Comparison of VET approaches through history, with a particular focus on Africa

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Abstract

This chapter seeks to capture the rich variety of approaches to VET through a whole series of different lenses as well as through the author's writings on VET over 50 years. The historical periodisation of VET, right back into the colonial period, is a crucial first lens. The notion that VET was particularly appropriate for specific groups of people was evident in different colonial regimes. Thereafter, development cooperation agencies pursued many different policies on VET, and these changed markedly over time. Because of VET's close linkage with work and employment, there have been many priorities for VET that have reflected political concerns with VET's possible role in dealing with the threat of educated unemployment. These would include the connection between VET and the informal sector of the economy. Somewhat in parallel, there was widespread policy interest in the link between non-formal education and VET. The awareness of the relevance of skills beyond formal education and training led to the adoption in many quarters of the wider term, skills development. The actual terminology for varieties of VET or skills development has proved hugely important to the way that these fields were captured in the major international agreements about support to education world-wide. Equally, it has been vital to tease out VET's connections with science and technology, enterprise development and educational planning. Despite these crucial connections to the labour market, both formal and informal, VET remains a poor relation in many major series on educational planning and on comparative education.

1 Introduction

One approach to comparison is to explore how methods and discourses concerning vocational education and training (VET) have altered over the past fifty years. Arguably there have been major shifts in the lenses for examining VET both in

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developing and industrialised countries, and in the development cooperation approaches that have often connected the two. In many ways, VET has had a very special history, making it rather different from other education sectors such as secondary or higher. Because of its close connections with employment and the world of work, there have been more politics around VET priorities and approaches than with education more generally. This has been particularly evident in the aid policies which at different times have paid a good deal of attention to the role and potential of VET in developing economies.

With the discovery of the informal sector of the economy in the early 1970s, there was a recognition that skills development could lead to different forms of self-employment, thus reducing the alleged political dangers of educated unemployment. It was also recognised that there were forms of apprenticeship within the informal sector of the economy, and that these operated in ways that were often very different from apprenticeship in the formal economies, either of the developing or more developed worlds. With the rise of interest in world-wide education policies from the time of the World Conference on Education for All, in 1990, there was a natural concern with the positioning of VET in such priorities, as well as in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Global Monitoring Reports, and in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The author was involved in the analysis of many of these critical VET developments over the past five decades. This provides for a longitudinal comparison around VET, and particularly in the theatre of development cooperation. During this period, the terminology of VET also changed, as it had done in earlier decades. Thus, what had been called industrial education changed to technical or vocational, and also to diversified education. Technical vocational education and training (TVET) became widespread along with vocational education and training (VET), especially within Europe. But the term, skills development, captured a wider segment of preparation for work, and in some situations, technical vocational skills development (TVSD) became the preferred term. Interestingly, in the final text of the SDGs, the following is used with the vital link to work: "…relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship" (UN 2015, p. 28).

2 The era of industrial education in the United States and Africa

The first education commissions to advise on the character and priorities of education and training in Sub-Saharan Africa drew their principal insights from the American South. These Phelps-Stokes Reports had judged that just as industrial education was their clear preference for the blacks of the Southern States of the USA, so too was their priority for Sub-Saharan Africa, where the two Commis-

sions reported in 1922 and 1925 (Jones 1922; 1925). The proposals around industrial education for blacks were linked to the traditions of Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute and were in opposition to the policies of W.E.B. Dubois who argued the critical need for there to be college education for young blacks. Transferring this political debate from the Southern States to Africa was the work of these education commissions, and understandably it was received warmly within the colonial regimes of the time. Government officials and missionary societies in Africa visited Tuskegee Institute in large numbers over the 1920s and early 1930s and brought back their insights to the developing education systems of their countries. It was an early example of what would later be called policy borrowing or policy transfer. But it was also a highly charged illustration of the political nature of industrial education, and especially so in the white settlement countries of Kenya, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The notion of the suitability of industrial education for the young people in such societies was in fact deeply contested (King 1971; 2016b).

The views about the particular suitability of industrial and agricultural education for the developing societies of Africa were very far from being accepted universally across the continent. Academic secondary schools were established in small numbers in many territories including in South Africa, Kenya and the Gold Coast (now Ghana), and there were the beginnings of university colleges, particularly in Anglophone Africa. But even at independence many decades later, industrial and practical education was still a compulsory element in many school curricula.

3 Technical and vocational education and training: A donor priority

Although several of these colonial curricula, along with industrial education, were abandoned at Independence, several of the key development agencies to which countries turned for assistance, and especially for the expansion of secondary education, found that agencies from the Ford Foundation, to the World Bank to Swedish Sida and Germany's GTZ (now GIZ) considered some version of VET to be critical in planning for a modern society. The World Bank, for instance, from its first education grant for secondary education in 1963 until 1979 felt that the curriculum for secondary should be 'diversified' towards agricultural, technical and commercial subjects. Famously, the Bank in its education sector working paper argued:

> This (general secondary) education is dysfunctional for most types of employment — wage or non-wage — and for playing other roles needed in a developing society…. Emphasis on vocational and technical schools and centres, and attempts to 'vocation-

> alise' the curricula of academic schools are illustrations of attempts to achieve such an orientation. (World Bank 1974, pp. 21–22)

With the build-up of research capacity in the World Bank in the late 1970s, opinion began to shift, and even if the diversified secondary school continued to be supported, the Bank's 1980 education sector policy was already acknowledging that the "diversified secondary school is a questionable method for training large numbers in specific vocational skills" (King 2003; World Bank 1980, p. 45).

Even though the World Bank had terminated its support to this version of diversification by 1980, it had by no means been the only type of VET being offered to the newly independent nations of the world over these almost twenty years. Often within the same country like Kenya, there could be several distinct donor-supported models being supported, including Swedish support to practical subjects in academic secondary schools (Lauglo 1985).

The sheer range of what was on offer in versions of VET through donor support in the different regions of the world is captured to an extent in King's chapter "Technical and vocational education and training: A donor priority" in his *Aid and education in the developing world* (King 1991b). Several aid agencies, including SIDA, GTZ and the U.K.'s Overseas Development Administration, had separate departments dealing with technical and vocational education, and many increasingly carried out reviews of their work in the field, notably Swedish SIDA with its review of *Vocationalising education* (Lauglo and Lillis 1988).

Over this whole period, the World Bank's influence across the education sectors and across regions was becoming much more marked; so, the publication of its key policy document on VET, in 1991, just a year after the World Conference on Education for All, was a milestone. The first page of its executive summary underlined that there was a key role for the private sector when it came to skills development: *"*Training in the private sector — by private employers and in private training institutions — can be the most effective and efficient way to develop the skills of the work force" (World Bank 1991, p. 7).

The text continued with an acknowledgement that the private sector was alive and well in the informal sector of the economy: "Even the very small unregulated enterprises of the rural and urban informal sectors can provide training needed for existing technologies and production practices" (World Bank 1991, p. 7).

4 The discovery of the informal sector: Implications for training and historical comparison

Twenty years earlier, in 1971, the term 'informal sector' had been first used, and had been internationalised in the ILO's mission to Kenya which had resulted in

Employment, incomes and equality: A strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya (ILO 1972). As it happened I had gone to Kenya in July 1972 to work on the new post-secondary technical institutes, and by chance came across some of the earliest of Kenya's indigenous machine-makers on some waste land in Nairobi. It was the beginning of more than twenty years of documenting Kenya's informal sector, and in particular the place of training and apprenticeship within this newly expanding form of employment.

The discovery of a different kind of apprenticeship in Kenya from what was well-known in the great apprenticeship nations of Switzerland, Germany and Austria, and from what Callaway had found in Nigeria, and had termed *Nigeria's indigenous education: The apprenticeship system* (Callaway 1964), underlined the importance of the comparative dimension in understanding training systems (King 1977). This encouraged me to look at different understandings of apprenticeship, whether in the U.K., in Sierra Leone, or in India (King 1976; 1991a; 2012a). The very different cultures of work, roles of trade unions, and attitudes to formal vocational qualifications meant that 'learning on the job' meant very different things in different work environment. In many situations, in developing countries, there is a formal apprenticeship system, often very small and organised with the larger international firms, and there is a very much larger apprenticeship system, organised informally, both within the formal sector labour market and within the informal sector. In countries, such as Kenya, where there are international firms, local Indian firms, and African firms, there may be as many as three different systems of learning on the job co-existing, but also influencing each other.

Comparison is not just about looking at different versions of what may sound like the same phenomenon occurring in different work environments. It is also about examining change over time within a particular system of learning and working. Hence, historical depth is invaluable.

This is one reason why I chose to revisit Kenya's informal sector twenty years after I had first carried out research there (King 1977; 1996). It proved possible to meet with many of the small-scale operators I had studied earlier, but also to review how the changing political and policy environment had impacted on the sector between 1972 and 1995. Certainly, this kind of 'tracer' study can prove invaluable for understanding change over time.

The historical lens is invaluable in this kind of comparison, but it is also important to try and understand what I termed the 'prehistory' of the informal sector in the case of Kenya. Where had it come from? What had been the influence of different waves of settlers? What had been the influence of the colonial government? (King 1996). Taking stock does not need to be only backward-looking. Ideally, it is also worth looking forward and examining how informality has become widespread, well beyond the informal sector. The process of 'eating from one's

job' in the sense of corruption is just one illustration of how the informality admired by the ILO in its Kenya Report can begin to have very negative dimensions (King 2001).

One further example of the value of historical comparison with a link to self-employment can be taken from one of the best known articles in the field of comparative and international education: "The vocational school fallacy in development planning" by Philip Foster. It proved possible 40 years after its publication to ask some of the same survey questions used by Foster, in the same country, Ghana, and in some of the same schools. The results cast some new light on Foster's powerful claim that children's aspirations were influenced by their perceptions of the opportunities in the formal sector of the economy and not by the curricular orientations of the schools. The original article had been influential in changing World Bank views about the impact of diversified secondary schools. But the new research seemed to suggest that there might be a curriculum effect after all. And in particular the schools did seem to encourage forms of entrepreneurial self-employment (King and Martin 2002).

5 VET's natural policy connections – a) Nonformal education & skills development

If history is a crucially important methodological dimension of VET, there are several other lenses that have been found to be creative in approaching VET in a comparative way. One of these has been the potential link between VET and nonformal education (NFE). NFE emerged in 1969 as a term that covered a whole range of organised learning and training activities taking place outside the traditional confines of formal primary, secondary and tertiary education. Its progenitor was Philip Coombs, the creative first director of the International Institute for Educational Planning. It appeared just two years before the term informal sector was coined, and the two domains had some common characteristics, as they pointed to worlds of work and world of education and training that lay beyond the formal sector of the economy and the formal sectors of education.

One of the first publications to make an explicit connection between the parallel domains of the informal sector and nonformal education was *The African artisan* (King 1977, pp. 1–45). In outlining the nonformal option, it was argued that it offered 'a skill to live by…': "Hence the interest of nonformal enthusiasts has been directed towards indigenous apprenticeship systems, on-the-job training, and particularly to innovative methods of acquiring skill in institutions that are not too institutionalised" (King 1977, p. 4). When sketching out the range of research on NFE supported by the donor community, it was noted that amongst the main areas where NFE had been recognised as relevant was in "its ability to assist with

skill development and productivity for the many who had not got a school diploma to help them" (King, 1991b, p. 165).

Conceptually, the term 'skills development' proved valuable since it suggested that there was, like NFE, a world of skills outside the limits of the formal technical and vocational institutions. The term had been used also in 1991 by the World Bank's *Vocational and technical education and training* policy paper, but none of the articles in its long bibliography used the term. It was therefore a relatively new term in 1991, but it proved a natural development from the wide circumference of NFE, and, importantly, it used the word skills rather than education. Thus, when the intention was to indicate the range of providers and locations of technical and vocational education and training, the term skills development proved attractive, at least in English. When King and Palmer did their *Fundamental in educational planning*, they chose a title which married the more formal and less formal dimensions of VET: *Planning of technical and vocational skills development* (King and Palmer 2010).[2]

6 VET's natural policy connections – b) Science and technology

At one level VET is often seen to be a different silo than science and technology. Thus India's Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are a world away from the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). But the creation of local technological capacity is bound to draw upon traditions of skills development as well as upon science and technology via the formal school system. Some of these interactions between skills, knowledge and capacity were teased out in King's "Science, technology and education in the development of indigenous technological capability" in *Technological capability in the third world* (King 1984). The centrality of science and maths in skills development is also underlined by the many varieties of dual systems of vocational training and apprenticeship.

7 VET's natural policy connections – c) Educational planning

Too often educational planning has been concerned with school, college and university education and insufficient attention has been given to its crucial connections with vocational education and training. In the case of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), this vital connection to VET was covered by the presence of Atchoarena and Caillods in the Institute for many years.

2 The French title of this Fundamental does not bridge these two worlds: Planifier le développement des compétences techniques et professionnelles.

But it may be noted that in the long and distinguished history of the 'Fundamentals in Educational Planning' of the IIEP, from 1963, there had been almost no item covering technical or vocational education until that referred to above – by King and Palmer in 2010. There had been one publication on *Education, training and the traditional sector* in 1981 (Hallak and Caillods 1981). And there had been some focus on 'Education, the nature of work and employment' in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This had led to at least two volumes, and in one of them, King had written on "Planning education for self-employment: A contemporary creed" (King 1980). This had particularly looked at skill acquisition in the informal sector but had connected that to skill development in nonformal education as well as in the formal sector of the economy.

This tendency to leave VET concerns outside of the mainstream focus of education can also be seen in other spheres of educational publishing. Thus, in the well-known Comparative Education Research Centre series on comparative and international education, the volume by King on *Education, skills and international cooperation: Comparative and historical perspectives* was the first volume since 2001 to look at many different dimensions of skills development.[3]

8 VET's natural connections – d) Enterprise development

Another of VET's obvious connectivities is with enterprise. This has already been referred to in relation to self-employment, but enterprise development is wider than self-employment, covering medium and small enterprises as well micro and large. Teasing out the many different links between vocational training and enterprise requires a review of many different cultures of skills development and of work (King and McGrath 1999). But it was also vital to make the connection between skills development, globalisation and the knowledge economy. This was done, in final form, by Simon McGrath, drawing insights particularly from our joint projects in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa (King and McGrath 2002).

9 VET, Education for All, and poverty reduction

It was mentioned above that the World Bank's policy paper on *Vocational and technical education and training* appeared in 1991 just a year after the World Conference on Education for All (EFA). The Bank paper had a direct impact on VET in developing countries, as it was widely, if too critically, interpreted as being negative about government-supported VET. Be that as it may, VET in developing

3 See list of 36 publications inside front and back cover of King, 2019.

countries was also affected by the EFA movement which was generally thought to be about prioritising basic and particularly primary education. Arguably, this is not an accurate reading of the World Conference Declaration or Framework for Action of 1990. Skills were certainly supported in the World Conference, in several different senses, but one proposal in the declaration is clearly concerned with the domain being discussed thus far in this paper: "Other needs can be served by: skills training, apprenticeships, and formal and nonformal education programmes in health, nutrition, population, agricultural techniques, the environment, science, technology, family life…" (UNESCO 1990, p. 6).

When it came to putting these ideas into one of the six dimensions of EFA targets, this became "Expansion of provision of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults…" (UNESCO 1990, p. 3).

While this seems relatively clear, the same could not be said when, ten years later, the EFA targets were drawn up at the Dakar World Forum. Instead of the essential skills discussed in Jomtien, the new target talked merely of "equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills" (UNESCO 2000, p. 2). The term 'life skills' proved to be hugely problematic when the series of EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs) started effectively in 2002. Year after year, the GMR team commented on the difficulty they faced in monitoring 'life skills'. It would not be until 2012 that they finally had an EFA GMR which looked thoroughly at skills development. They examined foundation skills, transferable skills, and technical and vocational skills, and even then their lens on technical and vocational skills was restricted.

A detailed, historical account of how skills development was actually handled in this crucial EFA arena over the period from 1990 to 2012 is available (King 2019), as is an analysis of how VET was in practice dealt with rather narrowly in the 2012 EFA GMR: *Youth and skills: Putting education to work* (King 2014). One interpretation of this period could be that the international VET community was insufficiently engaged in analysing how its own complex domain could more effectively be connected to the new politics of basic education which emerged in Jomtien and was confirmed at Dakar.

This insight about the importance of positioning VET in relation to basic education was one of the reasons that a team in Edinburgh University carried out a multi-country project from 2004 to 2006 on post-basic education and training, resulting in a volume entitled *Educating out of Poverty?* (Palmer et al. 2007).

By 2011–12, twenty years after the Bank's policy paper, VET had begun to regain its place in global reporting. There were a whole series of global reports dealing with different dimensions of skills development. These included the forthcoming 2012 GMR, but also UNESCO's *World TVET Report* (King 2011). And by 2013, there were many more, including from the ILO, the OECD, UNESCO,

the World Bank, and McKinsey Global Institute. They were all reviewed in *NORRAG News 48* which celebrated this special year of global reports on TVET, skills and jobs (King 2012b).

10 Securing and monitoring VET in the post-2015 agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Unlike the framing of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which had only covered primary education and gender equity, the different parts of the international VET community were determined to ensure that there was due recognition of technical and vocational education and training, and of skills development more generally. Not only was 'affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education' captured in target 4.3 of SDG 4, but it was made quite clear in target 4.4 that the concern was not with life skills but work skills: 'relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship' (UN 2015, p. 28).

Arguably, the challenge now would be how to make provision by 2030 'of equal access for all men and women' to such levels of technical and vocational skill. But at least the commitment was there, loud and clear. Which had not been the case in Dakar in 2000 or in the MDGs a decade later.

What would require careful attention, however, was not just the process whereby these crucial targets for education and skills had been secured over a period of many decades (King 2016a), but what would happen to them when the international monitoring community decided on the global indicators. Would the good work done in gaining these targets be lost in translation into indicators (King 2017)? This remains an issue of concern to the international VET constituency, as the title of this volume 'Lost in VET?' makes clear.

11 In conclusion

This brief safari over fifty years of attention to different interpretations of industrial, technical and vocational education — or of skills development more generally — has used a variety of methods. Historical content analysis of key documents has gone hand in hand with interviews, as well as some limited survey work. Dissemination has been critical, whether in book, journals or in conferences. But it has also been important to involve the policy community itself. This had been one of priorities of *NORRAG News* over a period of some 30 years. Comparative perspectives have been vital along with historical. Connecting with a concerned community over time has been essential. And ideally the community is drawn from

several different but overlapping disciplines, including area studies, history, development studies and comparative & international education. The role of development cooperation has also been shown to be a key factor in the way VET and skills development have been promoted and supported. This has not only been true of the traditional western donors, but it will continue to be of concern as the so-called emerging donors such as China and India give their attention to supporting skills development beyond their borders.

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