

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN FRENCH SPEAKING AFRICA AND THE QUESTION OF DEVELOPMENT

JOSEPH KI-ZERBO*

This short exposé will not be exclusively descriptive or analytical. Africa, it has been said, is the graveyard of educational experiments. And there is no lack of accounts, very often lucidly exact, given by foreign experts. And statistics also abound, sometimes masking the true reality.

It is more urgent, above all in the perspective of an educational "New Deal", to think about the problems, the reasons for failure and the strategic points of attack for a qualitative change.

Thus, after recalling the characteristics of traditional education, I propose to consider the following chronological phases:

—from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries (1944);

—from 1944 to 1967;

—present-day problems.

(Obviously, for countries such as Guinea, for example, which have undergone profound changes, the periodisation will be different).

1. TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

This education has been disturbed by outside influences. It is being transformed under our very eyes, but it continues to exist and it should not be underestimated. In fact, it is this education that lies deep within the mass of the people which one seeks to transform by a new type of education. But one cannot properly change that which one does not know. For example, the African languages learnt by the students influence their pronunciation and their study of European and other languages. In the same way, their traditional attitudes can play a role in their approach to technology.

Traditional education developed in closed, or at least withdrawn societies, with a low level of technology and low co-efficient of change, but with a very high degree of social and ideological integration. Whence the principal characteristics of this education "model":

1. *It was an education by and for the community.* There was no specialised body of teachers. All, according to their age, were given the duty of educating others. The goal was the formation of the social man, the useful producer and the considerate citizen.

2. *The education was concrete and pragmatic* and was acquired through active life. It was while tending goats with my friends that I learnt to know

the properties of plants, the habits of animals and the resources of nature. But while listening in the evenings to stories and tales, one learnt the elements of geography, history, philosophy, natural science, morality, linguistics, etc. For example, the story of the monkey and the hippo which ends with the words, "It is the relapse which kills the patient".

3. *It is a global education* which puts together the manual and the intellectual, the body and the spirit, which is functional because it is linked to the group's activities, including its leisure and its games.

4. *It is a progressive education* moving forward by stages. During its heyday, it took place at the age of seven years, when the child entered as an auxiliary into the world of production, and at the age of about 15, when he entered the world of adults, generally through initiation.

5. *It is a democratic and an egalitarian education*, just like the society concerned. The introduction of writing and the socio-economic evolution brought about the first differentiations. One knows of the privileged status of the Egyptian scribe. In the fourteenth century, in the commercial metropolis of Timbuctoo, there are statistics available which allow us to state that primary education was given 100% to the children of free men.

We note also, that even in the traditional world, there existed a specialised form of education in the context of guilds and even an esoteric and a "reserved" form in the areas of religion, pharmacopoeia, etc.

This education naturally suffered from lack and contained the limits of its historical "age". In particular, the absence of writing obstructed the capacity for abstraction, generalisation and capitalisation of knowledge. Hence a certain conservatism. But its very oral tradition gave it more sap and savour, and more truth also. Hence its profound humanism and its efficacy in development, coming from the fact that this society had almost, in its own measure, achieved the ideal which today one confers upon UNESCO; that is, an educative society.

2. FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

(A) FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

From the fifteenth century, there began, in an embryonic form, the education of the western type. This was limited mostly to the training of managers, accountants, or for the creation of missionary and professional schools. In the Los Islands, off the coast of Guinea, the Dutch set up a naval dock-yard in the seventeenth century, King Affonso of the Congo (1506-1543) set up schools where 1,000 pupils, sons of noblemen, learnt the rudiments of reading, writing and grammar. A professional school was also set up where Portuguese artisans from Sao Thome whipped their Congolese apprentices who took the first chance to escape. In the eighteenth century the Jesuits set up workshops for masons, iron-smiths and carpenters in Luanda. Afro-Brazilians and other freed slaves also developed educational activities on the coast of Benin.

Briefly, during these centuries, the principal characteristics of this "education" lay in its utilitarian and exploitative aspects. By force of circumstances, these clerks and qualified workers were integrated as auxiliary agents into the vast economic apparatus which tarred their own brothers in slavery, and took agricultural and mineral products in exchange for guns and knick-knacks.

(B) FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

This was the great period of colonialism. Education in this time was essentially a form and an instrument of colonisation. When in March 1817, the French teacher Jean Dard was sent to open the first elementary school in St. Louis in Senegal, the schools of the Church Missionary Society of Sierra Leone already had 350 pupils—the English colonies being more advanced in this field. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were in Senegal only nine primary schools run by the Government, of which eight were in the hands of nuns and priests. Among these was the Ecole des Otages, founded in St. Louis by Faidherbes for the education, that is to say, the indoctrination, of the sons of chiefs. The legal and administrative framework was elaborated from about 1903-4 (the creation of the General Government). But it was a decree of May 1924, which laid down with precision the educational system in its entirety.

At the base, at the level of primary education, there were the preparatory, elementary, regional schools and primary superior schools. At the federal level, the Ecole Normale of St. Louis, transferred to Goree in 1913, which became the Ecole Normale William Ponty where, after a common two years course, specialised teaching was given for the training of administrative clerks, teachers and doctors. Later on other federal schools were created: the Medical School of Dakar, the Veterinary School of Bamako, Girls School of Rufisque (1939), the Rural School of Katibougou and of Dabou, the Technical College of Bamako. Two secondary schools were opened in Senegal, at St. Louis in 1842 and Dakar in 1912. As for technical education, each colony was provided with an establishment for qualified workers.

This framework as a whole was the same for the group of colonies of French Equatorial Africa, although the participation there of missionary teachers was higher than in West Africa.

By its purpose and function, this type of school was an integral part of the colonial system. The following sections of the decree of 1924 are explicit: Article 2: "The essential objective of primary and junior education is to bring closer to us as large a number of natives as possible, to make them familiar with our language, institutions and methods, and to lead them gradually to economic and social progress by a careful evolution of their own culture". Article 64: "French is the only language to be used in the schools. It is forbidden for teachers to use their own language while talking to the

students". With the result that little African children learnt to recognise their "ancestors the Gauls" and to consider the heroes of their own countries' resistance against the invaders as being sanguine agitators. And when they spoke their mother tongue, they were put in the corner with the dunce's cap. Moreover, the teaching, considered to be a precious and a dangerous thing, was distributed sparingly. From this arose a cultural malthusianism and a mystification which inculcated a complex of racial inferiority to the young Africans.

If one looks at the actual development for the decade 1922-32, one has the following figures for French West Africa : 1922; 28,200 students of whom 3,820 were in private educational institutions. 1932: 56,000 of whom 8,000 were in private educational institutions.

Certainly, agricultural education was very developed, but nothing very new or modern was taught. And sometimes in the schools it was an academic version of forced labour. Nevertheless, thanks to the compulsory manual work, the schools of that period seemed to be more rooted than those of today. Since the syllabus was more limited, as was the number of students, (157 at the W. Ponty School and 41 at the Medical School in 1932) these schools formed an elite corps which constituted the administration's structure before taking the lead in the movement for independence in 1960. The historical role of these cadres is far from unimportant, especially as some of them were to lead the movement for emancipation. But the majority continued, objectively, to function as auxiliaries in the colonial shops in a system where the techniques and the forces of production were working for the profit of the foreign masters. In this dualist system where 80-90% of the population devoted itself to a subsistence agriculture or to exploitation under the rod of administration linked to foreign capitalist companies, they constituted, by will or by force, the dregs of the imperialist system. They also crystallised by their privileged position, a certain image of the role of the school conceived as a factory for the production of white collar workers.

3. FROM THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

It should be immediately stated that the date of the accession of independence does not, unfortunately, constitute for most of these countries a turning point in their educational policies, except in rare cases, as in Guinea. After the Second World War and after the participation of Africans in the liquidation of nazism, political liberalisation was coupled with education expansion, important mostly in the secondary and higher educational spheres. But the qualitative structural character developed very little, rather this perpetuated and sometimes even aggravated the faults of the preceding period.

UTAFITI (A) QUANTITATIVE ASPECTS

During this period there occurred a considerable increase in numbers because of the aspirations of the students to go on with their studies whatever the cost and because of the need for experienced cadres felt in countries which had just acquired their territorial assemblies (1952) and national assemblies (1960). The part of the budget devoted to education was increased while the French Fund for Investment for Economic and Social Development (FIDES) and then the Fund for Aid and Co-operation (FAC) also gave contributions. The Addis Ababa Conference in 1961, where it was proposed to universalise primary education for Africa by 1980 also helped in this regard. In 1962, the annual rate of increase in the francophone countries for primary education was 20% instead of 12%.

1. *Primary Education* in French West Africa. The numbers increased from 127,000 in 1942 to 356,000 in 1956. In the entire group of francophone countries, the number increased from one to three million from 1956 to 1966, that is, three times, with an annual rate of growth of 12%.

2. *Secondary Education*. The number increased from 3,820 in 1948 to 14,124 in 1952. One should also add the 6,954 students from the technical colleges. For the whole of the Francophone group, the number increased in the ten years between 1956-1966 from 60,000 to 360,000 with an annual rate of 20%.

(B) QUALITATIVE STRUCTURAL ASPECTS

In this area, the tendency has been a negative one:

1. Assimilation into the French system has increased in the syllabi, examinations and certificates, contrary to the tendency during the preceding period. The Loi Cadre of 1957, which gave internal autonomy to the French colonies, kept in the hands of French Authorities the right to control the syllabus, just as in diplomacy and the army. This turned the content of education completely away from African culture.

2. Elsewhere, from 1960, the disintegration of the political federation of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa was accompanied by a disintegration of the vast educational federal system which had functioned until then, and this happened first at the primary, and then at the secondary and higher levels. The break-up for political reasons made a good number of national systems uneconomical and made it impossible for a number of countries to establish expensive institutions such as Faculties of Science, Medicine, etc.

3. Education during this time grew further away from the society, and manual labour was removed as had been forced labour previously for Africans. Technical education being considered inferior, many of those having acquired it, (locksmiths, carpenters) for lack of jobs ended up by joining the administration and police. The field of research, monopolised entirely by the French ORSTOM, was more devoted to the study of ethnology and cash

crops than in the problems directly connected with African development. Certainly the first cadres with higher education appeared at this time, but the brain drain also began here. Thus it is said that there are more Togolese doctors working in France than there are French doctors serving in co-operation projects in Togo. At the same time, there has been a failure of ambitions in the quantitative field. Since the Addis Conference, the rate of scholarisation has been on the increase, and painfully so, and sometimes hardly moving forward because of the demographic increase and the overburdened budgets. Education takes about 15 to 25% of the total budget, that is, about 3-4% of the GNP. And this to educate sometimes about 11% of the children, whence the overcrowding of the classrooms and the drop in the standards. A student in secondary education being looked after by the State spends five to six times the annual revenue of a peasant family. And since the pressure for education increases, the small number of places available in public or private schools risk being taken over by children of privileged classes. The countryside remain largely ignored. Failures and repetitions increase at a large rate. In some countries, out of an entry of 10,000 pupils, only 1,500 finish the course in the primary stage. In another richer country, out of 10,000 beginning the primary cycle, only 5,050 or 50% finish and only 1,460 obtain the certificate of primary education. Out of 10,000 students entering school only 1,125 continue at the secondary level and only 55 obtain the baccalaureat. At the same time, no proper programme for literacy exists for the masses. After three years of school, the child is usually cut off from his roots and tempted by the movement away from the countryside; the out-of-work intellectuals usually gather at the homes of relatives or friends in the towns, thus using up their savings and transforming the school into an economic vampire and a social power-keg.

4. PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS AND CRISIS

New ways of looking at things constitute an attempt to resolve contemporary contradictions. This is under the impetus of development, of educational planning and by the elaboration of more precise tools of analysis. But too often one remains at the level of fancy, of timid experiments, and of preserving the old colonial heritages to which too many leaders are tied spiritually and I should say from their bellies, because it is there that they themselves have been born and have grown up. Creative imagination and energy are absent, except in Guinea, and, to a lesser measure, in Mali, Congo-Brazzaville and Upper Volta. The efforts to effect a change have two main points:

(A) THE ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL

Accent is placed increasingly on high-level scientific and technical institutions and on their apparatus of first-rate personnel and equipment. The Nairobi Conference of 1968 further encouraged States in this path. Today,

one wonders whether, instead of emphasising secondary education, as was recommended at Addis, it would not be better to adopt a strategy which attacks the problem from two opposing points; the setting up of high level technical schools and the carrying out of mass literacy programmes. This would allow one to pass immediately on to the intensive production of middle-level technical cadres in all sectors. As for literacy projects, nothing substantial has been done except the emitting of false cries of victory. Some fortunate countries, such as the Ivory Coast, desire by means of television to increase rapidly the rate of schooling, but is not this to avoid the real problem which is to recuperate all brains, for science and for Africa? One talks at length about schools for collective promotion in francophone Africa and of the ruralisation of instruction in order to integrate the school into the village and the village into the school. Centres of training in active methods integrated into the economy of society are being created almost everywhere. But the impact is not basic. Some countries have tried going further by creating a short course in centres of rural education to run parallel to the ordinary primary course (Upper Volta). This system has had to be abandoned because the results, economic, social and pedagogic, were not satisfactory. The School is not yet a source of energy. In those countries whose economic growth is weak, the main employment is within the administration, and where the budget is small the manpower projections forecast a saturation of high-level cadres and the impossibility of employing even university graduates. It appears that there is no long-term solution to this problem outside the formation of large common markets where the movement of cadres could take place from one country to another.

(B) THE CULTURAL AFRICAN FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL

The School remains a growth external to the flesh of African countries, to their environment, their society, their problems and their destiny. An unrelenting struggle is fought by a group of patriotic intellectuals and politicians to Africanise the school. The syllabus has been refashioned first in the primary, then in the secondary and finally at the University levels beginning with history, geography, natural sciences, etc.

In countries which are 80% to 90% rural in their populations, the emphasis should be put more on rural law rather than on industrial legislation. Sociology should be rural and pastoral rather than industrial. Taking into account the preponderance of the existence of the administration and the state, administrative instructions, or at least information, should be given to all students. Taking into account the sociology of groups in Africa, development studies should emphasise the communal aspects, and thus the techniques of planning and co-operatives in connection with the traditional forms of organisation of work, rather than on the subtleties of Roman Law.

But it is not enough to change the syllabus. One must change the books, the methodology, the teachers, the structures, the qualifications. An immense

work—especially when the ministries and the governments are preoccupied with more immediate needs, sometimes those of simple personal survival. Little by little, Africans are publishing their own text-books. The training of teachers remains a crucial problem and the professional schools are far from carrying out their vocation, the teaching profession, because of its limitations, being avoided as much as possible. This being so, foreign teachers in many of the countries continue to rule over the selection of national cadres and national qualifications are identical and not equivalent to the French qualifications. Even when the syllabus is the same, the study courses and the examinations are made to be the same as in France. These change each time there is a change in France. Thus the identity of qualifications facilitates the brain drain because they allow one to work in France. There is here an obstacle to the proper flowering of autonomous systems of African education, an obstacle which is dealt with from year to year under the pressures of need or of opinion. But in general, the structure of the system as a whole resembles that in force in France: primary education—six years, secondary education—seven years crowned by the baccalaureat, higher education—four to seven years. This is true also of the administrative organisation.

The African and Malagasy Council for High Education has been trying with great difficulty (due to a nationalistic spirit) to co-ordinate the efforts of universities on certain points in order to make them effective. An Inter-African Convention for the recognition of degrees has been signed by 14 Heads of State. An exchange of university teachers has been tried, for the situations are very varied. The campuses of Dakar and Abidjan have respectively 5,000 and 4,000 students, but the former's teaching body is only 50% African and the latter only 20%. In the other countries there are only few students and the investment and running costs are prohibitive for the poorer countries.

If there is an area where Africanisation is still a difficulty in the francophone countries, it is in that of the language of instruction. Everywhere, and at all levels, it is the French language, except in Guinea. Today the introduction of African languages at several levels is envisaged, either in the mass literacy projects—as in the UNESCO experimental project in Mali—where the newspaper in Bambara "*Kibaru*" has articles in it signed by peasants, or in the areas of school education. In this last area, there are still hesitations. These are due to objective difficulties in the enterprise, as in the choice of language, study material, working out of texts, teacher-training, pedagogic and administrative organisation. But other hesitations are mostly due to the fear of parents or culturally alienated politicians, to the refusals of tribalist and reactionary leaders. It will need great patience and determination to carve out its royal road linking the inexhaustible wealth of universal knowledge to the unending source of African culture.

CONCLUSIONS

The history of education in francophone Africa is that of the acquisition

UTAFITI of technical civilisation by means of a vast economical and cultural alienation. This is a situation which is historically irreversible for all our peoples but for whom the cost has been manifestly too high. Efforts must be made to minimise and to do away with this cost by trying to make the school a dynamo producing multifarious energies, economically and culturally. There is the need here for a total revolution in the sense of Copernicus. We must make actual African reality the sun around which everything else must revolve. And the link which the school should have with our civilisation is not that of the pipe-line but that of the umbilical cord.

Will the African school remain the instrument of colonisation as in the time of the slave companies? In reality, too many of the Africans coming out of these schools become intellectual *eunuchs* charged with watching over the exotic harems of imperialism.

Or, on the contrary, will the African school be the weapon in the struggle for freedom and a tool for reconstruction? This depends essentially upon the choice of the leaders. It is for them to make the correct diagnosis and to explain it to the masses in order to turn them away from the mirages of alienation and to assign to them new objectives, more difficult to obtain but more salutary in the long run. It is for them, the leaders, to create eventually that economic space most favourable for the growth of an African education. It is for them to preach, by example, a strategic return to our own heritage, not for the reasons of reactionary self-satisfaction, but for the discovery there of a surging of that spiritual energy which could mean our own starting-point.

For we must avoid like the plague the servile imitation of foreign models. The ape has no personal strategy of development—he only repeats after and imitates. But the African school must produce men who are allergic to stagnation and to the status quo, men who, instead of fleeing their societies, confront them with all the lucidity of science, and with the courage of a civic spirit, men who will be the engines and the locomotives of progress.

So, to end with, I would like to emphasise the three major items which have a role to play in a strategy for a revolutionary new deal in African Education.

1. To match work with studies from the beginning of school so that the student knows that his degree does not constitute his capital with which to exploit, but a tool for more and better work. For it is no use waiting for the drop-outs and the early school-leavers to appear before worrying about the failures of the system. It is better to prevent than to cure.

2. To change the mentalities of all the people (the children, the teachers and the parents) concerning the role of the school. This will need a powerful political and ideological motivation.

3. To reject elitism by democratising and popularising education; by changing the methods and contents of the syllabi, by introducing African languages in order to bring the people themselves directly into the world of science and technology.

But the central principle which must govern all the rest is that of the Copernican Revolution by which we state that African reality, African development, must be the sun of our system and that everything else especially alien imports, must revolve around this centre as do the planets around the sun. This must be the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega of the new strategy for education in Africa.

UTAFITI