

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Abstract from the report of the International Conference on Education (33rd Session) of the International Bureau of Education. It deals with (i) the role of higher education institutions in national development, (ii) improving and sustaining the competence of educators and (iii) managing the system of education.

The final report of the International Conference on Education (33rd Session) of the International Bureau of Education held at Geneva 15th–23rd September 1971 has an important section on higher education which reads as follows:

The role of higher education institutions in national development

Higher education was expanding more rapidly than any other level of education and, at the same time, in developing countries, higher education institutions were trying to move away from the academic concept of education for its own sake and to concentrate on the preparation of high-level manpower to assist in national development. The Conference felt, however, that one of the major problems of higher education was its continuing failure in many countries, both developed and developing, to adjust to national requirements. Higher education was deficient in this respect in both qualitative and quantitative terms; it produced on the one hand graduates whose training did not equip them to perform the tasks the nation expected of them; on the other hand, elsewhere graduates in such numbers that they could not be absorbed by the economy. The importance of the relevance of high-level training to the national economy was stressed repeatedly.

Attention was again called to the conflict described in the working document, between the traditional academic university education and the more modern, technologically-biased type of higher training. The prestige

of the former often led to social and economic difficulties. The problem of whether it was preferable to develop a comprehensive university system, as was being done in some countries, or to retain a system of differentiating types of institutions remained largely unresolved. Some delegates argued that the degree of similarity between objectives of higher vocational education and university education made it undesirable for the distinction between them to lead to their complete separation. The case was argued for a highly flexible system of higher education offering a wide variety of full-time and part-time courses at different levels as a means of ensuring a steady supply of trained middle-level manpower, of which there was a world-wide shortage. It was felt that the provision of education for people of 18 years and above should be seen as a whole and that both universities and other parallel institutions of higher education should be accorded parity of esteem. This would be possible only if the latter were enabled to attract as highly qualified a staff as the universities themselves. The practice whereby non-university higher institutions awarded degrees in collaboration with the university or through some form of national academic award council was commended.

There was some discussion on the problem of university autonomy, but it was felt that this differed very much according to the ideologies and needs of each individual country and was affected by the close identification in developing countries of the university with national development. Other changes reported concerned the growing internal democratization of the university community and the methods adopted to improve the efficiency of university administration. The need for national institutions of higher education to play a larger part in the training of teachers and in promoting research was emphasized. A number of delegates drew particular attention to the importance of scientific research in the universities. In teacher training, the educative and pedagogical elements should receive due attention, and research should be realistic, practical, and should not be confined to the university.

Some developing countries, where the early stage of development of higher education necessitated the training of many students abroad, were faced with the problem of students who failed to return home after completing their courses. Such students remained abroad either to pursue their studies up to a level higher than that needed by their own country or to accept employment. Further difficulties created by training abroad were the frequent failure of foreign curricula to meet national needs, and the inappropriate attitudes which were all too easily engendered during a prolonged stay in a more developed country.

While a call was made for equality of access to higher education and for flexibility regarding admission, attendance and curricular require-

ments, attention was drawn to the wastefully high rates of repetition and dropout occurring at this very expensive level of education. Doubts were expressed as to the validity of the contention that a country's degree of economic development depended on the amount of higher education it provided. It was felt that much research had to be carried out into such problems as motivation in higher education and students' attitudes, and that studies should be made of the administration of higher education, its cost and its economic and social benefits. It was also felt necessary to explore the ways and means of relating higher education to work experience, especially in the developing countries, in order to reduce unemployment and make higher education more practical and relevant.

Improving and sustaining the competence of educators

Much of the debate on this issue consisted of a succession of informative descriptions of national measures adopted to provide and improve initial and in-service training of teachers. The following paragraphs record the major points in the dialogue which ensued.

There was general agreement that no profession was in greater need of constant up-dating than the teaching profession. Teachers needed continuous retraining—as well as further training—in order to help them keep abreast of the latest advances in knowledge, teaching methods, educational technology and the behavioural and social sciences. They needed to be offered facilities and inducements to engage in in-service training. A need was even seen for an element of compulsion in in-service training.

Teacher production not only required to be accelerated but measures were needed to raise the status of teachers. Financial inducements alone were insufficient; a well-defined career structure and public recognition of valuable services to the profession were advocated.

The suggestion that training should be directed specifically towards the type of teaching to be undertaken was considered to be uneconomical by some delegates because of the lack of teacher mobility in which it resulted. A marked trend was noted towards the institution of a single-track course for all teachers, leading to a basic salary and followed by more specialized courses attracting credits and appropriate emoluments. A plea for more flexibility in the provision of teacher training was advanced; the possibility of sandwich courses merited consideration.

The training of teachers alongside students studying for other professions was advocated. This would produce a less inbred profession and produce teachers of wider experience and would enable students in

training to delay their final commitment to teaching.

The question as to whether teacher training should be undertaken wholly by the university or by separate teacher-training establishments or in part by both remained unsolved. Arguments were advanced against entrusting it to the universities; the excessively academic outlook of university teachers; the tendency of complicated university administrative procedures to hold up such changes as curricular reform; the tendency of the autonomous university to take the control of teacher training from the Government; the practice of many students abandoning their intention of becoming teachers and pursuing more attractive professions on completing university studies.

The need for more and better training of teacher educators was stressed and it was suggested that the number of specialized institutions existing for this purpose should be increased.

The changing rôle of the teacher as a creator of situations for learning was stressed. The practice of attaching young teachers to "experienced" teachers was still followed in some countries but elsewhere increasing use was being made of the techniques of self-observation and assessment in the early years of teaching. The rôle of an inspectorate or its equivalent as a source of help and guidance to young teachers was recognized.

A number of delegates emphasized the urgent need for a vast increase in the supply of adequately trained teachers to work in rural areas. If such teachers were to fulfil their rôle as leaders in community development by contributing towards the elimination of social inequality and social backwardness, their training needed to be flexibly structured and comprehensive in nature. It was suggested that international co-operation could do much to remedy this need, particularly with regard to the supply and training of science teachers.

Attention was drawn to the high proportion of women in the teaching profession. It was reported that 70% of students in teacher-training colleges in some countries were women. Research into the reasons for this situation and its consequences in education as well as its socio-economic implications was recommended.

The problem of providing resource materials for teachers was formidable. Radio and television broadcasts could help but teachers' guide-books and teaching materials needed to be supplied continuously. International action for the preparation and distribution of such materials was recommended. The support offered by well financed, staffed and equipped national education documentation centres to the training of teachers and the trainers of teachers was recognized.

The Conference stressed the importance of morality, integrity and

spiritual qualities in the teacher if he was to fulfil his rôle as a leader in the community.

The management of the system of education

The size of the educational enterprise was stressed by delegates: in the numbers of people involved and the increasing funds required. It was observed that "systems" of education were not always systematically conceived or defined, so that it was important to examine how policies for education were established. Countries of federal structure arrived at a national policy by a process of co-ordination and co-operation between the territorial units concerned; and several of the more centralized countries reported reforms aimed at decentralizing authority to provincial level. Both approaches recognized that educational policies involved the national community as a whole—which in turn made it essential to provide educational information services for the general public. Participation, in the widest sense, was essential for the formation of educational policies.

Some delegates mentioned the political considerations which affected educational policies: the rôle of education in promoting national cohesion and in ensuring equality of opportunity. In rapidly changing societies, these factors might suddenly acquire great force.

There was recognition that educational planning should be placed in the context of general socio-economic planning. However, some delegates stressed that educators needed a more important place in the over-all planning councils if education was to become an agent of change and not simply the passive reflection of the requirements of the economy. More broadly expressed, there was a need for "educational strategies" who would have the interdisciplinary view indispensable for such a task.

Economic factors were frequently referred to as a major consideration in educational policy decisions. There was a limit to the rate of economic growth which formed an obvious constraint on educational expenditures. The improvement of resource utilization was stressed, from two points of view: making better use of existing facilities and ensuring that education was relevant to employment and society at large.

In this connexion, research of multidisciplinary nature should be directed to policy issues, so as to provide a sounder basis for educational decisions. Similarly, several delegates emphasized the value of improved management techniques within the education system. A management information service recently instituted in one country had provided a critical analysis which had been responsible for all the major changes since introduced in the national system.

Improvements in central management would not be effective without an education service capable of taking responsibility and decisions. Measures to decentralize administration reported by several countries were usually accompanied by efforts to ensure that the training of teachers' supervisors and administrators took account of these measures. The reform of administrative structures in education was as profound as the reform of the entire educational system.

Reference was also made to the slow rate of change in education. The institutional structure did not respond adequately to short-term fluctuations in social or economic conditions. While much attention was given to long-term planning, this question of the shorter term needs also merited study.

Educational reform should be viewed as a permanent necessity. *Ad hoc* measures to reform education fell short of meeting the requirements inherent in the permanence of change in human society. It was suggested, therefore, that national education authorities establish appropriate permanent machinery to meet this overriding need.