automates. Bad and poor economic strategies have immensely contributed to this malaise. In most third world countries the introduction of economic
reform programmes has had adverse effect on employment. Poor economic investment growth rates have been recorded. In Zimbabwe the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) has resulted in economic hardship and an intriguing scenario.

Technical Education development in Zimbabwe

Early vocational education in Zimbabwe developed with a strong religio-political curriculum. This was deliberate and for obvious reasons (Maravanyika, 1986) Missionaries wanted the black to master the 3Rs so they could do arithmetic and read and write religious and faith materials. The settler government wanted to groom the blacks so they could be educated sub-servants. With time, missionary education was overshadowed by the settler machinery and racial overtones dominated African education. Missionaries advanced a technical/vocational education so that Africans could raise their standard of living, while settlers emphasised academic courses for their children and an academic/vocational for only a few blacks.

Education up to 1980 was racist and elitist. The technical/vocational education was politically controlled so that blacks could not compete with whites (Nherera, 1994). The curriculum was racially and politically determined to dominate the blacks (Zvobgo, 1994). Independence brought with it a whole range of imported and in-house curricular ideas to mix with the relics of colonial practices. There was a deliberate attempt to change the school curriculum; first for social mobility, then for economic ends and now for socio-economic development.

The social emphasis on the school curriculum was aimed at mobilising the people to work with the new socialist government to make the people aware of their social rights and the new social and political order. Little of technical education was emphasised in these early eighties. Then came the socio-economic emphasis. This time economic issues began to influence the course of education. Technical/vocational education was now being emphasised. Technical/vocational programmes and aid for secondary schools were instituted. More technical/vocational colleges were built. The Department of Youth Development and Skills Training, established in the Ministry of National Affairs Employment Creation and Cooperatives (MNAECC), has been given the task of establishing youth training centres to train school leavers in vocational courses (Siddiqui and Matare 1993). The technical/vocational curriculum has been revised and changed continuously to suit the demands of the time.

Today the emphasis is on the creation of employment and the indigenisation of the economy. Creation of employment has been elusive because the formal industrial sector is not expanding but collapsing under ESAP. Indigenisation of the economy is a current thought, that is, that blacks can be part of the nation’s economy. The thinking is that, because historically blacks have been excluded in the national economy and that, in order to be included in the system, they have to start in small and perhaps in informal ways. The informal industrial sector is the refuge for the retrenched and the unemployed youths. This sector of the economy is very large and diverse and run by blacks. By virtue of its size, it is bound to play a very important role in the economy. Can education be used as a tool for change?

In changing and attempting to change the curricular, there has been a personal slant introduced by each individual in a position of influence. Policies have changed with the person. These dynamic changes have a serious implication on general education and more so on technical/vocational education. The devolution and evolution of the curriculum that manifested over the last fourteen years has left education planners and implementors in a crisis. Which way forward?

Historical notes on technical/vocational education in Zimbabwe

Over the years, the government instituted the demise of the colonial F2 secondary school system. Basically the F2 system was a politically determined school for 35% of the 50% black primary school leavers to train on a craft based syllabus in preparation for employment as low skilled workers to service commerce and industry (Zvobgo 1994). The F2 education evolved into a short lived system (NCE) National Certificate of Education examination
which did not survive because politicians rejected it because they felt it was only a name change for the F2 system.

In 1980 Education with Production (EWP) was introduced. It was a programme with a socialist philosophy of polytechnic education by Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)(PF) for refugees in Mozambique. The programme came at a time when school enrolment rose from 1.2 million in 1980 to 2.2 million in 1989 (Mandebvu 1994) The number of schools also increased. The new curricular was to be introduced gradually in schools but because of the many problems that came with rapid development the programme died a natural death. It now survives in a few schools run by the Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP), a non governmental organisation. (Condon 1993) The traditionally ‘O’ level technical/vocational curriculum continued throughout the changes and a new technical/vocational curricular is now grafted into the system. The programme is to complement the existing courses by introducing a pre-vocational craft course National Craft Certificate (NCC) and a National Foundation Certificate (NFC) to run concurrently. These training programmes would introduce entrepreneurship skills training so that if the youths fail to obtain employment in the formal sector, they could set up small businesses as individuals or as co-operative groups in the informal sector. The craft course is geared to develop work skills and attitudes for employment in both formal and informal sectors of the economy.

Technical/Vocational Education and Employment

It is the formal industrial sector of employment by commerce and industry which is what education has traditionally trained for. The informal sector in Zimbabwe is made up of a wide range of small scale, self-employed and low capital businesses. Traditionally education has not trained for this type of work. The practice has been that people retrenched from the formal industrial sector and took their skills into the informal sector. Youths from secondary schools also brought in skills learnt at school. The other form of training that has been informal education is through, say, father to son and on-the-job-training. Curriculum in technical/vocational education is now trying to compromise and to cater for both the formal and the informal industrial sector. Courses in secondary school are trying to incorporate elements of entrepreneurship studies because enterprising skills had been left out in traditional skills training.

Technical Teachers’ colleges are now trying to include business management courses for trainee teachers. Another element is the introduction of an industrial attachment component to training. This helps to link education in the classroom to reality in the work place and expose the trainee to reality. A good example is the new Chinhoyi Technical Teachers’ College and other technical colleges. What brought about this shift?

Zimbabwe adopted an ambitious economic reform programme, ESAP, from the World Bank. The initial impact of this in the past five years was a deregulation of labour laws and an opening up of the economy to local and international competition. The result was massive retrenchments, increasing the unemployment figures and putting pressure on the vulnerable public. The resulting high interest rates about 32% forced companies to close and more and more people went on the streets. When on the street these people and the school leavers, about 250 000 annually, needed to do something to survive (Coclough, et.al. 1990). For the retrenched, a programme was designed to impart skills to then so that they could start small businesses, that is, self employment in the informal sector. This scheme is sponsored by the Ministry of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Co-operatives (MNAECC). The programme included some financial assistance. Some retrenchees have benefited and some have not because of certain problems in the system.

The school leaver and employment

After being exposed to general education and a technical/vocational curriculum students sit for a school leaver certificate (‘O’ level) and a vocational skills certificate (NFC). The technical/vocational certificates ‘O’ and NFC are courses studied at the last two years of secondary education. ‘O’ level is examined by Cambridge University in conjunction with the local Ministry of Education and the NFC is
examined by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO). The ‘O’ level technical studies comprise Metalwork studies, Woodwork studies, Technical Graphics, Agriculture, Building studies and Home Economics. The content in these subjects is both theoretical and holistically practical. The ‘O’ level studies are for example, Building Studies which includes all aspects of construction for a bungalow from soil, foundations to roof, including plumbing and finishes, and these are treated in theory with some aspects in practice. The weighting being 60% theory and 40% practical. Students sit examinations in both theory and practicals (Chinyamunzore, 1989).

The NFC course which runs concurrently with the ‘O’ level studies (in selected schools) also has a theory and practical component. The subjects are not holistic as in ‘O’ level studies but elements have been broken down into trades, for example, in building, the trade includes brick/block laying, plastering, carpentry etc. Students do only one trade in NFC studies. The weighting is practical 60%, and theory, that is associate subjects, 40%. Students take examinations in both. HEXCO gives a certificate of attendance to those who fail to pass NFC.

The lesson structures in both ‘O’ level and NFC courses are almost the same. The average class size is 25 but some schools have up to 35 students per class. The theory lessons are mostly work that relates to the practical work in progress or anticipated. The scientific, mathematical and design aspects of materials, processes and environment are dealt with. The practical work involves application of the theory, matters of safety and the environment. An emphasis on design in ‘O’ level studies is beginning to come in and the syllabuses are currently being revised with this in mind.

The students who do very well in the school leaver courses go on to further education or seek employment using either or both ‘O’ level and NFC certificates. Should the job-seeking fail the youths are being encouraged to form groups according to their skills and interest to start up co-operatives. These informal endeavours are mainly either self-funded or help is sought from Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) or MNECC. They are then left to develop. The technical/vocational education skills would then come in to use forthwith. This is the ideal situation but the ventures have largely failed. Studies show that vast numbers of problems hinder enterprising youths starting a business. Inexperience in running such ventures is one of the problems. Poor funding, bad financial skills, misappropriation of funds and non viability of ventures put most enterprising co-operatives out of business. Over subscription to one venture by many groups in the vicinity and many other problems render co-operatives unprofitable and unworthwhile (Sidding and Matare 1993). How best can education help this problem? Managerial skills are now being incorporated into the school technical/vocational curriculum.

Unemployment in Zimbabwe is a critical issue. Those who attend tertiary institutions and study vocational or occupational courses still find it extremely difficult to find jobs. The economy is shrinking and so finding a suitable job becomes a nightmare for most. The Minister of Higher Education (S. Mudenge) on addressing the University of Zimbabwe academic members of staff (1993) boasted that his ministry was the greatest employer of University of Zimbabwe graduates. Eighty per cent had enlisted as temporary teachers and that most will stay as teachers for the rest of their lives. Graduate engineers are walking the streets today. Again can this be solved by education? Society places a colossal demand on education.

The vast curricular demands create their own problems. Can education train according to the various occupation demands from both the formal and the informal sector? How can this be achieved? One approach taken has been to create and train teachers who can teach the skills which will in turn be used by the students when they leave school, whether for the formal or informal sector. Can teachers take this load?

The teacher/instructor should be able to teach a vocational/technical curricular. In Zimbabwe the technical/vocational course is school based. It is mostly aimed at the mastery of trade and technical skills. The courses are now being laced with a design element because if the job
option is informal these skills and attitudes will be vital because most goods and services rendered are customer specific and mostly ‘one-offs’. Design skills also help when the informal sector grows into medium size industry, for example, manufacturing. Design skills are also very necessary for those who join the formal sector of the economy. Either way youths have to be creative and able to solve problems. The teacher also has to be adaptable and move with trends in industry and commerce. The way forward in curriculum development is for technical/vocational education to include design, experimental technology development, entrepreneurship and specific job skills training. The skills and attitudes incorporated would ensure survival for youths entering this complicated world.

Conclusion
The paper has discussed some of the requirements of general education, vocational and occupational education with reference to the Zimbabwean situation. It has outlined the major trends in technical/vocational education curricular in the past fourteen years since Zimbabwe independence. Key issues here have been that socio-economic factors determine and influence the direction of technical education. The role technical/vocational education takes in trying to solve youth unemployment has been analysed.

Efforts by education to solve unemployment have been thwarted or compromised by the introduction of ESAP and its massive retrenchments and the closure of industries. However, educationists and economists still believe technical/vocational education taught with enterprising skills will see many youths starting small scale businesses and starting to alleviate the problems related to unemployment. The informal sector would also promote the idea of the indigenisation of the Zimbabwean economy.

Whatever and wherever social problems come from, education is looked on as the provider of solutions and the honours is on us, teachers and educationists to provide with the blessing of sound economic undertakings.

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