

The Quality of Education
in Developing Countries

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economist, as we have seen, came into the field just at the moment when the world's educational problems were predominantly numerical ones, and, since his professional instruments were devised to deal with just this kind of situation, he immediately felt at home. It would be quite unfair to imply that the economist has no interest in the quality of education. As parent and citizen he is no less concerned with quality of schooling than is the educator, and, even in his professional capacity, he has no wish to ignore it, though he may find it difficult to manipulate if it cannot be measured.¹ It is natural that, in his probings into education, the economist should ask the kinds of question an economist can answer. They are mostly questions of quantity, and because of his training and detachment, he feels no discomfort in discussing them in purely quantitative terms. Despite a haunting sense of unreality in a familiar world, the educator has tended to go along with the economist, and has refrained, too long I think, from asking the kinds of question about planning that only an educator can answer. Experience has taught him that quality is of the very essence of most educational problems, and he will become increasingly unhappy in the new partnership unless questions of quality play a bigger part in discussions of educational planning than they have done in the past. Fortunately, there are signs that both sides are becoming aware that it is neither theoretically nor practically possible to separate quality and quantity in attacking the educational problems of emergent countries.

Pupil wastage is a case in point. Wastages of the magnitude described in Chapter I are clearly of major significance to the

¹ John Vaizey expresses this well in the introduction to *The Economics of Education*: "I have tried as well to satisfy the plea to pay attention to the 'immeasurable' benefits of education, though I must confess to an instinctive conviction that what cannot be measured may not exist" (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 14. Some of the qualitative products of education can, of course, be measured (they are the main concern of this book), but others, and not the least important, still elude us.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIST AND EDUCATOR

THE NEED TO ADVISE developing countries on the planning of their educational systems has brought together two professions which, until recently, have eyed each other with suspicion from afar, as befitted the representatives (according to choice) of Mammon and of God, of "hard" and of "soft" social philosophies. For the most part, the economist and the educator have hitherto shared neither basic assumptions nor immediate aims, neither their vocabularies, nor, with the exception of some statistical method, their techniques. Now, with little practical experience of working together on even simple tasks, they find themselves joined in a partnership to attack one of the most complicated of all social problems, the planning of a country's whole educational system as an integral part of its economy. Up to now, the partnership has worked unexpectedly smoothly, due in part to the economic sophistication of the small groups of professional educators directly involved, and in part to the fact that the great majority of experienced educational administrators in developed countries have been by-passed by the new planning movement and have felt no call to claim a place in it. The cooperation at both the theoretical and the professional levels, though friendly, has been relatively superficial, and the new partnership remains brittle and uneasy.

There would seem to be two reasons for this. In the first place, it is the economist who has just discovered education, and not the educator who has discovered economics. The

planner, either economist or educator. Whether he be forecasting the supply of educated manpower or the school enrollments and consequent costs over a long planning period, he must either accept the present slow rate of flow through the schools as his basis, or arbitrarily choose a different one. For lack of any firm alternative, some manpower specialists will fix on the existing rate, though few, perhaps, would be as fatalistic about it as John Vaizey might appear to be when he says, "... there are relations almost mathematically determined between one level of education and another. For example, of every hundred children who go into a primary school, it is possible to predict, with more or less accuracy, how many graduates will emerge. Therefore, if you want X graduates, you will be able to argue back to the level of primary school places."² In a sense this is true, but no one, least of all an economist, would suggest in practice that, if you wanted to double the number of college graduates, you would double the number of primary school entrants regardless of the vast wastage "en route." The alternative open to the planner is less absurd but more uncertain. He must assume that, within his planning period, the rate of flow through the schools will improve by a fixed percentage,³ but, while he remains at the

² John Vaizey, "The Role of Education in Economic Development," in Herbert S. Parnes, ed., *Planning Education for Economic and Social Development*, OECD Mediterranean Regional Project (Paris, 1963), p. 47.

³ UNESCO took this line in a paper prepared for the meeting of Ministers of Education participating in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan. One of its purposes was to set up a 20-year target for Tropical Africa in the form of an educational pyramid. After referring to the fact, already quoted, that only 40 percent of the entrants ever complete a primary school course, it went on to say, "It is assumed that intensive efforts would be made and that this wastage would be greatly reduced. It is thus anticipated that out of every 100 children who enter the primary school, 80 children will finally complete the primary course." "Current Educational Budgeting in Relation to the Goals of Addis Ababa," UNESCO/ED/MIN/IV (Paris, March 1962) p. 3. The second stage of the pyramid was built by taking a percentage of these primary graduates as entrants to second-level institutions. There can be no objection to the use of such figures for statistical purposes so long as their purely hypothetical character is made clear.

purely quantitative level, this is a mere guess. He cannot know the chances of reducing the high rate of wastage until he understands its causes. A prime cause in most cases is almost certainly the poor quality of the work. It is here that the educator will naturally come into his own as an equal member of the team, for he is the competent authority on the quality of the work, at least as the term is commonly understood in the classroom.

There is, however, a second, and perhaps more serious, barrier to the full cooperation of educator and economist in educational planning; neither has yet learned fully to trust the judgment of the other even when he is operating within his own proper field of competence. This is not surprising. The two fields are near enough together to lack the enchantment of distance but too far apart for either profession easily to appreciate the technical complexities with which the other is struggling. Each sees the other's problems as simpler than they really are. Without the mutual confidence that comes from having worked together for a long period, the educator and the economist have managed to run on roughly parallel lines in the field of educational planning, but there is little sign as yet of the mingling of their disciplines in a joint attack on a common problem.

This shows clearly when they find themselves facing together the intractable problem of a country that needs more schools to lift its economy, and a better economy to afford new schools. Neither economist nor educator can envisage a solution within the field in which he is an expert, and so each turns to the other to produce the rabbit from the hat. The educator still continues secretly to believe that, if the economist really set his mind to it, he could find some hidden source of funds for a purpose so obviously essential as education. This, it will be recalled, was roughly the attitude of the Ashby Commission, which reported on the state of education in

Nigeria in 1960.⁴ The economist, on the other hand, while maintaining that his primary interest is not in cutting expenditure on education but in getting the best value for the money spent, strongly suspects that, if the educators could only drop their innate conservatism and come into the twentieth century, they could develop a new "educational technology" that would raise the productivity of the schools and produce better results with little or no rise in costs.

There is some justification from past experience for both points of view. The Ashby Report actually did get more money for education, and most educational administrators can remember occasions, when, by digging in their toes, they wrung a few more dollars from an allegedly empty treasury chest. When a secretary of treasury says firmly that x million dollars is the absolute limit that a country can afford to spend on education, or an economist, more cautiously, advises y million as the optimal expenditure, each is well aware that his decision is based on a series of value judgments that could be challenged on other than economic grounds. Similarly, a per-spicious economist, or a management consultant under his direction, could be relied on to find in any school system some waste of funds and some places where modern techniques merit more consideration than they are currently being given.

In an administrative system dependent on checks and balances, it is right that members of the two professions should jolt each other out of a too facile acceptance of the status quo in areas near their common frontier, but there is a limit to this friendly mistrust when they are called upon to give joint advice to a country other than their own. As economist and

⁴ "We could have approached this task by calculating what the country can afford to spend on education, and by proposing cautious, modest, and reasonable ways in which the educational system might be improved within the limits of the budget. We have unanimously rejected this approach to our task." *Investment in Education* [Ashby report] (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education, 1960), p. 3. Although the commission had a distinguished economist as consultant, this statement still smacks of the educator rather than the economist.

educator move more deeply into each other's territory, a point arrives where each must be prepared to accept the other's professional judgment that a particular proposal is, or is not, feasible at a given cost and within a given time. This they will do only when they have a common understanding (if not a common acceptance) of the fundamental assumptions on which such judgments are based, and when each has a more profound appreciation than he has at present of the other's professional problems. This mutual understanding is most likely to come about as a result of years of joint work on specific problems in emergent countries, but it might still be useful for the economist and educator to explain to each other in more general terms the peculiar difficulties they face in their own fields of planning. This will not be easy, for educational planning is at that awkward stage where individual problems cannot be seen clearly for the lack of a coherent body of theory while nearly all generalizations are suspect because conditions vary so greatly from country to country and from one stage of development to another.

Over the past six or seven years the economists have been much more effective than the educators in expounding their views on educational planning, and any educator who takes the trouble to master the "input-output" vocabulary⁵ and read the literature can get a fair idea of their current attitudes toward such problems as the limits of educational expenditure in emergent countries and the need for improvements in the productivity of the schools. With one or two partial exceptions, I am not aware of any comparable effort by educators either to question some of the economists' assumptions or to explain

⁵ Input-output analysis "seeks to determine what can be produced, and the quantity of each intermediate product which must be used up in the production process, given the quantities of available resources and the state of technology." William J. Baumol, *Economic Theory and Systems Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 299. The educator anxious to meet the economist on his own ground could do worse than to refer to this book, particularly chapter 15.

the peculiar difficulties involved in the reform of an undeveloped school system. One could begin this explanation almost anywhere, but, as an educator, I find it easiest—and safest—to begin at the point where the economists have penetrated most deeply into our territory, to the door of the classroom itself. My purpose is not to embark on a general apologia for the teaching profession but to examine briefly (and I hope not too defensively) one of the commonest criticisms made by economists, that the sheer conservatism of educators and educational systems is one of the barriers to both educational and economic progress in many emergent countries. The point is not whether educational systems are conservative—no school administrator who has tried to introduce reforms could have doubts on the question—but whether they are needlessly conservative. How far is resistance to change due to conservatism for its own sake and how far is it inherent in the very nature of teaching and learning within a school system?

THE ECONOMISTS' COMPLAINT

It would be well to let the economists speak for themselves:

We would mention here two additional factors that, in our opinion, act to retard technical change in education. . . . First, education in general—elementary, secondary, and higher—appears to be quite tradition-bound in methods of instruction and in views toward methods of instruction. In short, there are psychological barriers to change.⁶

For this great industry, education, is basically one of our most conservative industries, not with respect to the affairs of the rest of society, but with respect to its own affairs—its curricula, its salary structure, its folklore. Projections such as Professor Tinbergen's have the effect of shocking us all into a recognition that perhaps we need

⁶ Charles S. Benson, *The Economics of Public Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 469.

as radical approach in education as we have been willing to take in other fields.⁷

. . . one of these [fallacious policy conclusions] is that education is what it always has been and will always remain, that is to say, there is a built-in opposition to change which reinforces the traditionalism of educational systems since one of their main purposes is, in any case, to hand on the tradition . . . I would feel, then, that one of the major tasks of the economist coming into education is to lay emphasis on the importance of developing new techniques in education.⁸

Frederick Harbison presented this theme most strikingly in 1961, at a conference on aid to developing countries:

It is unquestionably true that the cost of primary education must be kept down, otherwise it will consume most of the resources which are more urgently needed for secondary and higher education Consequently developing countries should concentrate their attention on finding new techniques of education which can be utilized effectively by large numbers of teachers who themselves have had little more than a primary education and which can maximize the strategic services of a very small group of more highly trained personnel. The application of new teaching techniques—visual aids, programmed learning, instruction by radio and television, revised and simplified curricula and texts—offer a real challenge both to the developing countries and the assisting countries. The discovery of new techniques for primary education will be given much more serious consideration once it is understood by politicians, planners, educators and outside experts alike that under conditions of accelerated growth it will be impossible to raise substantially either the pay or the qualifications of teachers in the near future.⁹

⁷ Philip H. Coombs, speaking as chairman of the *Policy Conference on Economic Growth and Investment in Education: III The Challenge of Aid to Newly Developing Countries* (Paris: OECD, 1962), p. 87. The reference to Tinbergen is to a paper included in the same report: J. Tinbergen and H. C. Bos, "The Global Demand for Higher and Secondary Education in the Underdeveloped Countries in the Next Decade," p. 71.

⁸ John Vaizey, "The Role of Education in Economic Development," p. 43.
⁹ Frederick H. Harbison, "The Strategy of Human Resource Development in Modernizing Economies," in *Policy Conference on Economic Growth and Investment in Education*, p. 25.

But, he adds rather sadly, "Those who are accustomed to traditional methods of elementary education are suspicious of new techniques." Writing again, in 1964, after further experience in the field, Harbison, with C. A. Myers, reiterates the point with regard to "underdeveloped" and "partially-developed" countries (levels I and II of his four-fold classification of stages of development): "The basic problem, then, is to find new technologies of primary education which can be utilized effectively by low-paid, poorly educated, and unqualified teachers."¹⁰

ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

In charging educators with conservatism the economists tell us nothing we did not already know, but they do drive us to analyze in greater depth the causes for the conservatism. What we are concerned with here is essentially an examination of our own professional conscience rather than a debate with a sister profession. If it be true that our sheer reluctance to change threatens to slow down the development of some emergent countries, we owe it to them to amend our ways; in so far as rapid change is impossible, we owe it to ourselves to explain why. But it helps to begin with questions set by outsiders, which is the value of the economists' comments quoted above. Professor Harbison's statement is particularly useful as a jumping-off point. In returning to it again and again in the chapters that follow, I may give a casual suggestion more weight than he ever intended it to have, but it is a point of view that is now commonly expressed by other economists and by some educators. Above all, it does raise questions that are concrete and specific enough to demand an equally

¹⁰ Frederick H. Harbison and C. A. Myers, *Education, Manpower and Economic Growth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 98.

specific reply, and, at the same time, brings to focus principles and conflicting theories that may be more important than the practical suggestion he makes.

At the concrete and practical level two obvious questions present themselves. Are Harbison's suggestions for improving the quality of primary education by new techniques, without increasing the cost, in fact feasible? If so, why have they not been applied, or at least strongly advocated, by more educators? Neither question can be answered without a closer examination of what we mean by feasible. A particular educational technique may fail to be introduced into an area for any of several reasons:

- (1) because the teachers do not know about it,
- (2) because the necessary equipment and materials are not available or cost too much to install or maintain,
- (3) because the pupils in the area do not respond to this particular technique,
- (4) because the technique calls for knowledge, understanding, or other qualities that the bulk of the teachers in the area just do not possess,
- (5) because teachers and educational administrators are simply conservative and suspicious of new techniques.

With the exception of the first, we know little enough about any of these reasons, but it is the fourth that is most commonly overlooked. We are inclined to assume that, if a pilot project shows that selected teachers can use the technique successfully with sample classes in any area, one can safely plan for making the practice universal. Any opposition can then be attributed to the fifth of the reasons, sheer conservatism. Yet every administrator knows that it is just at this point, where a practice has to spread from the few to the many, that his real problems usually begin. Children are much more adaptable

than are those who teach them. J. S. Bruner has taken as a working hypothesis "that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child."¹¹ There is now some basis for his hypothesis, but, administratively speaking, the vital question is, "Can it be taught *by any teacher?*" As new methods percolate down from the liveliest teachers in a system to those in the average or below-average brackets, misunderstanding, incapacity, and simple dreariness can kill the living spark on which success depends.

If, as Harbison suggests, emergent countries will have to rely on the services of a high proportion of "low-paid, poorly educated, and unqualified" teachers, it is important to know if their failure to use techniques we offer them is due to the fact that they do not want to apply them, or that they cannot. If simple conservatism is all we have to contend with, we should be able to devise ways of circumventing it, but, if these new techniques call for knowledge, understanding, or qualities that the average teacher does not possess, the remedy may be tedious and expensive, involving better education, higher qualifications, and consequently higher pay for the service as a whole. Hence the need for a closer analysis of the nature and causes of educational conservatism. The kind of advice we give to the government of a developing country will depend in some measure on the degree to which we judge the conservatism of its teachers to be unjustifiable.

¹¹ Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 33.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATIONAL CONSERVATISM

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAUSES

ONE MUST BEGIN by admitting that education systems are, by nature, conservative. As Adam Curle has said, ". . . in most societies for most of recorded time, education has been a reactionary force rather than a progressive one. Education, often closely associated with religion, has tended rather to hallow antiquity than to promote innovation."¹ Sometimes, after major political or social revolutions, education has been deliberately used to break ancient molds, and frequently the mere spread of education has slowly eroded old systems of values, but most societies have been suspicious of experiments with their children's education, and few more so than those in the emergent and ex-colonial countries.

Parents in these countries often have a clear idea of what constitutes education; it is the kind of academic schooling their European rulers had, which has been handed on to them, perhaps in a watered-down form, through the schools of the missions or of the state. However unfitted it might be to the life of the primitive village or farm, this was the type of education that evidently gave the European his material superiority and that offered the local boy a hope of release from the poverty

¹ Adam Curle, "Education, Politics, and Development," *Comparative Education Review* 8:33 (February 1964).