

Educating and training in an Ideological vacuum: A critical explanation of the dilemma of education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical study on ideology and its indispensable relationship to education policy making and implementation and its didactical dimension with a special reference to Zimbabwe. The paper points out that successive colonial governments and religious organisations of that era established and worked, planned and implemented their policies within the bounds of liberal-cum-capitalist ideological framework. Hence all their education and training institutions were built and meant to fulfill that cause. Post-independent Africa inherited that framework and found herself giving her citizens education that created useless school leavers. This paper will advance an argument that educating and training in an ideological vacuum stifles critical and creative thinking which is the sources and foundation of potential invention and innovation. It therefore calls for Africa to come up with an ideological framework that defines their contextual social, political, and economic condition(s) resulting in crafting policies that are relevant to their needs than repeating tired ideologies.

Key words: Ideology, education, training, vacuum, Zimbabwe, society

1. Orientation and Problem Statement

The world has gone through various poles. During the multipolar world, there were many undocumented ideologies which were at work. The bipolar phase came into picture. This was a moment in human history when two ideologies were fiercely contending with each other; thus capitalism versus socialism / communism. A close look at the historical overview of the trend of influence by ideology in history shows us that each education system was tailored to serve the objectives of the ideology.

1.1 The concept overview

The commonly held working definition for an ideology is that it is a framework of thought that underpins our visions, missions, values, assumptions, purposes, and choices we make. However a bibliographical review shows us that there have been always revisits by various authors in transdisciplinary research. According to Heywood (1999: 145) looking at ideological hegemony, the term and / or concept 'ideology' was coined by Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy in 1786 to refer to the "science of ideas." According to Baradat (2006: 6) De Tracy wanted to use the knowledge he developed from this "science of ideas ... to improve human life;" that is "social and political improvement." Baradat says that the concept of ideology was associated to the idea of politics from onset.

For Goudzwaard (1984: 18) the original sense of the concept ideology meant "an entire system of values, conceptions, convictions, and norms which are used as a set of tools for reaching a single, concrete, all-encompassing societal end." However, Goudzwaard critically points out that in pursuit of reaching that "societal end" an ideology indiscriminately justifies any means even if it causes pain of any description to humankind. Baradat (2006: 8) argues that "ideology is a political term" (although it is employed in other disciplines) – "that consists of a view of the present and a vision of the future." Furthermore, Baradat points out that the future depicted in an ideology is "materialistic improvement" not empowerment. While the former means that whatever is produced out of communal effort is communally owned, the latter means that individuals are given skills and means of production to accumulate wealth. In order to realise the vision of the future, according to Baradat (2006: 8), an ideology is also "action-oriented, [that is] directed towards masses." Baradat concludes that all ideologues [Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Benito Mussolini, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Adolf Hitler] had one thing in common: appealed to the masses for support of their ideas. Therefore it can be deduced that central to all consulted definitions of ideology is that it is a system of beliefs that give explanation to the political and economic conditions of society.

Scrimshaw (1983) identifies five major educational ideologies which together represent over 2000 years of thinking about the nature and meaning of education and training: classic humanism; liberal humanism; progressivism; instrumentalism; and reconstructionism.

Classic humanism maintains a stable society by transmitting society's heritage to students. Over 2000 years ago in ancient Greece, Plato in the *Meno*, developed a view of education as being a way of producing a just and harmonious society made up of rational and reflective individuals. These notions were tied to a hierarchical society with the role of education being to train people to take up their proper roles. People at different levels in the hierarchy would require different curricula with only the rulers needing a full education.

Liberal humanism: the use of the intellectual disciplines in developing individuals and, thus, a fairer and more equal society. In the eighteenth century as, post-Renaissance, the thinkers of the Enlightenment period attempted to envisage a society beyond that controlled by hereditary monarchs, Rousseau advocated a view of society which assumed people to be naturally good but too often corrupted by their social environment. Education was about providing structure, order and discipline to help learners develop into morally mature individuals. The curriculum would be developmental, take account of individual differences. This would, it was thought, produce free thinking, responsible individuals able to play a full part in a democratic society.

Progressivism: meeting individuals' needs and aspirations so as to support their personal growth and strengthen a democratic society. In the early twentieth century Dewey (1915) developed an approach which saw both the above ideologies as problematic. Classical humanism was too teacher centred while Liberal humanism was too student centred. Dewey's vision of democracy as the best way for people to live together in society was for individuals to grow and develop together. Students were encouraged to cooperate and learn from each other as well as from their teachers (Walker and Soltis, 1992). The curriculum was based around active problem solving in a variety of social contexts and people would learn how to think for themselves, make decisions and participate in a democratic society.

Instrumentalism: a curriculum delivering a specific product such as the development of a skilled workforce. Instrumentalism is about a highly skilled and educated workforce that will meet the needs of international competition and values high levels of numeracy and literacy, subjects covering aspects of science and technology and anything that is relevant to achieving this goal. The instrumental curriculum sees knowledge in factual terms and is clearly lecturer/teacher/trainer led. Through this method students are prepared for the workplace and society in general.

Reconstructionism: education to change society. In stark contrast to the other ideologies, reconstructionism sees education as the means of moving society in a particular direction; in effect, as a tool for the state. In many developing countries, some degree of reconstructionism is, perhaps, necessary as they seek to raise the living standards of their population through a largely product-orientated curriculum. However, totalitarian governments have always used education as a means of getting people to serve the interests of those in power and there are numerous past examples including Nazi Germany where the purpose of education is described in Taylor and Richards (1985:21) as being: 'to serve the ends of proletarian politics, not the pursuit of individual goals and aspirations'.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Zimbabwe and southern Africa continue to battle between some form of capitalism and socialism. In fact, currently Africa does not have a home grown ideology. This puts the whole continent on an edge that can lead to failure of anything that is thought of being done in terms of education and training. This has meant an ideological ambivalence, if not an ideological vacuum. The end result is not only inconsistencies, but confusion, talking left, practising right, and so forth. During the colonial era, education policy was underpinned by the monarchical idea of creating gentlemen, ladies, and industrialisation. In the cold war, all socialist / communist countries were aiming at meeting the demands of the ideologies of the day. Apartheid era saw the creation of Bantu education. So what is the ideology that African countries are following now, in particular Zimbabwe and its southern African neighbours? This paper intends to bring more understanding of the situation that has befallen Africa using Zimbabwe as a case study: educating and training where there is an ideological vacuum.

1.3 Statement of Objectives

With the above ideas on definition of ideology, this paper sets out to:

- explore and conceptualise the relationship between education and ideology in Zimbabwe;
- demonstrate that ideological imperatives in education have impact in policy formulation and implementation; and
- evaluate the ambivalent and problematic relationship between the state, education processes and outcomes in education.

Our central argument in this paper is that there is an ideological ambivalence in Africa. This state of affairs has left Zimbabwe in a state of ideological vacuum. In fact, education and training is done without an all-encompassing societal end / vision.

2. Study Methodology

This paper is a case study employing qualitative approaches. The paper is based on historical exploration with critical explanation.

3. The Colonial Era

During the colonial era the dominant ideology was capitalism in which African education was meant to produce servants of the white master. In fact, education in the colonial period was strictly divided on racial grounds with clear demarcation between master and servant (whites and blacks). White children went to government-provided schools for whites, Asian and mixed race “coloured” children were lumped together in different schools, and black Africans attended schools for Africans. It was only in the 1950s, when the mining economy and industrialisation began that Africans began to be educated (Women of Zimbabwe Arise [WOZA], 2010). Government began to build schools for Africans and encouraged missions to develop teacher-training colleges. Emphasis remained on primary schooling, although some missions were now permitted to develop secondary schools to provide the basis for trained teachers, nurses and clerical staff for offices.

Initially government did not invest in African (natives) education. It was left in the hands of missionaries. One of the ways which missionaries conceived to be most effective was to make sure that their converts could refresh their religious knowledge in their homes by reading the bible and other simple books. The missionaries established schools and taught children and adults with no, or little financial assistance from the colonial governments (Muyanda-Mutebi, 1996). They designed their own school curriculum to suit their missionary purposes. Children and adults were taught religion, reading, writing and arithmetic.

One major weakness of the missionary education was that instead of producing educated Africans, it produced educated Christians, who progressively cherished Western culture more than their own (Muyanda-Mutebi, 1996). Avoiding government investment in African education would not be sustainable as colonial capitalism could not survive without native skilled labour. The system was thus forced to invest in native education (meant to produce a docile African who would serve the white master without questioning the prevailing injustice). Thus, gradually the colonial governments got involved into Africans education, but still the curriculum was not meant to produce educated Africans. Instead it was meant to produce servants. Nevertheless, both missionary and colonial government education produced unintended results (questioning the system, resistance, war of independence, etc.).

Meanwhile, schooling for white children was compulsory and free. Boarding schools catered for children growing up on farms and mines. Secondary schools were also streamed by ability into academic and commercial and special technical schools were established for those technically inclined. As government schools were racially integrated by legislation in 1978, “community schools” were allowed to establish fee levels, unfortunately too highly priced for the marginalised majority to afford.

It is important to note that right from the start the successive Rhodesian governments were ambivalent in as far as educating the natives was concerned. In the first place they left everything to missionaries. But missionary education would not meet the demands of the fast growing colonial industry in terms of clerical and semi-skilled jobs. They were thus forced to invest in natives’ education albeit without a clear ideological design; pure capitalism, socialism, or indigenous frameworks (the three competing ideological frameworks of the time). Natives dreams, fictional and academic literature would not go beyond simple criminal, prostitution, traditional barbarian, city dehumanising, clown and amusement stories (see Musingafi, 1999; 1997). In fact the colonial ideology in as far as educating the African (native) was concerned was a mixture of capitalism, colonialism and distorted / maimed African philosophies. This state of affairs was to be inherited and perpetuated by the postcolonial regime (see Musingafi, 1999; 1997).

4. The Post-Colonial Era

Soon after independence the Zimbabwean government wanted to implement radical changes in school curriculum in line with its ideological orientation (Marxism-Leninism / socialism). One of the promises of the liberation war was free primary education and affordable secondary education for all Zimbabweans. And so the immediate goal of the new government after Independence was to open up education opportunities equally for all races. Government also insisted that all must have equal schooling. The vocational secondary schools for Africans all were changed into academic schools and the slower, five-year stream in the white schools for the less able, as well as the commercial and technical programmes, was phased out. Opening secondary schooling for everyone implied an enormous expansion, as well as expansion in teacher training facilities. A new curriculum also had to be developed which reflected a focus on Zimbabwe and Africa and an appreciation of things African.

One of the most dramatic cases of curriculum contestation in the post-independence Zimbabwe is linked to the now defunct Ordinary Level History Syllabus 2166. The process of initiating the syllabus, which began in 1984, resulted in its approval and subsequent implementation in the year 1990. Following the attainment of independence in 1980, many Zimbabwean historians and teachers felt that radical changes were required in the content, teaching and learning methodology, and the assessment of history which, hitherto, had served to sustain the interests of the colonial masters. In line with the government's stated ideological stance then, Marxism-Leninism, the school curricula subject of history was considered a vital instrument for political awareness. It provided a critical arena in which the ideology of the state was to be both projected and contested. From the standpoint of policymakers, history was at the cutting edge of the process of politicising the curriculum content, and its position as a school subject was in part justified on this basis (Muronda, in Chitate, 1998). The new History Syllabus 2166 was an integral part of the liberation process whose origins dates back to the days of the liberation struggle. It was an extension of the Zimbabwe African National Union's (ZANU) education programme, which sought to capture the soul, consciousness and identity of the African people. Designed with a heavy dosage of socialist codes, ideology and doctrine, the new syllabus was to be used as a blueprint for other syllabi formats. The ultimate objective was to replace capitalism in language and in writing with socialism.

The syllabus was designed with a materialist methodology and interpretation of history. It therefore, presented history as a product of class struggle and sought to analyse it in the context of Karl Marx's socio-economic stages of development, notably primitive communalism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism. A dialectical analysis of the production relations, operating at each of the stages, was to feature as a distinct element of the syllabus. Perhaps, the single most innovative aspect of the new syllabus was its skills approach. In giving overt priority to skills objectives, the founders of the History Syllabus 2166 joined in the bandwagon of the 'new' history movement which, according to Harvey, Maxwell and Wilson (1996:77) propounds the view that school history curricula should be designed "... to improve students skills and abilities, rather than just the mastery of historical content." The emphasis on skills development, it was hoped, would result in the development of the critical faculty among students, which would enable them to weigh evidence, detect bias, distinguish between fact and opinion, and draw reasoned conclusions. To this end, pupils had to be exposed to a broad spectrum of resources running from primary to secondary sources. Special value was placed on the use of primary evidence. This was in accordance with the advice proffered by Garvey and Krug (1977:39):

To let pupils examine primary evidence... is to allow them to practise, in an elementary way, the skills that the historian has to use. It is to teach the structure of the subject by making pupils act within it.

It is important to note however, that other than the debate on history and subsequent changes to the history syllabus which came ten years after independence, nothing significant was done to re-coin the education ideological framework. In fact:

- language of instruction remained English;
- those educated in Eastern countries were treated as the other (not educated);
- without a pass in the English language no O level full certificate;
- strong resistance to any innovation in the indigenous language literature set books (see Musingafi, 1997);
- school curriculum and syllabus remained largely the same as in Rhodesia (except of course the coming of History syllabus 266 in the 1990s as discussed above); and
- schools remained divided into A, B, upper-tops, etc without any practical consideration of the student's capabilities.

5. Attempt to Establish an Ideological Framework: The Nziramasanga Commission

By the end of the 1980s it was clear that the existing curriculum had no strong ideological base and was not preparing school leavers for employment. With the coming of the economic structural adjustment programme in the 1990s with the removal of university grants, end of free education at primary school level, exorbitant school fees and the disappearance of adult literacy, things became worse. This resulted in the 1998 appointment of the Nziramasanga commission to report on the state of education and to make recommendations for its future development. A year later the report was presented; it was however, never released to the public, its contents did not become widely known and were never debated.

The Nziramasanga report condemned the state of education in the country. It made bold statements that for the majority of students schooling was irrelevant. Standards of teaching and behaviour in schools had declined

drastically and failure rates were very high. Administration was characterised by incompetence and nepotism, and the entire system was dictatorial, promoting blind obedience and rote learning rather than developing critical and imaginative thinking.

The main recommendation of the Nziramasanga report was a vocationalisation of education starting at secondary school. Primary and junior secondary school would be replaced by nine years of compulsory basic education. After Grade 9, all students would be allocated to academic, commercial or vocational / 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. Teaching methods would have to change to focus on skills, including scientific and critical thinking. The emphasis on examinations would be reduced, with the first national examinations being introduced only at Grade 11.

6. Conclusion

The political ideology of a country underpins and dictates the curriculum in education institution and training for and professional future for the country. Theories are made within a certain socio-economic-political framework to satisfy the ideology of the country. Curricula for education and training institutions are tailored towards the achievement of the prevailing ideological goals. In order to review and develop our own courses as teachers / lecturers, we need to be able to identify these ideologies and have our own opinions about them. This is important because these ideologies include assumptions about learning, teaching, the nature of subject knowledge and how education and training are linked to the wider economic political, moral and social circumstances of the time. This sets the context for making decisions about what to teach, how students learn and how that learning should be assessed.

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