Social Progress and education: Enhancing equality to improve access to and quality of education

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Sources for presentation

Selling Out Education: National Qualifications Frameworks and the Neglect of Knowledge

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Knowledge, Curriculum, and Preparation for Work

Stephanie Allais and Yael Shalem (both at University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa) (Eds.)
Sources for presentation


Overview of argument

1. The relation between 'developed core’ and ‘under-developed periphery’ is key to understanding economic development and shapes the possibility of what education can and can’t do. Much education policy research hides this.

2. Much influential research (eg World Bank) has internal inconsistencies: the push is for increased enrolments and critique of quality, ignoring their own analysis.

3. This research has become increasingly dominated by econometric analysis of large data sets, often with misleading or weak proxies, which could make education more impoverished.

4. In sub-Saharan Africa highly unequal education systems mirror highly unequal labour markets with dysfunctional consequences for the provision of skills for the industrial sector.
“Twenty-five years after Jomtien (Education for All) and 15 years after Dakar (Millennium Development Goals), education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa have expanded beyond recognition, enrolling tens of millions of first-generation learners in the primary grades, extending access to secondary education, and employing millions of newly recruited and trained teachers. ... Net enrollment rates in primary school have risen sharply, from a regional average of 54 percent in 1999 to 78 percent in 2013. ... These trends exemplify the tremendous advances made by Sub-Saharan African countries in expanding primary school participation ...”

Rising education levels

‘... at the start of the 20th century, the majority of the labour force in most of today’s “old” industrialized countries had made the transition out of agriculture, at a time when the coverage of their secondary education was well below that of SSA [sub-Saharan Africa] today.’

‘There are many strategies to make education more attractive, meaningful, and accessible, but the fact remains that millions of students, some in rich countries but mostly in low-income countries, go through school without learning to read and understand a simple text or solve a simple arithmetic problem, or gaining a grasp of very simple scientific facts.’

Africa faces a “severe learning crisis” that undermines economic growth and the well-being of its citizens, according to a new World Bank study. The region has made considerable progress in boosting primary and lower secondary school enrollment, but some 50 million children remain out of school, and most of those who attend school are not acquiring the basic skills necessary for success later in life.

‘Progress at the lower-secondary level has been much slower than at the primary level, and enrollment ratios at this level remain low in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the share of children enrolled in lower-secondary schooling rose from 41 percent in 2000 to 66 percent in 2014.’

‘Three anglo-phone countries—Malawi, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—have universalized primary education but have barely increased lower-secondary coverage over a 15-year period.’

(Bashir et al., 2018, p. 15)
‘Capitalism in the colonies was not a mirror image of capitalism in Europe, but the other side of the imperialist coin’

‘The most profound global income variations correspond to residence and non-residence in the major imperialist countries. Global income divergence is the accumulated effect of the historical and enduring subordination of Africa, Asia, and South and Central America to the requirements of imperialist industry, finance, and commerce.’

(Cope 2019, p. 131)
‘... the share of low- and middle-income countries has grown from 6 percent of participating education systems in the second Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1980 to over 25 percent in the sixth TIMSS in 2015, and from no low- and middle-income countries’ education systems participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 to over one-third of those countries participating in PISA 2015.’

(Bashir et al., 2018, p. 4)
‘Within Sub-Saharan Africa, however, there is little association between a country’s knowledge capital and its subsequent economic growth, although the evidence is limited’ (Bashir et al., 2018, p. 56)

‘In some extreme cases, countries with similar “knowledge capital” as measured in 2000 differed widely from each other in terms of GDP per capita growth over the ensuing 15 years’ (p. 57).
‘Globally, low- and middle-income countries exhibit greater between-school inequality—“academic segregation”—than do high-income countries. This is demonstrated by the share of total variance in student performance that is attributable to school-level variance as opposed to student-level variance.’

(Bashir et al., 2018, p. 81)
Extreme marginalization of TVET in Africa ... 

• with long roots in the history of colonialism and the nature of education systems, economies, and governments which colonial powers established ...

• reinforced by contemporary economies in which small elites are educated through general education, and large numbers of the workforce are either in survivalist work or unemployment.

• Academic education remains the general aspiration of those in education, even when the academic education that they are in is very weak, and even when employers require specific skills.
Year 1 enrollments 3 730 535 learners

Grade 5 completion (53.5% survival, of which 82% complete grade 5)

Grade 8 (30% write exam, 28% pass)

Grade 10 24% enroll; 70% pass

Grade 12 8.4%

Total university 731 602 FTEs

TVET total 302 083

Year 1 enrollments—just under a million learners

Basic education (year 9) completion (about 50 000 fewer than year one)

Year 12 enrollment (about 700 000)

About 450 000 pass final year 12 exams

100 000 university degree

Total university 731 602 FTEs

TVET total FTE 182 836

Your household income: **R 59 000,00**
People in your household: **1**
Your per capita income: **R 59 000,00**

To learn about other South African households, hover your mouse over the individual bars to find out what the incomes are at different points on the bar graph.

http://www.saldr.uct.ac.za/income-comparison-tool/
A highly unequal labour market has perverse effects on skill formation

- Extreme inequality in the labour market, and the history of how it has related with the education system since colonial days, creates a vicious cycle that works against the development of technical skills required by the labour market.

- Educational arms races have a particularly detrimental effect in economies with only a very small percentage of good, well-paying, protected jobs.

- More unequal labour markets undermine TVET provision.
In sum

• The over-focus on education as the solution to economic problems abstracted from the crisis of poverty and inequality in which the global South is expanding educational access, together with the recent focus on policy actions informed by analysis large data sets, is likely to undermine the possibility of building education systems which achieve the desired normative goals for education in Africa, and many other countries of the global South.