WHY IS EDUCATION IN AFRICA A *DEVELOPMENT* ISSUE?

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INTRODUCTION

The key focus of *IJEDA* is, as the title suggests, that the journal has a specific *development* focus, that is, articles that contribute in some way to the study of the role of education in development in Africa as a whole. So, this editorial essay sets out to examine what this might actually mean for the aims and focus of the journal, starting with the idea of development and some of the problems associated with it, before going on to look at the sort of topics that are relevant to the journal and why.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Concern with the idea that societies and states 'develop' over time, usually with the assumption that development means that matters are improving in some way, goes back at least as far as Aristotle and has occurred in many different cultures (Fagerlind and Saha 1989: Ch.1). Views and theories on the history, nature, causes and purposes of 'development' are many, varied and often controversial (e.g. Rist 2008; Haynes 2008 and Pieterse 2010). Post-second world war discussions of development were originally primarily concerned with economic development – the growth of wealth

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and output as measured by indicators of national wealth such as the gross national product. The main division was therefore initially between the industrialised countries of the Northern hemisphere and the poorer, more agriculturally based countries of the Southern hemisphere. Built into this twofold categorisation of international development was also the notion that the richer nations had a responsibility to help poorer, low income countries to develop.

However, over time attempts to measure development have become increasingly more diverse and sophisticated, with a whole range of different social indicators such as health, education, gender, well-being, and environmental protection being added. While attempts to classify states as 'developed' or 'developing' are fraught with difficulty and controversy, perhaps the most authoritative international statement on issues surrounding human development is the annual publication of the United Nations Development Programme titled *Human Development Report*. The 'Human development index' included in the *Human Development Report* ranks all the countries of the world from 1 to 186 according to a wide range of variables but special emphasis is laid on what they term the 'Human development index'. This is a composite index of what they consider to be the three key indicators of human development. These are life expectancy at birth, years of enrolment in schooling and gross national income per capita.

Nevertheless, classification of countries as 'developed', 'less developed' or 'developing' and as being situated in the 'North' or 'South' remains difficult and by no means clear cut and no terms are completely satisfactory. This is partly because ranking and categorising is inevitably to some extent subjective – change the indicator (s) regarded as important and you change the ranking. It is also problematic because significant change can occur quite rapidly so that some countries, such as Singapore, Brunei, South Korea or China originally regarded as 'developing' have now become 'developed'. Some 'developed' countries (Japan, New Zealand and Australia, for example) are located geographically in the South, which is why two terms that are now increasingly used are the 'global south' (developing countries geographically in the south) and the 'global north' (developed countries geographically in the north and south). Moreover, as Kendall (2009: 421) puts it,

> All of these binary labels, in fact, assume and fix the focus of developmentalist debates on states at a time when divisions between rich and poor, "North" and "South" are as great or greater *within* countries as across them, thus concealing the issue of how inequality and poverty affect "Northern" geographical spaces as well as "Southern", and how people, groups, and development-like resources flow within and across state boundaries.

Perhaps reflecting this problem of a binary division between 'developed' and 'developing', the UNDP now both ranks countries but also classifies them into four groups – very high, high, medium and low human development (UNDP 2013).

There are other problems with the notion of 'development'. One is the assumption that there is a clear and single path of development, upon which all people and states

must embark to enhance their well-being and that this path must be identical to the historical experience of the 'developed' or industrialised countries. Also, by using the labels 'developed' and 'less developed', unequal power and authority are firmly established in global economic and political relationships. Through unequal trade and aid relationships, which often benefit the richer, donor countries as much as the poorer, recipient ones, there is also a form of Western cultural homogenisation ('Coca-Colonisation') of the world. Traditional forms of development have also been criticised for the environmental destruction that they have brought in their wake. Such criticisms of development have even gone beyond debates about alternative interpretations of development to a rejection of the very notion of development because of in-built notions of neo-colonialism by the richer nations: 'it is not the failure of development which has to be feared, but its success' (Sachs 1992: 3). Such 'post-' or 'anti-' development theories have in turn been criticised for their lack of alternatives to development models and their failure to distinguish between the wide range of different contemporary development discourses (see, for example, Rist 2008; Pieterse 2000; Kiely 1999; Kothari and Minogue 2002).

While recognising these difficulties, the notion of development clearly persists and remains powerful in contemporary political and academic debates, including educational ones, and, whatever the criticisms of the notion of development and whichever criteria or indicators are used, it cannot be denied that Africa has a development problem. Indeed, of considerable significance to this new journal is the fact that in the 2013 *Human Development Index*, all sub-Saharan African countries were in the medium and low human development category, with Botswana the highest-ranked at 119 out of 186 and with 18 of the bottom 20 being in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of north Africa, Libya was 64th, Algeria was 93rd, Tunisia 94th, Egypt 112th and Morocco 130th out of 186 (UNDP 2013).

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DEVELOPMENT

In terms of the subject of the journal, it is important to note here in relation to the widely used UNDP's human development index that, while greater longevity and higher wealth may be more direct or obvious goals of development, enrolment in formal education is more of an indirect means to an end. Simply putting more young people into school is not in itself necessarily beneficial to society. It is the assumed results or benefits of schooling that explains why this indicator is included in the human development index. However, from the point of view of the journal, it is simply necessary to caution against any automatic assumption that education directly or necessarily leads to development benefits for individuals and societies in Africa in any straightforward manner. Indeed, the opposite is often the case. Even the *Human Development Report* notes that such relationships are problematic: 'One of the surprising results of human development research in recent years … is the lack

of significant correlation between economic growth and improvements in health and education' (UNDP 2010: 4).

Nevertheless, education is widely regarded as a key social institution believed to make a significant and positive difference in the way societies and individuals behave and develop. Formal education has been linked to different theories and practices of development in Africa and elsewhere, because schools help to create the citizens and workforce of the future and therefore to define the direction of development. However, it is important to note that some form of indigenous education has always taken place in all African societies in the sense of passing on, for example, economic practices, cultural expectations and rituals, food preparation, laws and health practices, whether through learning by example or from written sources or from stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances or myths. Often this was a form of learning integrated into normal daily social practices – the young would observe, listen, copy and practise what they saw around them in their family, village or town and sometimes improve upon on it (Omolewa 2007). However, this differs from the systems of formal education introduced through colonialism and then copied world-wide, with its separate institution of the school with its own school building and with specialist teachers and a planned curriculum that went beyond traditional knowledge.

Indeed, Kendall (2009) argues that there is a dominant, bureaucratic model of formal, Western-style and state-provided schooling that defines and constitutes 'education' for development in the 21st century – as sanctioned at the global Education for All conferences at Jomtien and Dakar and as inscribed in the UN's Millenium Development Goals. The essential features of this taken for granted model of modern education are that children learn primarily from adults about high-stakes academic subjects, on a fixed schedule, in an indoor setting that includes particular features (desks, chairs, chalkboards, written teaching and learning materials). She says:

> The international development model of education posits that mass, state-sponsored schooling is: (1) central to the creation of a "modern" nation-state; (2) central to the development of "modern" workers and families; and, thus (3) central to a state's "modern" economic growth and international acceptance. The general conceptualisation of education and development has received critical attention since its inception, but has yet to be significantly challenged (Kendall, 2009:422).

In this editorial essay, we will spell out some examples of the types of relationships between education and development in Africa that the journal will be particularly interested in; but first we want to make some comments on the contextual parameters of the journal.

THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL: GLOBALISATION, CULTURE AND CONTEXT

In the journal, we hope that authors will explore and discuss some of the major ideas, theories and issues about education and development, specifically in relation to Africa. However, authors and editors will need to bear in mind the two ends of a contextual continuum, that is, both that Africa exists in a globalised world but also that local culture and context are important in discussions of education and development in Africa. We will deal with each of these in turn. In terms first of globalisation or the increasing interconnectedness of the world, Africa is part of the process of social, political and economic interrelationships that have caused individual nation-states to decreased in importance (though not to disappear). In fact, it might be more accurate to speak of globalisation*s* in that globalisation has many strands. For example,

- The economic – the spread of free-market, neo-liberal or capitalist economic policies and trading patterns to most parts of the globe;
- The political – the spread of ideas of democracy and human rights to most parts of the globe;
- The increasing awareness of the ecological or environmental interconnectedness of the world – that environmental occurrences in one part of the world affect other parts and that the world is one large ecosystem;
- The actual, and immediate, interconnectedness of the world via information technologies such as the internet, email, texting, skype, mobile phones and 24 hour television news covering the globe;
- Related to the above, the widespread use of the English language in using these forms of communication. The English language is part of a standardised global curriculum - by the mid-1980s, for example, 72% of the world's secondary schools taught English (Meyer *et al.* 1992, cited in Spring 2008);
- The enormous increase in transnational air travel and tourism, so that the world becomes a smaller place geographically;
- The increase in global labour markets, so that there is large international-scale migration of labour between countries in search of work and a better standard of living;
- The power of transnational business corporations, including the Chinese government, that operate globally across national frontiers and that can move physical and financial capital at will;

- The spread of some common cultural patterns of consumption and behaviour as a result of the above – in terms of, for example, music, dress, food and films; and
- The existence of 'global' governance through bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, the General Agreement on Trade in Services and regional bodies such as the European Union, the Organisation of American States, the Arab League and the African Union; and so on.

So, what is the relationship between these globalisations and education? First, the increasing importance of the 'knowledge economy' globally. This is the argument that in the 21st century, the most important factors of production in a developed or rapidly developing economy are the skills and knowledge of people and constantly keeping them up to date. A study of successful engagement with the global economy in China, India, Sri Lanka and Kenya (defined as export-led growth with income equality and peace), for example, found that education is an important factor in this success (Green *et al*. 2007). Second, formal education – school – is itself a global phenomenon. Schools exist in similar shape and form to one another in most countries of the world. Whether this is a universally beneficial global phenomenon or whether this is the product of a model spread essentially through the power of colonialism to serve certain purposes is something that will hopefully be a continuing theme of the journal. Third, targets for education are increasingly set at a global level, for example, by the UN's Education For All targets and their monitoring by UNESCO. Fourth, the performance of education systems is increasingly being measured and compared in studies such as PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies). Fifth, even within education systems, there are increasingly common forms of governance globally – for example, decentralisation, school-based management, school choice and competition and an increasing role for both private education and fees paid by users (Sayed 2010). This is partly the result of what is known as 'policy borrowing' or 'policy transfer', whereby countries import or copy, perhaps with some local adaptions, educational policies that have originated elsewhere (Rappleye 2012; Phillips and Ochs 2003). For example, Schwiesfurth (2006) has shown how educational policies in post-genocide Rwanda have been influenced by dependence on aid from Britain, the exposure of Rwandan exiles to education in other, English-speaking parts of Africa and the comparative field of genocide studies.

However, while there are increasingly global or supranational relationships affecting education everywhere, it is also important to remember that it is human beings who are involved in development – whether they are actively involved in development in their own countries, recipients of development aid or donors of aid. All these people bring with them their own cultures and ways of seeing and

understanding the world. Everybody carries some cultural traits based on their shared customs, language, beliefs and assumptions about the world and how it functions. As Stephens (2007: 33) puts it in his detailed study of education, culture and development,

> at the basic level of one nation interacting with another, cultural factors play a fundamental part. Development, it is suggested, is therefore not 'culture-free' but is a process by which individuals rooted on one cultural tradition interact with individuals and agencies from another.

Therefore the context of development is important – where it is happening, by whom and to whom. For development theories and policies to be useful and to work, there is a need to understand how people *actually* behave in a specific context as well as providing generalised understandings, 'solutions' or 'answers' to the particular issue or problem. Harber and Davies (1997), for example, argue for the need to understand the specific contexts of developing countries in relation to the generalised statements of literature stemming from Western, industrialised nations about the nature and characteristics of school effectiveness and school management. Within developing countries, if a government, international organisation or an NGO wishes to introduce an AIDS or health education programme in a particular country or region of a country, then it is important to understand the local sexual and health beliefs and practices of the population first if the project is to work. Indeed, a mismatch between the assumptions and policies of education projects and the cultural beliefs and practices of local people often results in failure. Generalised theories of, and debates about, the roles of education in development are important, but so is an appreciation of the great variety of ways such roles play out in the wide range of different contexts and cultures that constitute 'developing countries'.

EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND *IJEDA*

So, given this understanding of development, education and the contexts in which it operates, what sort of topics might be of particular relevance to *IJEDA* and why? First, new data on, or new analysis of data on, the nature of formal education in the developing countries of Africa and, in particular, what differentiates it from more 'developed' or richer countries. This might concern access to education, the quality of education, the outcomes from education, and educational inequalities in developing countries. Second, it will be important for authors and editors to consider key theories of education and development – how might we begin to *explain* how education affects development and education in Africa and vice versa? Debates about the nature of development are intimately connected to different sets of ideas or theories about how development takes place or, perhaps sometimes more accurately, how it ought to take place. Although such theories as human capital, social reproduction, dependency, modernisation, liberation, capability, democratisation or theories that

argue that education is often harmful to development purport to 'explain' how development takes place (or does not take place), they often do so primarily either from a particular emphasis or priority (for example, economic development rather than social or political development) or from a preferred ideological model such as capitalism, socialism, green development or the development of a particular religious belief system. It is often difficult to separate 'is' and 'ought' questions in discussions of development, since how it actually takes place cannot easily be separated from an understanding of its ultimate goal – the nature of a 'developed' society – and this is a matter of opinion, preference, judgement and power as much as fact.

Third, there are also some examples of educational issues that are of particular relevance to a journal concerning itself with education and development in Africa and we will deal with them in turn. One obvious one, for example, is gender. The United Nations Millenium Development Goal 3 is 'promoting gender equality and empowering women' In 2003–2004, UNESCO devoted its annual *Global Monitoring Report on Education For All* to gender inequality and education, although it is an important theme in all editions. It made the following case for the importance of gender equality in education and development:

> There is also a powerful development case for achieving gender equality. It is clearly in the private and social interest to eliminate gender inequalities in education wherever they exist. The personal and social benefits are immense. Livelihoods are improved, families are healthier and better nourished, education is valued, and civic responsibility is enhanced. It is an affordable investment with high pay-offs (UNESCO 2003/4:17).

Yet, gender violence of boys and men against girls, for example, appears to be a widespread problem in sub-Saharan Africa, or at least the problem is well documented for the African region. Amina Mama of the University of Cape Town put it that,

> It is no exaggeration to state that violence and its particular gender-based manifestation has become an integral feature of Africa's postcolonial societies. This is true, not just in the war zones of Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia but also in supposedly peaceful contexts, where the daily torture and abuse of women is not even included in discussions of the continent's crisis. Worse still, there is growing evidence that Africa's newest democracies, South Africa and Nigeria, are particularly dangerous places for women. In both these cases, gender-based violence appears to be accepted as a normal aspect of daily life ….Simultaneously straddling modernisation with masculinist memory and nostalgia ….Gender-based violence is an integral aspect of modern African life, an invidious social ill that forestalls development, nullifying all the talk about women's rights and human rights and shooting democracy in the foot (2000:1–2).

In previous work, we have cited evidence of school based gender violence against girls in a wide range of African countries (Harber 2004: Ch.7; Harber 2009) and in 2007, the Global AIDS Alliance (2007) reviewed the Educational Sector Plans of ten African countries that are being supported by the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative, none of which outlined a comprehensive intervention package to prevent,

counter and respond to school-related violence. However, they also state that '… recent studies in Africa demonstrate that between 16 and 47 per cent of girls in primary or secondary school report sexual abuse or harassment from male teachers or classmates' (2007: 3) and further recent evidence continues to be produced of the widespread existence of this problem (for example, Dunne 2008; Bhana 2012). Thus, a focus on gender, masculinity and education is an important area for the journal.

Another potentially important issue for the journal is the role of education in post-emergency contexts, including post-violent conflicts. Africa has had its fair share of emergencies such as drought in Ethiopia or flooding in Mozambique, but more than its fair share of emergencies caused by war and violent conflict in, for example, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and the Central African Republic. Such emergencies are a development issue because they tend to have more impact on poorer people, the majority of whom live in developing countries. The housing of poorer people, for example, may well be less able to withstand an earthquake or flooding and their financial circumstances, and more direct reliance on agriculture, may mean that an emergency has a rapid impact on their lives and livelihood. What education can or cannot do to help to prevent and mitigate the impact of such emergencies, as well how education can be restored post-emergency is thus another important theme of the journal (see, for example, Harber 2013; Obura 2003) .

Another important issue for the journal is non-state educational provision in Africa. This is important partly because many developing states in Africa cannot afford to provide primary and secondary education for all, and partly because increasing numbers of parents in developing countries are opting to send their children to non-state educational providers, often because of the poor quality of state provision. Some forms of non-state provision in Africa, such as community financing of education or harambee schools in Kenya, have attracted attention for some time but more recently there has been considerable academic and ideological interest in 'low-fee private schools' for the poor as a supplementary way of achieving Education For All (Akeampong 2009; Chimombo 2009; Tooley and Dixon 2006).

The relationship between education and employment in Africa is another key concern of the journal. As somebody who had been working in Uganda put it:

> Education has often been hailed as the solution to Africa's problems … (but) ….There is a whole generation of Ugandans who have got their qualifications and exams and who want to go to work in an office, but there are no jobs. Then they have their families relying on them to bring in an income that their education promises (Norman 2010).

The relationships between education and employment and, in particular, the skills for employment that education may or may not provide is an important issue for developing countries, as providing formal education is expensive for both governments and individuals and if more education simply leads to more unemployment among

young people, which it often has, then this can have serious and negative social consequences (King and McGrath 2002; Oketch 2007).

On a negative, but unfortunately realistic note, corruption and education in Africa are also issues that the journal needs to welcome papers on. While corruption is a global problem affecting all countries, it is a particularly serious problem in developing countries such as those in Africa. Such corruption harms development. because it is a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law, depletes national wealth, denies communities of investment and necessary services, undermines trust in social institutions and can harm the environment through lack of enforcement of regulations in, for example, mining and forestry. Corruption also affects education in many developing countries (Heynemann 2009; Hallak and Poisson 2007). This has serious consequences, because when education is corrupt, it loses its impartiality, quality and fairness. UNESCO (2009: 138–139) notes that,

> Tackling corruption in education is important for the sector and for society in a broader sense. Education receives a large share of public expenditure – in most countries it is the largest area of government activity and the largest public employer. Efforts to limit corruption in general are not likely to succeed if they do not address the education sector in particular. Moreover, lack of integrity and unethical behaviour within the education sector is inconsistent with one of the main purposes of education itself, which is to produce "good citizens" respectful of the law, human rights and of fairness …Corruption has adverse consequences for efficiency and equity. Efficiency suffers because corrupt practices mean part of the benefit of public investment is captured in the form of private rent. Equity suffers because corruption acts as a regressive tax that hurts the poor the most.

Life expectancy is one of the indicators used to compose the UNDP's Human Development Index. The general health of the population is therefore an important indicator of development, but poverty can mean that curable and preventable diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea can have a devastating impact on life expectancy and child health. Education in Africa can both affect, and be affected by, health issues and is thus another important issue for the journal (Pridmore 2007). The educational level of parents affects the health and mortality of their children; the existing health of a child affects both their ability to attend school and their chances of success within it; school can provide both negative and positive health experiences and can provide teaching that directly tries to improve health related understanding and behaviour. In relatively recent times, HIV/AIDS has in particular provided a serious challenge to education in Africa, both in terms of its impact on the education system and in terms of what education might do to help to combat the spread of the disease (Biggs 2012).

A penultimate example of an issue of concern to the journal is that of literacy and language in education in Africa. The fourth of the Education For All goals that form part of the Millenium Development Goals included achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015. Literacy is accorded a high priority in the development of countries and is seen to bring both personal benefits to

the individual and developmental gains for the society in terms of, for example, economic modernisation and growth, democratic participation and citizenship and general levels of health. Illiteracy means that millions of people in the developing countries of Africa have restricted access to important information about health and social, economic and political issues. However, literacy, despite widely being seen as an obviously positive thing for individuals and societies, nevertheless involves more that the ability to read and write and is a contested and controversial area in terms of its definition, measurement, outcomes and language of use (Bartlett 2008; Maddox *et al.* 2011). The language of literacy, and the language of instruction in school, is a particularly important issue in Africa, with its history of imposed colonial languages and their continued dominance in education in preference to local African languages (Afitska *et al*. 2013; Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009).

Finally, built in to debates about development is the idea that the wealthier countries of the world will help the poorer ones through financial and other forms of assistance or aid. Hence, there are 'donor' countries and 'recipient' countries, though not all donor countries are necessarily from the richer, industrialised 'North'. Aid has played a major role in financing education in Africa, especially 'Education For All' initiatives (Colclough and Webb 2012; King 2010; Nordtvelt 2011). In Mozambique, for example, between 1999 and 2010, the numbers of out-of-school children fell from 1.6 million to 0.5 million and during much of the period, 42% of the education budget was funded externally (UNESCO 2012: 144). Thus, the nature, processes and consequences of aid relationships in relation to education are also of central importance to the journal.

CONCLUSION

IJEDA is a new journal devoted to the study of education in Africa from a development perspective. What is broadly meant by this has been set out in this essay to provide a general idea or flavour of the intentions of the journal, though it is by no means an exhaustive description of the range of possible contributions. The idea is to publish a high quality, refereed journal based on contributions both from Africa and from those located elsewhere who carry out research and scholarship in and on Africa. These might also be contributions from those involved in educational studies itself or from the social sciences such as sociology, political science, economics or development studies. The aim is that in 10 years' time, it will be possible to write the sequel to this essay, charting the successful development of the first decade of the journal.

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