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# CONVERGENCE ON POLICY GOALS: CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EAST ASIA AND ENGLAND

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**Abstract:** *The goal of character building in east Asian countries is often presented as a shared cultural construct and positioned within an east-west dichotomy. However, it is not at all clear that east Asian forms of character education are identifiable and distinct or that they always transcend national and cultural values. Jaynes (2008) has cautioned us to remember that cultural differences limit the extent to which we can learn lessons from another country, but how authoritative is this caution? The English Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, announced in December 2014 that she intended to secure England's place as a global leader by expanding the nation's provision and evidence base for character education. In this context, this article asks whether England shares any commonalities in the so-called east-west dichotomy on character education – are they mutually exclusive or are they compatible. Is there a west-individual view and an east - collective view? Is the character education movement in east Asia more of an ideological and political movement? As the British government looks for policy solutions to new and challenging problems, including character education, what answers can it find from abroad? What can it learn, borrow or pinch from these east Asian countries and is there a convergence on policy goals for character education within and across these countries? The paper is based on the work (translated) of prominent east Asian academics and builds on the author's personal interface with officials in the Ministry of Education in Japan and Singapore as well as meetings and conferences with numerous academics in universities across east Asian countries to address these questions.*

**Keywords:** *character, international comparisons, values, morals and schooling*

## Introduction

Character education in east Asian schools is experiencing a remarkable revival and re-emphasis. The purpose of education, as expressed through government legislation and regulations, in China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Japan has traditionally been explicitly linked to the building of character. Most of these countries are near the top of the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation/Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD/PISA) international league tables for academic attainment. It should be recognised that there is little or no research evidence that demonstrates a causal relationship between these examination results and character education. Consequently, this paper does not argue that England should adopt character education on the basis of east Asian success in PISA league tables. In recent years each of these east Asian governments has shown new and sometimes intense interest in looking at how to refresh and operationalise character education in schools. Each of these countries has either introduced new goals for character education or is currently planning a new curriculum in the next three years. Parental and societal concern about the behaviour of students is a factor fuelling the move to revitalise character education. On a broader level, what is happening is perhaps symptomatic of the vacuum of meaning engendered by consumerism and materialism, the symptoms of which these governments are recognising without necessarily understanding the full range of causes. English education has been reluctant to adopt policies on character education from east Asian countries. This reluctance

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may be due to cultural differences between England and east Asian systems of education. In the specific case of Japan, Traiger (1996) argues that the cultural differences are an 'unsurmountable barrier' to transfer of policy. This 'unsurmountable barrier' view feeds the notion that there is a basic dichotomy in modes of life and thought between England and countries in east Asia.

The notion that so-called 'cultural differences' between countries makes borrowing of educational ideas impossible seems fundamentally implausible. If it were true, Japan and Singapore would have been unable to set up a modern mass schooling system in imitation of western countries in the late nineteenth century, or borrow anything else from these countries in the hundred years since then; whereas, in fact, Asian countries have imported many practices and ideas from the west from sports to the ideas of Pestalozzi and Dewey. Such practices have been adapted to local context, which is normal in any borrowing process at any level, including within what is supposedly the same 'culture' or similar 'cultures'. Globalisation and the importance of looking 'elsewhere' have been valuable policy strategies for moderating educational reforms in these east Asian countries, which further helps explain the issue of convergence of policy goals. Few countries are hermetically sealed in regard to their educational systems as they engage in the international traffic of educational ideas and practices.

There has also been a growing recognition that an overly competitive schooling leads neither to happiness nor necessarily to economic dynamism. It is often argued that east Asian education systems are characterised by various degrees of rote memorisation, incessant testing, onerous homework, cram schools, private tutorial sessions and endless hours of effort that can start at 7am and end at 10pm. However, Cave (2007) reminds us that in the study of school mathematics, 'rote memorization' is more characteristic of mathematics teaching in England than in Japan and that in England, 'incessant testing' is increasingly becoming the norm. Starr (2012) argues that east Asian school systems teach the kind of factual knowledge that can be easily tested in comparative surveys and that this knowledge-based learning method may be less sophisticated and original as a result. There is also increasing recognition of little correlation between OCED/PISA league table results and success in later life. Nevertheless, all of these east Asian countries are marked by centralised control, prescriptive curricula, official textbooks, teachers as civil servants, educating for nation building and a degree of State paternalism.

Character education policy is usually a reflection of the prevalent values of a particular political context or jurisdiction. National cultural traditions are a major determinant and influence on education systems and therefore these systems are to a degree localised and culturally relative. East Asian societies have generally, at the level of goals, converged on similarly stated purposes for character education. There is a similarity of rhetoric, issues, and justifications for character education policies in many east Asian countries which are arrived at without any direct political link between them. These countries, it could be argued, have a comparable social-cultural formation in norms, values, beliefs and traditions which have combined to produce broadly comparable policy goals for character education. It is sometimes claimed that the guiding philosophy and discourse for these similarities in policy is derived in part from Confucian educational ideals and heritage with the emphasis on discipline, respect and humility (see Cen and Jun, 2014; Chou, Tu and Huang 2013; Starr, 2012; and Tu, 1996). Confucianism is most closely associated with Chinese societies and is about how people treat one another as well as how they behave individually. It is not a religion, but a system of moral, social and political philosophy. It is a system of thought centred on the Confucian theory of *ren*. This encompasses feelings of love and empathy and rests on the idea that if you want to be successful you must first help others to be successful. It sets standards for civility and appropriate behaviour and the main goal is the cultivation of character. However, one should be cautious in applying Confucian ideas too widely in east Asian societies as it is easy to exaggerate and over-generalise its influence. There are also other influences. Singapore, for example, is a distinctly pluralistic society and has more of a 'meritocracy' orientation. Nevertheless, some of the east Asian countries examined in this paper could be identified as what Starr (2012, p.17) calls 'Confucian heritage cultures'.

There is, however, much agreement on broad aims for character education, but considerable variation in the political operation and processes of character education, resulting in divergence of content, practices, teaching approaches and assessment within these different jurisdictions. As in England, east Asian societies are largely seen as marked by competitive, data-driven standardised public school examinations and many believe that such systems have had a detrimental effect on attempts at character building in students. The renewed focus on character education is intended to counterbalance the perceived materialistic and selfish tendencies generated by exclusive focus on academic success in which a student's worth is judged solely by their academic attainment as measured in public examinations. Kristjánsson (2015) argues that in order to be truly successful, any programme of character education needs to satisfy four criteria. It must: (1) align with public perceptions and speak to the dominant anxieties and vulnerabilities of the given context; (2) meet with a relatively broad political consensus and attract political interest, ideally be both on the political 'left' and 'right'; (3) be underpinned by a respectable philosophical theory, providing it with a stable methodological, epistemological and moral basis; and (4) be supported by a plausible psychological theory, explaining how the ideals of the educational theory fit into actual human psychology and are generally attainable. Few, if any, of these criteria have been met in east Asian countries or even in England.

### Theoretical Approaches

But why should national governments legislate for and promote virtue in their school systems? Why is it assumed that there ought to be a role for governments to improve the moral character of people? These questions invite normative justification for any State intervention in the school curriculum. In east Asia there is a diverse range of philosophical and religious approaches underpinning educational thinking, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Maoism and Christianity. It must be recognised that a sense of religious identity exerts much influence on the common moral understanding of Asian people, but this article will restrict itself to the more philosophical elements of this moral understanding. In the west the focus is almost exclusively on western philosophical traditions, but there has been over the last century an enormous amount of interaction between eastern and western thought. Hence, to categorise the west as simply concerned to promote individualism and open debate and the east as predominantly concerned with collective values and social harmony would be misleading. All political states make demands on the school curriculum and schools naturally aim to define policies made by their locally elected politicians. However, a general definition of character education for east or west might be the acquisition and strengthening of virtues that sustain a well-rounded life. Character education is an umbrella-term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal traits called *virtues* (see Arthur, 2003). On this view, schools should aim to develop confident students who are effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens. Students should be encouraged to develop a commitment to serving others, which is an essential manifestation of good character in action.

In the west Aristotle has been a major influence on both understanding political association and the character formation of citizens. Aristotle's *Politics*, in books 7-8 (see Lord, 2013), teaches that the end or purpose of the state is the highest good of citizens – in other words, a life of virtue. The aim of the state is to help shape the good life of its citizens. McIntyre (1999, pp.128-129) following Aristotle, but with a culturally constructed understanding of virtue, views the state as concerned to foster citizenship and draws on the Aristotelian tradition as a basis for the development of character. Following this, the present paper also uses this Aristotelian theoretical approach to explore the possibility of east-west convergence on character education policy. In the west, moral theory has drawn on Kantian ethics, utilitarianism and virtue theory and each has their critics (see Doris 2002; Brandt 1992; and McIntyre, 1967). However, Aristotle's *Ethics*, in book 10 chapter 9 (see Broadie and Rowe, 2002) which effectively advocates moral education through the development of virtues, has elements in common with east Asian philosophical approaches to character formation.

For example, Aristotle believed in a balanced collectivism and sought a life of positive association for all citizens and this sits well with the Asian aim of social harmony. However, Aristotle believed that the individual must not be entirely subordinate to the state. He emphasised the role of the family with the family seen as prior to the state. Nevertheless, he did believe that the state had a role to play in prohibiting unacceptable public behaviour while allowing considerable freedom to the individual. While Asian values are not Aristotelian in origin, however, there are similarities that might encourage connections, but Aristotle, we need to remember, was less collectivist than Asian values appear to be. To be sure, this would look different in China - where the government issues explicit moral guidance to citizens - from Japan where the individual has a greater degree of independence from state direction.

While Aristotle believed that every society is established for the sake of some good, Hunter (2001, p.228) has noted that politicians and civil servants are incapable of setting moral standards for character education. Liberal political theory in the west has also traditionally held that government has no business setting moral standards for the public. When a government or state prescribes a rigid curriculum for character education this might encourage dispositions of respect, responsibility and self-discipline, but might also foster submission, conformity and docility in citizens. On a liberal view, the virtues that form character should be freely chosen by citizens as desirable for their own sake. It is only through such freedom that truly virtuous citizens might be developed. Still, McIntyre (2013, p.11) believes that those who lack virtuous character do not make good citizens.

### English Character Education

English education traditionally saw the purpose of education as character building and this was the explicit aim of the Department for Education (DfE) until just after the Second World War (Arthur 2003, pp.20-21). The purposes of east Asian national character education programmes are similar to what Nicky Morgan, (former) Secretary of State for Education in England, articulated at the *Sunday Times* Festival of Education in July 2015 when she said that 'building a strong character and a sense of moral purpose is the responsibility we have toward our children, our society, our nation'. This might well be echoed by any Minister of Education in east Asia. Today, England's education system is marked by detailed standards, accountability and test scores for league tables that may not be the most fertile environment for any new emphasis on character education. There is also the suspicion in psychological circles about the very idea of character education and efforts at such education are typically designed apart from the best available psychological evidence.

The English DfE has borrowed ideas from east Asian countries to shape policies in English schools, though there are few clear cut examples of 'hard' copying of policies from east Asia. Even the emphasis on traditional didactic approaches to teaching and learning, some of which have been borrowed from the east and applied in England by Michael Gove, the former Secretary of State for Education, has often been more rhetoric than reality in practice. Certainly, there are ideological and cultural incompatibilities which inhibit any straight transfer of policies - a point recognised by the reports of Michael Barber and McKinsey justifying the reform agenda in England (see Barber, 2012). Greater emphasis on broader educational values and practices rather than concrete policies *per se* is arguably what is required. However, the DfE rhetoric consistently links attainment to character skills such as resilience and grit. In contrast to east Asian educational systems, English education has in recent times aimed to be child-centred and individualistic in approach, but it is not clear that it has always realised these goals in practice. Children are encouraged to define and pursue their own goals in life and become autonomous thinkers and citizens. The intention is to maximise freedom and this is supported by a diversity of approaches in western educational psychology. Does this result in selfish individuals? Individuality cannot develop from a vacuum insofar as it needs a social atmosphere. In 1999, a specific statement of the aims and purposes of the English education system was published by the government as a preamble to the National Curriculum which included a

Statement drawn from the 1996 National Forum for Values in Education and the Community (Arthur 2005, p.239f). This Statement emphasises both social and moral values.

The emphasis in English government circles over the last few years has been to emphasise resilience and grit, borrowing language from the US, and linking this to increased academic attainment and employability. So far there have been no government guidelines on what character education actually means, though it has become one of the five aims of the DfE and there is a minister responsible for introducing it and he is aided by a special character unit of civil servants. What lessons can England learn from east Asian countries? In east Asian countries the primary agency in the spreading, dispersion and dissemination of character building policies and practices is the state and its civil servants. State legislation, guidelines and regulations initiate policy changes which are normally prescribed for education. Such prescriptions are couched in high idealistic terms and issued from governments that may or may not be democratic, but have a strong dominant party system, or be authoritarian in the form of communist dictatorship - or even exhibit soft authoritarian tendencies that are not on the liberal western democratic model. In all these east Asian models of government the family, community and ultimately the nation are often seen as prior to the individual and there is frequently a fusion of the state, the leading political party and the bureaucracy making for stronger direction in education policy. A short review of each of these east Asian nations may serve as an introduction to their current character education provision. Three categories are outlined: quasi collectivist, quasi paternalistic and quasi authoritarian; but we see elements of all three at work in almost all east Asian societies.

### **Quasi Collectivist Character Education**

The Japanese public senses a general decline of morality among the young evidenced by increasing levels of school absenteeism, violence, suicide and bullying. In this connection Ryan et. al (2011, p.17) argues that human behaviour is a function of both character and culture – shared values, group expectations, tradition that call forth either the best or the worst in our character. Takayama and Apple (2008, p.297) argue that the perceived Japanese ‘crisis’ is the reflection of a conservative discourse of tradition, order, patriotism and discipline which has formerly had the support of the Japanese people. Returning traditional moral education to schools has been a goal of Japanese conservatives since the Second World War. Green (2000) also indicates that Japanese education has reached a crisis point and, despite having one of the highest literacy rates in the world, it often looks to England for a reform agenda. The current 2006 Fundamental Law on Japanese Education, which is still seen in Japan as controversial and contested, refers to character in three places. First, in the introduction, it speaks of the purpose of education as the ‘perfection of character’. Second, in paragraph three, it says that schools and teachers must ‘polish the character’ of their students. Third, in paragraph eleven, it says that moral education is ‘the foundation of character’ in schools. While the importance of character is already recognised, the revision of the National Curriculum in Japan is reviewing how to ensure that character education is implemented in every school. Moral education is already compulsory in Japanese schools, but its practice and quality varies. The Ministry of Education believes that there has been a failure to determine what moral education ought to be in the classroom. To this end there is a unit in the Ministry preparing new content for moral education for introduction in 2018 (primary schools) and 2019 (secondary schools). In a *Wall Street Journal* (27<sup>th</sup> December 2015) poll, 83% of parents in Japan agree that moral education should continue to be taught as a school subject, but only 22% of Japanese teachers believe it should be taught as a specific subject. Nevertheless, civil servants, teachers and academics are drawing up the curriculum for a special course in moral education.

Many Japanese academics see moral education as a field, rather than a school subject because it covers a wider area and is the responsibility of all teachers. Japan has decided to follow Singapore, China and South Korea in introducing a specific timetabled place in the school curriculum for moral and character education. The proposal is designed to give the subject greater status, but also involves

more state control. This means that designated teachers need to be trained to teach this new subject and new textbooks be produced. No one in Japan would deny that some kind of character education is necessary in schools, but the term 'moral education' has become more ambiguous in academic circles with suspicions that the militaristic moral education of pre-war Japan with its imperialist goals, may engender new ultra-nationalism. It has also been argued that character building activities in Japan lead to high degrees of social conformity at odds with independence and autonomy in Japanese school students (see Otsu, 2000; Shields, 1998; and Jansen, 1957). Cave (2001, p.187; and 2007, pp.16-17) has carried out extensive research on 'individuality' in Japanese education and highlights the Japanese government's educational reforms in the 1990's designed to encourage creativity with the policy slogan 'stress on individuality'. While recognising that there was much ambiguity regarding 'individuality', he concluded that there was significant progress in providing some new freedom for teachers and encouraging 'self-directed learning'.

Justice, taken from *Kojien*, justice is defined as 'the right way to secure a good life' and 'individual virtue leading one to take the right action, for example, in distributing social goods'. This sits well with Aristotle's idea of justice as an acquired disposition to promote the common good, though Aristotle insists that such just agency should be voluntary. Japanese students tend to be well motivated and learn to be polite by required socialising with their fellow students. Notions of obligation and duty are communicated in the web of commitments to others in the Japanese terms *giri* and *on*. Both terms imply a strong sense of being embedded in a community where responding to the demands made by communal obligation has priority over individual desires. Thus, the kind of character education promoted is quasi-collectivist or communitarian in style and relies to some degree on the cultural homogeneity of the society. Some Confucian thought is invoked in Japanese character education, but there are also Buddhist, Shinto and even Christian influences (Luhmer 1990, p.172). The most important Confucian influence is the emphasis on interpersonal relations and the promotion of humility. The purpose of voluntary after-school clubs in Japan (*Bukatsudo*) is to help socialise Japanese youth as 'part of the group' (see Cave 2004, p.384) by emphasising participation, habit, repetition, routine, ritual, order, shared responsibility and discipline. Such clubs are run by teachers and involve sport, art and music, but generally discourage competition between students in favour of self-improvement, good manners and getting on with others. These clubs, influenced by English public school ethos of the nineteenth century, emphasise cheering others on so that everyone contributes to success. Such clubs are often compulsory, begin at the end of the school day and last for two hours up to six times a week. Some have suggested that these are vestiges of a previous 'militarised character training', others that they are about engendering obligations to the community and the promotion of the common good. There is still a strong consensus in Japanese society in favour of schools as agents of social stability and cultural preservation.

Japanese character education is understood as occurring via the ethos of schools as well as through the various student practices within them. So, for example, there is the culture of senior (*senpai*) and junior (*kohai*) whereby students learn good habits and behaviour from mentoring by seniors. It is a kind of apprenticeship programme and stresses role-modelling and imitation of behaviour. Another example is the practice of *Hansei* which requires each student to keep a reflective diary of all their daily activities and behaviour which the teacher reviews and comments on to aid improvement. During lunch hour, students take turns to serve food to class members and the teacher and all eat together in their class; there is often no cafeteria or dining hall in Japanese schools. Japanese schools generally have no cleaners since students are required to clean the whole school, including the school play-ground at the end of each day. Such practices are designed to socialise and build the characters of students as well as to encourage co-operation and responsibility for each other. The role of mothers in Japan is and has been to prepare lunch boxes for their children, supervise their substantial homework and encourage their desire to learn. But do such practices mould uniformity? It is perhaps important to distinguish between formal and informal moral/character education insofar as Japan emphasises both types. Informal moral and character education is intended to socialise children in more generally acceptable conduct and the



formal element takes the form of one hour a week of explicit 'moral education' (*dotoku*) across the nine years of compulsory education.

### Quasi Paternalistic Character Education

In Korea, a government report 'The agenda of education reform for the establishment of New Educational System' published in 2009 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology spoke about the need for the development of 'sound moral character' and the 'development of virtues involved in positive human relationships', as well as of preparing young people to make good ethical decisions in their lives. The three specific stated goals of character education are: understanding oneself, caring for and respecting others, and cultivating the ability to co-operate with others. Filial piety, another Confucian ideal, is emphasised and involves learning how to demonstrate respect for parents, grandparents and elders in the community. Co-operation and sharing are important, as well as developing a sense of balance and order. The intention is to empower students for responsible decisions that are ethical and socially acceptable. Previously students took the purpose of ethics or moral education classes to be simply about memorising information. However, the new government report seems to be prescribing what it believes students need; that the state becomes responsible for your character and in so doing strengthens its own hand over the individual.

Character education in South Korea is associated with strong government and with an anti-communist stand (Suh 1988, p.93). What the South Korean government calls the 'Character Education Promotion Act' was passed in January 2015 in the National Assembly. 'Creativity and character education' was the key education slogan of President Park in the presidential election campaign. But, until the year 2015, there has been no consensus about the meaning of character education. The Act offers an official definition of character (building) education. The Act envisages a national character education committee, the addition of relevant curricular units in schools, and new teacher education courses. According to this Act, all Korean schools (from kindergartens to high schools) will be required to teach students how to develop 'humane character and capabilities'. The definition of character education refers to teaching students how to 'develop the mentality and attitude necessary for living with others, and in nature. [and]...key values include etiquette, filial duty, generosity, cooperation, communication and responsibility'. Under the current examination focused curriculum, teachers fear that the teaching-to-the-test educational culture will produce another layer of administrative and evaluative ritual of curricular and instructional practices in local schools. Many teachers fear that the school culture of teaching to the new Korean SAT tests will simply mask character education (Lee, 2013 and Lee, 2001). The South Korean system also reflects some of the socialising practices in Japanese schools, such as eating with classmates and after school clubs.

Singapore has the highest percentage of separate ethnic groups and is more pluralistic than other east Asian societies. Character education, which is compulsory in Singapore schools needs to be understood as occurring within an evolving political and social framework that emphasises social integration and consensus. Habits and attitudes for a civic culture have not always been present in Singapore's schools (Kam and Gopinathan, 1999), but schools continue to play a major role in inculcating Singaporean values. Character, civic and moral education now play a major role in schools, emphasising honesty, commitment to excellence, teamwork, discipline, loyalty, humility, national pride and the promotion of the common good as part of the character and citizenship education provided in every school (Tan and Chin, 2004). The needs of family and community are considered more important than the needs of individuals; collectivism and a paternalistic approach is prioritised. This was given explicit focus in the 1990s with Lee Kuan Yew's 'Asian Values' platform that challenged western style political freedoms with its emphasis on the family and social harmony and the prioritisation of social over individual needs (Lee, 1998). While Confucianism is not mentioned in official character education policy, Tai and Chin (2004) believe its influence is present.

Taiwan has also preserved traditional Chinese values and has stressed the moral dimensions of education. The country has used Confucian textbooks such as *Ta Hsuen* (The Great Learning) which

extends 'the Virtuous Individual' to the 'Good Citizen of the World'. Taiwan is more politically diverse with a more liberal approach, than other east Asian societies (Lee, 2004). While still influenced by Confucian values, character education has been more controversially divided between conservative and progressive camps. There are no formal timetabled lessons in moral education in schools and this has been criticised by more conservative voices. Conservative voices in Taiwan want the transmission of virtues to take place in schools, while progressives appear more concerned with the process of decision making for social justice. However, character education is expected to be taught through all subjects, through the school ethos and in extra curricula activities (Ho, Lam and Yeh, 2013). In Aristotelian terms, character develops over time as one acquires habits from parents and community, and character education in both Singapore and Taiwan certainly emphasises this.

### Quasi Authoritarian Character Education

In July 2010, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council of the Peoples Republic of China convened the first National Working Conference on Education, and issued the *National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)*, defining the directions for the scientific development of China's educational programme. Attaching priority to the cultivation of people is the foundation of this new policy direction in which moral education is given priority. The guidelines for 'Integrating the System of Core Socialist Values into School Education' was promulgated. An important educational philosophy and principle of the *National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* is that character education will be a key part of education for each student. This would appear to promote an authoritarian character education whereby students are simply told how to act and what to believe. There are, however, contradictory components in Chinese educational practice. Wenhua College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, has developed student-centred programmes to encourage individualised education (Fu, 2011). Hundreds of Confucian education centres and classes, and new private schools have also been established and run from the west, which indicates some diversity in approaches to character education.

However, the Chinese Communist Party has used moral education in schools to promote patriotism and socialism. In this regard, emphasis on Confucianism is at odds with recent state policy and communist ideology. The Confucian idea of character development is to cultivate virtuous behaviour in society with teachers modelling the virtues. The idea of *ren* is defined as 'human becoming' and teachers are expected to practice *ren*; that is, to care for others and promote the good of all. Character education is therefore directly related to building up society and China shares many of the classroom practices of Japanese schools, including an emphasis on extra-curricular activities. Confucian ethics is accepted as a secular moral philosophy by the Chinese government. The State therefore exploits popular support for Confucian ideas for its own social purposes (Fuqing, 1998). Confucianism is consequently seen as compatible with communism to the extent that it emphasises loyalty, self-discipline and respect for authority as well as social responsibility. As Yu (2004, p.16) says: 'the return of Confucianism does little than reinforce the collective and conservative nature of moral education shaped by communism'. However, an alternative view might be that there are two models of moral and character education existing side by side; one traditional the other socialist.

Vietnam has one of the poorest education systems in east Asia and the lowest academic standards. In Vietnam character education forms part of moral education and is provided from pre-school to tertiary levels of education. It has a strong national education policy grounded in Vietnamese law and emphasises the promotion of manners and right conduct. Character education in Vietnam reflects socialist ideology and Doan (2005) sees it as political education for nation building and instilling socialist values. Nevertheless, traditional morality is held in high public esteem and Confucian ideals are mixed with communist doctrine and celebrated in all schools. Confucianism and communism are blended to shape student behaviour in schools through prescribed rules and there is stress on the more social virtues of character (Phan, McPherron and Phan, 2011). Primary

schools focus on character building while secondary schools give more emphasis to building the good citizen. In both Vietnam and China any criticism of the prevailing communist ideology is either ignored or condemned and communist influence continues to extend into every aspect of life. In Aristotelian terms, however, the full development of character requires open reflection and some measure of rational autonomy. Aristotle would also require full democratic participation on the part of free citizens in the political community to be virtuous – a requirement that is largely missing in communist societies. However, in Vietnam there is some variety of school provision and more private schools are being encouraged especially among the Catholic and Buddhist communities (Chu, 2008).

### Commentary

There are practices in character education within east Asian countries that would be difficult to transfer to England. It is important to recognise that the very idea of east Asia is relatively modern and largely denotes a regional designation comprising many separate countries. It would be misleading to suggest a dichotomy of character educational approach between conformist east Asian countries and individualist western approaches as might be implied by my foregoing characterisation of east Asian character education as predominantly quasi collectivist, paternalistic and authoritarian. All the virtues emphasised by east Asian countries for character education are also prioritised in England, such as balance, co-operation, loyalty and self-discipline. The preamble to the 1999 National Curriculum and more recently, the nationally influential work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in the University of Birmingham have embraced wider aims of social cohesion and cooperation emphasised in Asian cultures.

Nevertheless, if we use Geert Hofstede's (2010) research on 'Intercultural Dimensions' which considers the degree to which a society reinforces individual or collective achievements and interpersonal relationships we can see that all east Asian societies are deemed to be more collectivist in nature. In Hofstede's measurement, England scores highly for individualism which implies that individual rights are dominant within a loosely-knit social framework, while all the east Asian societies score considerably lower implying a more collectivist focus and tightly-knit framework to these societies. Hofstede's scores appear to reinforce the view that east Asian societies have a greater sense of their self-image as 'We' as opposed to the 'I' of England. The implication for character education policies may be that they are culturally constructed from local communities in east Asia. Nonetheless, this polarisation of cultures between a west-individual view and an east - collective view within an increasingly globalised context requires greater empirical evidence than what is offered by Hofstede if it is to be sustained.

One should also not confuse moral education in east Asian countries with social conformity or non-questioning loyalty to the state, insofar as values promoted by the state in these countries are not uncritically accepted by everyone. The national traditions of such countries are indeed strong and patriotism is often stressed in school textbooks (Meyer 1988, p.1130), but this is largely taught indirectly through celebrated national literature, much as Shakespeare and other national classics are taught in the west. Generally, moral virtues are considered more important in these countries than civic virtues. The general social conservatism of such countries and the overwhelming emphasis on the group over the individual are idealistic political aspirations, but in practice this goal is not always successfully achieved. These governments are able to state clear goals because they are largely free of the controversies that rage over moral and character education in liberal-democratic societies. East Asian governments range from quasi collectivist and paternalist approaches to character education to quasi-authoritarian and even authoritarian approaches than a democratic government in England could allow. Such east Asian societies were previously marked by a uniform authoritarianism which emphasised patriotic education, conformity to strict codes of conduct, and nationalism. In all of these societies schooling was directed towards achieving national identity and cohesion, whilst character building was directed to defence from possible attack, particularly in South Korea and Taiwan. While political education was at the forefront, new teaching approaches, a concern

for critical thinking and some focus on civic values are not entirely absent in these countries. Still, while there has been a cultural shift in some places that focuses on individualism, this is a minority position, albeit a growing one.

Confucian traditions and the Confucian concern for character education are still strong in some east Asia countries and are often mixed with Buddhist, Taoist and other values. Such blends of traditional ideas are largely spread by individuals and families from one generation to the next (see Tu Wei-Ming, 1996). Character education policies are therefore sometimes underpinned by the teachings of Confucius, especially in relation to social welfare. Individualist trends can be discouraged and the collective prioritised. Extra curricula activity is hugely important in east Asian societies as part of socialisation and character building and some of this has been borrowed or copied from Britain's public schools of the nineteenth century. There are numerous direct and indirect ways that character building takes place in east Asian schools that might be recognised and accepted as good practice in England, but some of these practices, such as consuming teacher time after school clubs, may come at too high a price for western teachers.

England is more cautious about asserting character qualities for schools while east Asian countries are often forthright in asserting a strong role for the state. East Asian societies emphasise the commitment to national identity while England is again perhaps less assertive in this. East Asian societies also tend to have a stronger common tradition than more pluralistic societies such as England. As Cummings (1989, p.180) say 'Asian states appear less constrained by law and custom in their review of policy options....In contrast Western states tend to focus on a relatively narrow scope of values and mobilize fewer options for their realization'. It is interesting that in east Asian countries goals of resilience and grit – very much seen as American influences and increasingly influential in English policy rhetoric - are less evident; but there is something similar in the form of 'guts' or perseverance (*ganbari*) which is pervasively within and beyond schooling. But emphasis is placed on moral and intellectual virtues no less than performance virtues with one of the most common Japanese phrases being *garbatte kudasai*, meaning 'please persevere or do your best'. Character and moral education is not part of the examination system and yet examinations are the mainstay of Asian school systems leading to some tension with ideals of co-operation. There also appears to be a difference in that east Asian societies value group harmony while England encourages individual development and choice. However, the promotion of rational autonomy is not entirely absent in east Asian societies.

Some in east Asia countries have historically viewed England as hedonistic, weak-willed and as a place that embraces excessive human rights at the expense of social cohesion (see Gopinathan 1988, p.133). While Gopinathan exaggerates this feature of English education, England does pay much more attention to individual rights. Values in east Asian character education are largely based on traditional practices and are prescribed by governments. However, there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that east Asian youth are less selfish and better at working for the common good of society than more liberally educated English youth. There is a general impression in the west that east Asian societies are more stable, more orderly, respect the family and work together. But such societies are much influenced by ideas from England and the US (Su, 2008 and Fuqing, 1998). Cummings (1989) has exposed many myths generated about east Asian education systems. Ke and Fang (2004), Chinese scholars working in Chinese Universities, have argued that the main Chinese objectives for character education ought to be about recognising and respecting individuality, but it is not clear that this could become a reality in a communist society. In any case, concepts such as 'individuality' in east Asian societies can be ambiguous and there is some debate in these societies between conservatives and progressives about whether to emphasise more patriotism or more creativity in the young. Parental beliefs and attitudes are also key to understanding both academic attainment and character building in many east Asian societies; lessons from the schools' systems in east Asia alone would not therefore be suffice to improve English schools as widespread cultural change would be required among parents in England to value education (see Jerrim, 2014).

Many east Asian states are quasi paternalistic about character education; regarding it as justifiable to interfere in the lives of students because they will in the end be better off as a result. However, English schools can also be quasi authoritarian institutions with pronounced paternalistic elements in promoting and protecting what they perceive as the well-being of students. English policies on reducing poverty, welfare dependency, supervising the poor, and racial integration can all be paternalistic and intrude upon the freedom of individuals. English schools also enforce existing parental values or seek to change lifestyles on the grounds that many students lack educationally required family support and cultural capital.

An important tension in the idea of character education concerns whether it is simply a culture free phenomenon that provides us with universal traits and dispositions to be applied in any context or is it culturally constructed from the beliefs and practices of a particular local community. Is it to be viewed as part of a continuum between conservative and progressive approaches?

## Conclusion

Still the goals of character education in England are not as clear as those officially stipulated in east Asian countries. There is also a degree of convergence in policy goals in and between east Asian countries. By comparison, English policy goals for character education are not as well developed and there is some gap between government policy announcements and the reality of school practices – although this may be changing. Character education is a policy that because of the dynamism of educational change and the interaction among various agencies at different levels of the school system often means that policy goals are compromised in reality. By contrast east Asian governments dictate clear and ambitious goals that serve to reinforce character education, and supporting it with resources and training programmes to ensure more effective implementation than in England. Such governments usually frame policies through long and detailed consultations with teachers, academics and civil servants. The extent to which English schools stress individuality and freedom may also be exaggerated insofar as there is considerable stress on discipline and order as well as on working with others. England might therefore benefit from a study of character education practices in east Asia so long as we recognise that the cultural experience of character education provision in east Asian countries is not adaptable wholesale outside the home context. Borrowing in both directions may be possible, though this will always require some adaptation, but learning from others is more effective than policy borrowing.

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# MALAYSIA'S EDUCATION POLICIES AND THE LAW OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

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**Abstract:** *Since gaining independence in 1957, the Federation of Malaya and now Malaysia has implemented education policies to broaden access, to unify an ethnically diverse population through a common curriculum and language, to enable the disadvantaged to catch up through affirmative action, and to build human capital as the country seeks to become an advanced country in the face of globalization. While some policies, such as enhancing access have achieved their objectives, others, such as unification and development of a national identity, have not. No less important are the unintended consequences of these policies. While some, like the expansion of private higher education and transnational higher education, have been a boon to Malaysian education, others, such as ethnic polarization in education, have been damaging. Some of these consequences, while unintended, have not been unexpected.*

**Keywords:** *Malaysia, education policy, affirmative action, national unity, ethnic stratification*

## Introduction

All actions, undertaken by whoever, have consequences. These consequences may be as intended by whoever takes the action, or unintended by them. Intended consequences are generally beneficial to the party taking the action or its target group. Unintended consequences, however, can be positive, benign, or negative.

Among the many specific actions taken, those by economists and governments are particularly salient. Economists advise actions that can affect the economic wellbeing of many, while governments have the mandate to enact policies that affect those under their jurisdictions. Little wonder, then, that the so-called law of unintended consequences is typically defined with specific reference to the latter actors. Thus Norton (2008) defined it as: "The law of unintended consequences ... is that actions of people—and especially of government—always have effects that are unanticipated or unintended."

What may be the causes of unintended consequences? Merton (1936) cited, among others, ignorance, analytical error, vested interests, basic values, and self-defeating prophesy. Equally common are the need to satisfy multiple objectives, the failure of assumptions to apply to the situation at hand, and to match policy rhetoric with action on the ground. These causes would arouse limited interest were it not for the magnitude of potential impact some actions bring about, especially if the consequence turns out to be perverse. Since policy seeks in principle to do good, a perverse consequence can prove extremely damaging for the country and its citizens.

The Malaysian education system is particularly worthy of consideration because it is subject to many of the factors that render unintended consequences likely, and even inevitable. First, it is made to satisfy multiple objectives, including universal access and affirmative action, of which educational

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excellence is just one, arguably not even the most important. Second, education policy is often based on assumptions such as the ability of the system to produce internationally competitive graduates with, at best, a second-rate command of English. Third, annual examination results conducted by the education authorities that are, for years, at variance from those from international benchmark assessments, which suggests that, for whatever reason, little effort has been made to investigate, let alone cure, the gap to bring Malaysian standards on par with international benchmarks.

This paper shows that the unintended consequences of the implementation of Malaysia's education policies have been substantial. While some consequences do elicit a positive response, the overall assessment must be that they have been mostly negative in nature.

To recognise what consequences are unintended, it is important to identify what are intended. This is done in the next section, in which the country's education objectives since independence are highlighted. In the sections that follow, each of these intended consequences are analysed in the chronological order the policy objective appeared and with respect to whether it did materialise.

### Malaysia's Education Objectives and Policies

Malaysia's education policies have evolved over a period of half a century, as they responded successively to a shifting national context and external circumstances. Rao (2009) identified three major phases of education policy agendas. The first phase dated from independence as the Federation of Malaya in 1957 until the introduction of affirmative action under the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. The second phase, lasting about two decades from 1970 to the 1990s, covered the progressive, yet more aggressive application of the NEP to education. This was a period in which the intensification of NEP implementation across sectors occurred and the state took on a progressively larger role. The 1985 recession however saw the partial retreat of the state and the adoption of more liberal policies. Together with the growing impact of globalisation and the attendant need for international competitiveness, the third phase began. In this latest phase, emphasis is on nurturing human capital for Malaysia to become a "knowledge economy" and achieve "Vision 2020", was a strategic objective introduced by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991. The vision calls for the nation to achieve industrialised nation status by the year 2020.

The *first phase* was defined by the Razak Report, which appeared just before independence (1956) and the Rahman Talib Report in 1961. In both reports, the objective of building a national identity was emphasised as an education objective (Rao, 2009). In the Razak Report, this was to be achieved through a standardised syllabus for both primary and secondary schools and both Malay and English were to be compulsory subjects. It was emphasised that: "The ultimate objective of education policy in this country must be to bring together the children of all races under a national education system in which the national language (Malay language) is the main medium of instruction" (Mohammad Zaini 2014, p.138). The Rahman Talib Report also emphasised the use of Malay as a medium of instruction. These two reports formed the basis of the Education Act, 1961, the passage of which saw the implementation of the national education system in which the medium of instruction in secondary schools was restricted to either English or Malay.

A second theme of education policy was to equalise access to education for the disadvantaged Malays, in essence, the beginning of affirmative action. Only Malay-medium schools were tuition fee-free, with fees also largely waived for Malays in English-medium schools. Most government scholarships also went to Malays who, by virtue of these scholarships, could more easily secure entry to state universities (de Tray 1984, p.2). A subtheme of affirmative action was to increase access to education to ultimately achieve universal education.

The *second phase* was dominated by the launch and implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the outcome of racial riots in 1969, and applied to education. As earlier indicated, the roots of this policy were to be found well before these riots; in the Barnes Committee's Malay education recommendation of 1951 which stated as its overarching objective to "enable the Malay

community to occupy its rightful place in the mixed society of Malaysia" (Mohamad Zaini 2014, p.139). The NEP in education was manifested by the imposition of quotas and scholarships for university enrolment. Indeed, Lee (2013) argued that government scholarships were awarded and loans granted on a purely ethnic-based and income blind basis.

The imposition of the NEP did not signify the wholesale abandonment of using language to build a national identity. Post-1969, English schools were converted to Malay medium, the universities being the last to convert by the mid-1970s. In converting English schools to the Malay medium, the government expected that the move would promote shared experiences in elite formation with Malay linguistic and cultural symbols. This educational language policy would convey a sense of belonging so that "non-Malays belong to Malaysia but that Malaysia belongs to the Malays" (Rudner 1977, p.68).

To the extent that education is the pathway to poverty reduction and social mobility, nation-building and affirmative action are not necessarily contradictory goals. The extent of education inequality, whether expressed through enrolment rates, years of schooling, and the selection of disciplines in tertiary education, needs to be addressed if Malaysia is to move forward as a unified nation. The use of language as a unifier also continued under this period, with the phasing out of English language as a medium of instruction in favour of Malay language (Puteh, 2010). However, achieving national unity while accommodating ethnic diversity remains a fine balancing act. Of even more relevance is how to assuage the feelings of the communities at the wrong end of affirmative education.

The *third phase* that began in 1990 reflected a more competitiveness-based approach to education that coincided with the launch by then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of his Vision 2020, with its objective of Malaysia becoming a high-income country by the year 2020. Dubbed by Rao (2009) as the "globalisation era", it followed shortly after a recession forced upon Malaysia the retreat of the role of the state (Thillainathan and Cheong, 2016). A more neo-liberal approach enunciated by (former) Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was reflected in his statement: "... globalisation is about competition, the competition of the market place. It is about the dominance of the most efficient" (Mahathir 2002, p.13).

Towards this end, considerable emphasis is placed on using education to build human capital towards achieving a "knowledge economy" (Lee, 1997). This emphasis on competitiveness would appear to require some pull-back of affirmative action. Thus, at least lip service was given to "meritocracy" in education. In reality, this was illusory as quotas were not relaxed (Rao 2009, p.7).

Non-Malay anxieties regarding their lack of access to public universities were indeed assuaged with the passage of the Private Higher Education in which private tertiary education was recognised for the first time. And shortly after, the government proclaimed its objective of turning Malaysia into an international education hub. Yet it must be remembered that this policy represents not a proactive but a reactive stance, a response to the large number of students completing secondary schools that public universities were unable to cater for.

Underlying each policy objective and shift is the strong hand of the federal government, which saw fit to control and to take the lead in every aspect of education from admission to curriculum in schools to senior appointments and the nature of discourses in public universities. Even when the sector opened up to private education, it was subjected to regulation, more tolerated than welcomed, and was seen by the government's scant efforts to tap its potential. It is hardly surprising then that Niaz (2014), in his critique of this mindset, argued: "The Malaysian government should look to civil society for support in strengthening the nation's education system... Civil society needs to bring important issues to the government's attention as well as get local communities to voice their demands for quality education."

Thus, over the course of half a century, several policy priorities have been articulated that assumed prominence at different times. Whether these have been congruent remains a matter of contention. It may be argued, for instance, that the arrival of the NEP overshadowed earlier efforts to build national unity and identity. Similarly, it has been argued that the more neoliberal policy stance since the 1990s has blunted its momentum (Lee, 1997; Lee H.A., 2012). Still, there can be no

doubt that affirmative action continues to provide the subtext in all policy discussions. The question that needs to be asked is the extent to which these objectives have been realised.

### Education and National Unity

Since colonial times, education in Malaysia has been defined by ethnic stratification and implemented through ethnic inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, the entire education process from primary to tertiary education has relied on ethnic markers, while education policies are also framed in ethnic segregation terms (Hazri and Nordin, 2010). Central to this segregation is affirmative action embodied by the NEP. In such a situation, it is to be expected that the beneficiaries of ethnic inclusion, the *Bumiputera* (or 'sons of the soil', referring to the Malay race and other indigenous group in Sabah and Sarawak), view efforts to create a national identity very differently from those who suffered ethnic exclusion, the ethnic Chinese and Indians. Reflecting the former view, Mohamad Zaini (2014, p.141) concluded that "... the policy of preferences ... does not aim at ethnic dominance or supremacy (but) ... merely seeks to overcome the historical backwardness of the Malays." Reflecting the latter view, Ting (2013, p.5) saw the government's stated nation-building goal as "a thinly veiled state project to assimilate minorities."

The story of this segregation began in colonial times and continued after Malaya became independent in 1957. A primary school system that had distinct vernacular language streams in addition to schools with Malay and English as media of instruction was blamed on colonial divide-and-rule policies before independence and rationalised as the need to reconcile multi-ethnic demands after independence (de Michaeux, 1997).

Yet, policy and institutional factors account for only part of the segregation story. In addition and complementary to the NEP, Raman and Tan (2010) attribute this segregation to enrolment choices. This is amply illustrated by Table 1 below which shows that ethnic Chinese parents sent their children overwhelmingly to Chinese schools. This choice, according to Lee H.G. (2012, p.175), stemmed from their belief of marginalization by state policies, repeated proclamations of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay preeminence), ethnocentric attitudes of a largely Malay teaching and administrative staff that sometimes found their way to the media, and perceived Islamization of national schools.

**Table 1. Ethnic Chinese Student Enrolment in Primary Schools, 1973 - 2005**

Year	% Chinese students in SRJK-C (Government Chinese Primary School)	% Chinese students in SRK (Government Malay Primary School)
1973	82.4	17.6
1978	88.2	11.8
1995	89.0	11.0
1998	90.6	9.4
1999	90.9	9.1
2005	94.7	5.3

Source: Lee H.G. (2012, p.174)

At secondary school level, Chinese parents have greater acceptance of national schools, but more so because most Chinese medium schools have complied with the government's language policy, as shown in section 4, in order to secure continued government funding (Lee H.G. 2012, p.175). Even with their conversion to "National Type Chinese Secondary Schools", however, their "internal culture remains identifiably Chinese and the schools have retained close links with the local Chinese community" (Raman and Tan 2010, p.120) which still regards them as "Chinese schools". To make things worse, a number of Chinese-medium schools elected not to receive government funding and maintained their Chinese-based curriculum, and instead obtained their funding from

the ethnic Chinese community. These are the so-called "Independent Chinese Secondary Schools" (ICSS) (Raman and Tan 2010, p.122). While these schools were eventually included in the national school system in 1996, they received no financial assistance, and its United Examinations Certificate (UEC) was not recognised by the government, meaning students coming out of ICSS cannot enrol in public tertiary institutions. (Lee H.G. 2012, p.175) estimated that although the majority of ethnic Chinese students are enrolled in national-type Chinese secondary schools (128, 000 in 2002), a significant minority (54, 000 to 60, 000 since 1990) has opted for the ICSS. Thus government efforts to integrate Chinese-medium schools into the national system have been unsuccessful.

No less damaging for national integration, thanks to the NEP, are the schools set up exclusively for the *Bumiputera* community. These are the fully residential schools, the junior science colleges established by the *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA – Council of Trust for the Indigenous People), and the Islamic religious schools (Raman and Tan 2010, pp.121-122)

It is not only at the school level that education policy has had consequences opposite to those intended. Pathways from school to higher education are also ethnically segregated. Thus, the Matriculation programme of public higher education institutions (HEIs) is largely the preserve of *Bumiputera*, and completion of the programme almost always resulted in admission to public HEIs. While *Bumiputera* study for the Higher Religious Certificate, non-*Bumiputera* study for the competitive *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM) or for university foundation programmes. Those non-*Bumiputera* students who study for their A-levels are not eligible to enter public HEIs, but, it should be noted, have already decided to pursue higher education overseas or in foreign university programmes in local private HEIs. Rao (2009, p.12) also noted that remedies against education injustices are also on ethnic lines. Students of a particular ethnicity with complaints against education placements or awards have to appeal to the ethnic-based political parties that purportedly represent their community.

In higher education itself, a rapidly rising demand for tertiary education as students complete their secondary education and insufficient places in public universities to meet this demand, together with quotas as tools of exclusion for non-*Bumiputera* students have led to a surge in the number of private HEIs. Students enrolled in these private HEIs initially consisted primarily of non-*Bumiputera* denied places in public HEIs and unable to afford an education overseas. However, as these private HEIs brought in foreign academic partners through a variety of cooperative arrangements, as shown in section 6, and English became necessarily the language of instruction, they became institutions of choice of the non-*Bumiputera* despite the much higher tuition fees they charge. These institutions' attraction also lay in the fact that their presence allowed students who, voluntarily or otherwise, remained outside the national school system to progress all the way to tertiary education. Meanwhile, fortified by quotas up to 100% in some institutions (for example, *Universiti Teknologi MARA*, International Islamic University and Islamic Science University), public HEIs enrolled a majority of *Bumiputera* students. The rise of private higher education, institutionalised by the Private Higher Education Institutions Act of 1996, has thus produced a tertiary education system with private and public sectors running on parallel tracks, with no links between them, either via study pathways or through staff transfer. The strengths and weaknesses of each system are thus locked in, with no cross-fertilization of ideas or human capital.

This segregation has consequences beyond higher education itself. Employer perceptions of graduate employability have been found to be based on the type of HEI from which students graduated. Cheong et al. (2015) found that employers viewed foreign graduates as being of the highest calibre, followed by graduates from local campuses of foreign universities, other graduates of transnational education, graduates of private HEIs, and graduates of public HEIs in that order. Although recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each type of graduate, employers and their recruitment preferences are undoubtedly affected by their perceptions.

## Language as a Unifier

The use of language as an instrument of unification in a country with diverse ethnic groups and multiple languages/dialects being spoken has ample precedent, examples being Mandarin in China and Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesia. In the case of Malaysia, Malay can stake a strong claim as a unifying language, fulfilling two key conditions of being spoken by a majority of the population and related to other languages in the region, although not the third – being politically neutral (Nida 1975, pp.160-161). But it can have the opposite effect, as Kelman (1971, p.21) warned.

Unfortunately for Malaysia, in the context of a society defined by ethnic stratification and reinforced by policies of ethnic inclusion and exclusion, it is the latter impact that prevailed. Dissatisfaction with the language policy can be found from the very beginning. As already indicated, the system inherited from British Malaya had consisted of vernacular schools at the primary level coexisting with national schools in which the medium of instruction was either Malay or English. By mandating first the use of English and Malay and then Malay in all secondary schools, vernacular primary schools “... were dead ends, which failed to prepare students either for any form of further education available or officially recognised in Malaysia or for employment in other than small-scale ethnic enterprises” (Snodgrass 1980, pp.250-251).

Further, by forcing through the use of Malay in all secondary schools, Chinese-medium secondary schools had to comply or risk losing government funding. Even with their diminished use of Chinese, however, they were considered by ethnic Chinese parents as “Chinese schools”. And, as indicated earlier, a small number of Chinese-medium schools defied the government’s language policy by resorting to non-government funding.

Beyond the tensions created by exclusion/inclusion, Wong (1981) argued that there was a fundamental difference in non-*Bumiputera* and *Bumiputera* views of the education system. While the former tend to view the educational system as the place for open competition in which social and economic rewards are bestowed on the basis of achievement, the latter perceive it as the instrument which accords them preferential acceleration of mobility without necessarily having to compete with the non-*Bumiputera*. Thus, although not what the policy-makers anticipated, such an outcome is hardly surprising. This difference in perception epitomises what Chai (1977, p.59), commenting on the education policies pursued during the first decade of the NEP, concluded that it was “ironic that the twin interlocking instruments of nation building, language and education, have divided rather than united Malays and non-Malays.”

After 1990, with globalisation’s benefits widely advertised, and Vision 2020 proposed by then Prime Minister Mahathir as a national strategy, the role of the English language was resurrected as complementary, if not competitive, with the national language policy. The next milestone for language policy came when the government permitted the use of English for teaching technical subjects at the post-secondary level when the 1996 Education Act was passed. In the same year, with the government objective of turning Malaysia into an international education hub, the passage of the Private Higher Education Institution Act expanded the use of English as the language of instruction to twinning programmes and offshore campuses of foreign universities (Puteh 2010, p.195). Although the primacy of the Malay language was safeguarded in the 1996 Education Act requiring private HEIs to have the Malay language as a compulsory subject, this stipulation was more often honoured in the breach than observed

However, pressure to reintroduce the English language into the school curriculum also came from within. Subject to no language control, the private sector was also a lobby for English language competency (Gill, 2005; Hariati and Lee, 2011). As pressure to achieve competence in English continued to build, the Ministry of Education reintroduced, after a lapse of over two decades, the teaching of mathematics and science in English in 2003. This move, although opposed by both Malay nationalists and Chinese educators for once united by their fear that the importance of their respective languages would be eroded (Lee H.G. 2012, p.178), was eventually undone not by these opponents but by weaknesses in the initiative’s conceptualization and implementation (G25, 2015).

Thus, the objective of the use of the Malay language as a unifier had to first deal with the mistrust of the minority communities who associated it with the NEP and then with the even more powerful economic forces of globalisation and technological advance. In the end, the former undermined this objective while the latter diluted it. Given the ethnic context of Malaysian society, with the NEP sharpening the divide, and the reality of employability at the micro-level and economic advance being driven by national competitiveness at the macro-level, the ultimate ineffectiveness of this objective is hardly surprising.

### Education Access and Affirmative Action

The government's policy focus on education, backed by fiscal resources, has greatly increased access to education, with the NEP ensuring that disadvantaged *Bumiputera* were no longer educationally handicapped. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2005, p.22) confirmed Malaysia's achievement of universal primary education (Millennium Development Goal 2) by 1990. In secondary education, net enrolment rates have climbed to over 80% for lower secondary education and over 70% for upper secondary education by 2003 (UNDP 2005, p.71). These impressive results reflected the government's drive towards massification of education from what was an elite system that favoured English schools in urban areas.

Credit for increasing education access goes to the application of the NEP to this sector. Since its launch in 1971, the NEP has explicitly driven, or was the subtext for, all education policies. Its most visible consequence applied to education through quotas for students, teachers, institutions and student loans has been the increased education access for the majority *Bumiputera* community and hence for the population overall. This is highly evident from the growing numbers of Malay students enrolled and their rising share in total enrolment.

But this success has been achieved not without cost. Arguably the most significant unintended and perverse consequence is the deterioration in education quality. While examination results for schools show better performances year after year, Malaysia has been falling behind in international benchmark tests of mathematics and science (the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, TIMSS) (Table 2). This decline is alarming in that not only is Malaysia losing ground comparatively but also absolutely – test scores have been falling, in both tests, below the average for all participating countries. This deterioration in performance is out of step with the multiple awards of 'distinctions' to students in locally conducted examinations. This deterioration in school performance has implications for the quality of the country's higher education, to which a proportion of students from secondary education would progress.

**Table 2. Malaysia's Test Scores in International Tests TIMSS and PISA, 1999 to 2011**

Country/Skill Tested	TIMSS				PISA	
	1999	2003	2007	2011	2009	2012
<u>Mathematics</u>						
Malaysia	519	508	474	440	404	421
Korea, Rep.	578	589	597	613	546	554
Singapore	604	605	593	611	562	573
Taiwan	585	585	598	609	543	560
<u>Science</u>						
Malaysia	492	510	471	426	422	420
Korea	549	558	553	560	536	538
Singapore	568	578	567	590	542	551
Taiwan	569	571	561	564	520	523

Sources: PISA (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>) and TIMSS (<https://nces.ed.gov/timss/>)

How can this deterioration be explained? Tan (2012) points to the education system allowing academically weak students to progress rather than addressing the source of their handicap as one major reason. The NEP has certainly had a hand in precipitating this state of affairs. As has already been described, in seeking not only to equalise access to education (places for *Bumiputera* secondary school students) but also to equalise outcomes (admission to HEIs), the government set up parallel tracks in the secondary school system, with one track, mainly for *Bumiputera*, virtually guaranteed admission to HEIs (Cheong et al. 2011, p.177; Loo 2007, p.223; Pak, 2013). Other schools/colleges set up for *Bumiputera* students, such as residential schools and MARA junior science colleges also allow their students to bypass the more rigorous STPM route to HEI admission. More broadly, Lee and Nagaraj (2012, pp.224-225) pointed to pedagogy and curricula that emphasised rote learning and paid little attention to the diverse needs of students.

Another unintended consequence, stemming from this decline in the quality of the national school system, is the growing popularity of Chinese independent secondary schools, which have become the schools of preference for many parents for their children. Despite the higher fees they charge, these schools have had “to turn away thousands” (Kong, 2013). Kong (2013) cited the example of Kuen Ching Independent Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur receiving 1,681 applications for its 800 new places, and of four other Chinese independent secondary schools having to institute entrance examinations due to the strong demand for places. Sporting physical facilities often superior to those of national schools, these schools have seen a status-reversal from the time they were regarded as schools of last resort to national schools using English as the medium of instruction. That their enrolment continues to rise year after year speaks to their growing popularity (*The Star*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016).

It is arguably in higher education that the NEP has made the greatest impact. As Rao (2009, p.5) highlighted some striking results of the early implementation NEP applied to higher education in the 1970s:

Within a few years of the implementation of the policy of quotas, nearly three-fifths of all students enrolled in higher education were Malays and only one third were Chinese. More than half the Chinese applicants for University admissions were turned down. Overall, there was a steady increase of *Bumiputera* students in public institutions of higher education and a steep decrease of Chinese and Indian students.

As in secondary education, these gains in numbers notwithstanding, a perverse impact has been the erosion of standards reflected in Malaysian universities falling in or garnering low international rankings. Cheong et. al (2011, p.173) recorded the University of Malaya’s ranking in 2007 to be as low as 247 in the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings, well below those of leading universities in the Newly Industrialised Economies and China, with other Malaysian universities even lower. A new Vice Chancellor appointed in 2008 relentlessly drove the university’s ranking higher, but he was replaced in 2013. The university’s ranking continued to climb, to 133 in 2016, but severe budget cuts in research has cast doubts about its further advance.

Compounding the challenges public HEIs had to face, it is in higher education that the NEP has resulted in the greatest ethnic exclusion. This is summarised by Mukherjee et. al (2011, p.102):

The public university admissions quota system overwhelmingly supported one ethnic group – the *Bumiputeras*... overall Chinese and Indian representations were lower than their proportion in the population. The implementation of an admissions policy based on meritocracy has not changed the picture much – in fact, the proportion of *Bumiputeras* has continued to increase. Government scholarships have financed a small segment of Chinese and Indian students but again not in proportion to their population.

They cite *Bumiputera* enrolment in public HEIs between 2005 and 2008 to be over 80% (Mukherjee et al. 2011, p.41) and their share of scholarships to local public HEIs and foreign HEIs for the period 2000 – 2008 at 87% and 73% respectively (Mukherjee et al. 2011, p.92).



This ethnic exclusion has produced another unintended consequence, this time, for higher education. This is the rise of private sector tertiary education to cater to the unmet demand for tertiary education. That the government was not a willing partner in this development is clearly seen by its initial refusal to allow private HEIs to award degrees, and even after it did, with the passage of the Private Higher Education Act in 1996, subjected only them, not public HEIs, to quality audits by the *Lembaga Akreditasi Negara* (LAN – National Accreditation Board). And despite pronouncing its objective of making Malaysia an international education hub, mandated private HEIs to end awards, even jointly, of foreign degrees.

Despite these initial hurdles, private sector tertiary education expanded rapidly. Student enrolment in private HEIs increased significantly in the last decade (2000 – 2010), from 209,585 in 2000 (Malaysia, 2001) to 484,377 in 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010), an increase of 131%. When the decade ended, private HEI students outnumbered their counterparts in public HEIs by a ratio of 52.5 to 47.5. This surge forced upon government a change of mind once they saw in this development the benefits of reducing non-*Bumiputera* disenchantment with the government's NEP-driven education policies, of saving foreign exchange, and of potentially easing the outflow of local talent.

Despite facilitating increased access, the expansion of private tertiary education has its downside in that non-*Bumiputera* children from poorer families cannot afford the high fees charged. Thus, it may have contributed to an increase in disparity between middle-class and rich and poor non-*Bumiputera* students. The latter would have been forced to apply to public HEIs and take their chances despite the unfavourable odds (Lee H.G. 2012, p.184).

### **Globalisation, Human Capital Deepening and Transnational Education (TNE)**

Related to the burgeoning of private higher education but also distinct from it is the advent of transnational education (TNE), defined as “all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.” (UNESCO/ Council of Europe, 2001). The arrival of TNE to Malaysian shores, and with it a novel form of foreign influence in Malaysian education is a direct product of the unintended consequence of private sector higher education growth. Itself an unintended consequence, TNE has been retroactively justified and strategically implemented. The fact that the development of TNE in the country is characterised by an early period of ‘wild west’ where anything was possible, to subsequent over-regulation before arriving at responsible regulation suggests a pattern of reaction rather than measured response and demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding by policymakers of where TNE could take the country. This lack of understanding is to be expected given the almost complete absence of detailed knowledge of TNE at the time.

Even if TNE was not harnessed to boost the quality of local education, the entry of foreign tertiary education providers has the positive unintended consequence of providing Malaysia with the opportunity to market itself as a hub for international higher education. The country has also benefited considerably from the income stream this has generated and associated branding/reputational factors. This in turn has led to Malaysia exporting TNE and becoming a significant TNE player on the global stage.

But TNE also has other unintended consequences, some far from desirable. First, the Private Higher Education Act 1996 states that the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia. With the introduction of TNE, private HEIs operating TNE programmes are required to write to the Ministry of Higher Education for its approval to use English as a medium of instruction. This requirement is not followed as the assumption of approval is taken for granted. Thus TNE has strengthened the use of English in private HEIs, sharpening the language divide between public and private HEIs. Second, the ethnic imbalance in enrolment between private and public HEIs has been made worse by the arrival and expansion of TNE. Third, TNE has reinforced the trend for private higher education to become

progressively elitist. However, with enrolment high in business, finance and accounting programmes as compared to pure and applied sciences, this does not help the government objective of increasing the share of students pursuing the hard sciences. Finally, in reinforcing the divergences already noted with the rise of private higher education, TNE has further fragmented labour market perceptions. Among graduates from private HEIs, employers have come to favour those coming through TNE over those who did not, the former on the basis of their joint/dual degrees and use of English.

Even if these consequences are unintended, some could have been leveraged for the good of the education system as a whole. One area is the use of the English language, as listed above, which has its connections here too. This is the language of instruction and the dynamic and positive perception of local private higher education has been greatly influenced by the evolution and expansion of TNE in partnership with them or in their midst. Issues of quality (perceived and otherwise), recruitment, employability and value have all played a part in the identity of public Malaysian HEIs – particularly when compared with foreign providers (Cheong et al., 2015).

Another area in which TNE can be leveraged is to contribute to the objective of producing human capital to compete in a competitive globalised world. When Dr. Mahathir launched Vision 2020, he envisaged that education improvement was to spearhead the drive towards the Vision's achievement. However, the number and share of students opting for science and technology subjects in public HEIs were extremely low by international standards. Cheong et. al (2011, p.173) showed that in the mid-2000s, the proportion of Malaysian students studying technical subjects was a paltry 14%, less than half that for Korea and Taiwan, and also much lower than China, India and Singapore. To remedy the situation, the government has promoted the study of science subjects through a host of new institutions like MARA junior science colleges, but to date, not much has changed, leading to the assessment by Chandran et. al (2005, p.1) that “with regard to education, R&D and other fundamental mechanisms to accelerate the process of innovation was still absent in Malaysia.” The implementation of another initiative, *IBestariNet*, to equip all government schools with internet connection and laptops shows how poor planning and execution have jeopardised such efforts and wasted resources (Gryzelius, 2015).

TNE, if involving international universities with technological specializations and expertise, can contribute to remedying this lack of national capability and the government's unsuccessful initiatives. By virtue of their positive perception in the eyes of the public and being not subject to the NEP, they offer an avenue by which the government can reconcile its human capital objective without compromising its NEP goals. Yet by its lack of understanding of TNE and its many instruments, the government has not availed itself of this opportunity.

This failure to leverage off TNE's potential is because compared to private HEIs, public HEIs have not had the same extent of interaction with foreign universities in the form of TNE. This is the result of an “us vs. them” mentality among public sector officialdom combined with a lack of understanding of the opportunities that TNE offer, as already discussed. Yet, one could argue that the arrival of TNE has impacted public sector higher education. The STAR ranking under the Malaysia Research Assessment (MYRA) is a response to foreign influence and the global ranking system. Unable to compete on the global stage, and unable to look less than when compared to foreigners at home, a system of ranking was implemented that created a new reality and maintained the previous status quo. It would appear that from the public sector perspective, TNE is desired for its ability to fill a market need but rejected for the value system it perpetuates in terms of language capability, international exposure, and employability.

TNE has raised the profile on education in Malaysia and provided opportunities along the way for the introduction of innovative pedagogies, research collaboration and output. But it has weakened the stranglehold the government has over the system through bringing in foreign parties with whom the government is not familiar and who have their own agendas that may be at variance with national priorities. While regulation systems are clearly in place to support and promote national objectives, structures and aims, the TNE system has evolved considerably, and is continuing to

evolve, both in content, access and outlook. The possibility that regulations are perpetually playing catch-up is very real.

## Conclusion

A first cut in assessing any policy's efficacy is to determine whether its objectives are achieved. In the context of this paper, the education objectives that have been undoubtedly achieved are the greatly expanded access to education, and especially to assist the disadvantaged *Bumiputera* due to the implementation of the NEP. An implication of this assessment is that achievement of objectives is a positive development and failure to achieve it negative. This is an oversimplification. The NEP has certainly benefited its target clientele, but those subject to ethnic exclusion have been victimised by it. Exogenous developments may also bring pressure to bear on policy. The growing role of globalisation has given impetus to the learning of English and brought on a policy shift, if only partial.

A second cut at assessment is to determine impact. It is also often assumed that meeting objectives implies positive impact. But failure to meet objectives does not signify the absence of impact. Indeed, as the examples of unintended consequences above show, impact can be quite substantial. This impact can be perverse, i.e. when the opposite of what is intended occurs. Or it may emanate from issues related to a particular policy. Thus, the switch to Malay saw a serious decline in English language proficiency at a time when the world looks to English as a universal language. And the failure to meet the rising demand for higher education has spawned a vibrant private tertiary education sector, and with it, TNE. Some unintended consequence may have nothing to do with objectives being met. For example, the successful implementation of the NEP to education has led to a serious decline in the quality of education.

Finally, it should be noted that "unintended" does not mean "unexpected." Where failure to meet objectives is the products of policy contradictions, such an outcome may certainly be expected. And if it is not, policy-makers may be labouring under the wrong assumptions. Thus in the case of the NEP and national unity, Brown (2005, p.1) noted:

... the Malaysian regime has sought to resolve the tensions between nation-building and ethnicity through a didactic and pedagogical approach to educational development, which promotes a concept of nationhood that, rather than transcending ethnic allegiances, is explicitly based on ethnic stratification... these 'ethnic citizens' are encouraged to participate in the Malaysian nation uncritically through the virtual worship of development symbols and unquestioning deference to political leadership.

That this assumption is untenable is clear from the fact that unless education is truly "dumbed down", its progress would surely lead to greater critical questioning of that assumption.

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# THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN PALESTINE IN ADDRESSING INEQUALITY AND PROMOTING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** UNESCO's new emphasis on vocational education and training as transformative, and concerns in particular with equity and sustainable human development, has been strongly influenced by a recent literature on VET and human development that has a particular focus on the most marginalised, especially young women, and is concerned with how their aspirations, agency and achievement of wellbeing can be promoted in the face of wide-ranging structural obstacles. This article seeks to further develop that account through an even stronger emphasis on VET in the context of extreme poverty, inequality and marginalisation as faced in Palestine. VET in Palestine serves many of the poorest and most disenfranchised in Palestinian society in a context of profound structural obstacles to wellbeing achievement. Our analysis show a very positive story of how VET has helped highly disadvantaged young Palestinians, particularly young women, to make progress on their human development.

**Keywords:** VET, occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), capability and functioning, human development, inequality, gender and development

## Introduction

In 2012, the UNESCO-convened Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), in Shanghai, offered a vision of “transformative TVET” (UNESCO, 2012). At Shanghai and in the UNESCO TVET Strategy 2016-20, there is a clear sense that this transformation must include not just a focus on youth employment but also concerns with equity, gender equality, transition to green economies and sustainable societies.

This emphasis on vocational education and training (VET- our preferred term) as transformative requires a new literature that moves beyond the VET orthodoxy. This orthodoxy has focused overwhelmingly on economic and employment rationales, and has generally found VET wanting in terms of its contribution thereto (e.g., Foster, 1965; Psacharopoulos, 1981 and 1985; Psacharopoulos and Loxley, 1985; Lauglo and Lillis, 1988; Middleton, Ziderman and Adams, 1993).

In exploring our concerns with equity and sustainable human development we have been strongly influenced by the growing literature on VET and human development (e.g., Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011; Dif-Pradalier, Rosenstein and Bonvin, 2012; López-Fogués, 2012; McGrath, 2012; Powell, 2012; Tikly, 2013; Powell, 2014; Powell and McGrath, 2014; McGrath and Powell, 2015; McGrath and Powell, 2016; Dejaeghere, 2016). This literature has a particular focus on the most marginalised, especially young women, and is concerned with how their aspirations, agency and achievement of wellbeing can be promoted in the face of wide-ranging structural obstacles. Whilst

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it accepts that employability is important, this literature understands this as being complex and as a means to the greater end of wellbeing.

Drawing on ongoing doctoral work by the first author, this article seeks to further develop that account through an even stronger emphasis on VET in the context of extreme poverty, inequality and marginalisation and with a theoretical influence from gender and development literature.

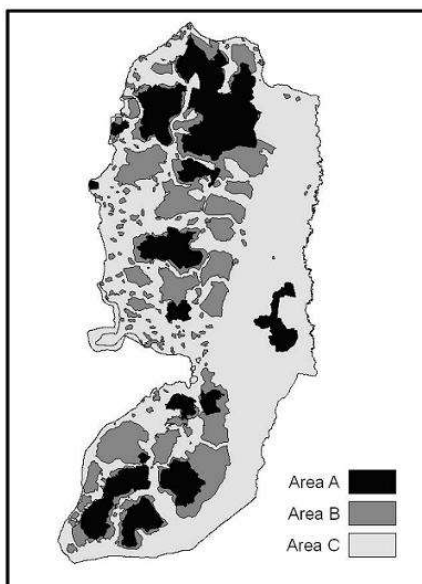
A paper on Palestine needs to acknowledge the question of its special status. As we shall explore in the next section, the case of Palestine is indeed an extreme one. Yet it is that which makes the case so interesting. Given the profound structural constraints under which young people navigate the Israeli-Palestinian labour market, it makes no sense to talk the conventional VET language about youth employability. Rather, the case forces us to explore how VET addresses key issues that are relevant far beyond Palestine: social justice, inequality and the achievement of economic and social rights. These are the concerns of this paper, explored through quantitative data from a larger mixed methods study.

In the next section we will outline the very particular context of Palestine. We will then move to the theoretical and conceptual toolkit used in this paper. Then we will briefly present our methodological approach. After this, we will provide an integrated presentation and discussion of our data, structured around a set of key themes that emerged from both the literature and data. We shall end with a conclusion that summarises the main messages of the paper and how it contributes to our understanding both of the Palestinian case and to wider debates about VET's contribution to addressing the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, with a particular focus on gender.

## The Context

Given the extreme particularities of the Palestinian case, it is extremely important to spend some time in setting the contextual scene. The very name that is in common usage to describe the territory is redolent of its unusual status: the “occupied Palestine territories” (oPt). Although this was replaced in United Nations (UN) documents in 2012 by the designation “The State of Palestine”, it is clear that occupation is a continued reality and statehood an aspiration. Under the Oslo Accords, Palestine has sequentially acquired authority over policies areas such as health, education and welfare since 1993.

Figure 1. Map of the West Bank divided



Source: UNOCHA-oPt



However, such control is heavily circumscribed in practice, with even territorial integrity unachieved. The “Palestinian territories” are divided into three: the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, each separated from the others. Furthermore, the West Bank remains divided into externally (i.e., Israeli) designated zones, A, B and C, as shown in Figure 1. These are not contiguous territories but reflect Israeli political considerations regarding land claims and security priorities. Over 60% of the West Bank is classed as Area C:

where Israel retains near exclusive control, including over law enforcement, planning and construction. Most of Area C has been allocated for the benefit of Israeli settlements or the Israeli military, at the expense of Palestinian communities. This impedes the development of adequate housing, infrastructure and livelihoods in Palestinian communities, and has significant consequences for the entire West Bank population. Structures built without permits are regularly served with demolition orders, creating chronic uncertainty and threat, and encouraging people to leave. Where the orders are implemented, they have resulted in displacement and disruption of livelihoods, the entrenchment of poverty and increased aid dependency. The humanitarian community has faced a range of difficulties in providing aid in Area C, including the demolition and confiscation of assistance by the Israeli authorities (UNOCHA-oPt, n.d.).

Territories in Area B are subject to Palestinian civil control but Israeli military control, whilst even Area A (notionally under full Palestinian control) are subject to Israel Defence Forces raids.

The “occupied Palestinian territories” programme of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA-oPt, n.d.) argues that this situation has resulted in a “protracted protection crisis”.

Inequalities inevitably are great and the differences with Israel (with which Palestine is complexly and problematically intertwined) and between the three sub-territories are profound. Whilst Israel has high income and human development status, East Jerusalem and the West Bank are more akin to middle income countries in economic and human development terms; with Gaza is most similar to low income / low human development states in crisis. Of the 4.5 million Palestinians living within the bounds of the quasi-state, nearly 40% are defined by UNOCHA-oPt as having significant humanitarian needs, with two-thirds of these being located in Gaza. This in turn accounts for more than 60% of the population of Gaza.

Huge numbers of Palestinians are still refugees, whether within Palestine or in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In 1950 these refugees numbered 750, 000; 65 years later they had risen to 5 million, more than the total population of the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, UNOCHA-oPt characterises the whole of the populations of Gaza, East Jerusalem and West Bank Area C as marginalised. Additionally, the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs has identified a series of other groups across the oPt as marginalised, including households in poverty; women subjected to gender-based violence; female-headed households; orphans and vulnerable children; the elderly; people living with disabilities; and ex-detainees (MOSA, 2014).

Not all of Palestine’s problems can simply be linked to the occupation. Traditional Palestinian gender norms act as a further constraint on young women being able to be active in the labour market and to achieve those aspects of wellbeing they most value. For many families, a women’s place remains in the home and marriage is likely to put an end to working outside its walls. Official data suggests that lower female economic participation is related to various social and cultural norms and beliefs, unfavourable working conditions and the limited number of occupations accessible for women (PCBS, 2009). Moreover, public opinion survey data suggests the prevalence of a belief that women’s work is secondary to men’s and that a woman’s main role is family caring and rearing (Alpha International, 2009). At the same time, female empowerment in other aspects of life is also constrained (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004). Feminist authors have also shown how the effects of

military occupation have exacerbated the challenges faced by Palestinian women (e.g., Giacaman and Johnson, 2002; Taraki, 2006; Muhanna, 2016).

The historic lack of a Palestinian state led to vocational education and training being dominated institutionally by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Church related organisations. Beginning in 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) began its mission and included VET as a vital element. The emerging Palestinian state now offers vocational education and training through the Ministry of Education, focusing on vocational upper secondary education; the Ministry of Labour, providing training for the unemployed of up to one year's duration; and the Ministry of Social Affairs, focusing on VET through rehabilitation centres for children and youth.

Efforts to unify the fragmented governance of VET in Palestine and to enhance the sector's status and quality started soon after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the mid-1990s. This resulted in a national strategy in 1999 and an action plan in 2003. The strategy was revised in 2010, calling for quality and relevance of VET as its priority (MoE and MoL, 2010). The overall objective is to create a knowledgeable, competent, motivated, entrepreneurial, adaptable, creative and innovative workforce in Palestine. However, VET is still overburdened by external and internal challenges. The wider political situation and, in particular, the enforced limited mobility of its graduates depress employability and returns on investment in VET, whilst the policy process has not yet resulted in effective implementation, with governance still fragmented, and quality, monitoring and evaluation still weak (Hilal, 2012; Leney and Jwailles, 2014; Kuhail, 2015).

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The Palestinian case demonstrates the complex interactions that occur in poverty and disempowerment. Such interactions are intersectional (Davis, 1983; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990). Categories of disadvantage do not simply combine at a statistical level but are formed of a complex web of multiple identities that are structured by related systems of oppression and discrimination. According to Collins, a pattern of "interlocking oppression" is created by the interplay of culture and identity with the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Intersectionality had its origins in the interface between black feminist academia and activism. This may help to explain why a theoretical account that could be expected at the first glance to be highly structuralist and, indeed, pessimistic is strongly concerned with optimism and offering a vision of hope for a better future.

This insistence on thinking about the dialectic potential of structure and agency is also contained within two other major influences on the approach taken in this article. The field of gender and development (GaD) has long had concerns with intersectionality, although the language has more typically been of vertical and horizontal inequalities, that is inequalities amongst individuals and inequalities amongst groups (Stewart, 2000). However, as Kabeer (2010; 2015) notes, the language of intersectionality does sit well with much of the gender and development literature.

Kabeer (1989, p.10) insists on the well-established distinction between poverty as a state and as a process. As she noted early in her career,

women and men experience the state of poverty differently and often unequally and become impoverished through processes that sometimes (though not always) diverge.

One of the most important contributions of Kabeer to our thinking about poverty and inequality is her work on empowerment within the framework of GaD theory (Kabeer, 1999). She argues that empowerment is a notion that overcomes the agency-structure dichotomy by insisting on the ultimate goal of individuals being able to act as they value whilst carefully analysing the range of obstacles that limit their possibilities of achieving well-being. She suggests that processes

of empowerment entail change at different levels and in different dimensions: change can occur at the level of the individual, in their inner sense of self or in their access to material resources; it can occur in relationships within the family and household; or it can reflect alteration in position in the wider hierarchies of the economy and state.

An emphasis on the importance of empowerment must draw us to questions of power. A range of authors have developed useful accounts of power, such as Lukes (1974) and Foucault (1982). Lukes undermined the conventional view that power is held by individuals and institutions in the material sphere only. Rather, he argued that power can be exerted by shaping what can be said and thought. Foucault took this further by moving away from the idea that such power is held by institutions and individuals, arguing instead that it is a force that flows through society and relations. This led him to reject the notion that power is something held by individuals or groups (and not others). Feminist development activists have taken these notions on further, and in our work we draw upon the four-fold model of power to, with, over and within (Kabeer, 1994; Veneklasen and Miller, 2002).

Kabeer's notion of the "power to choose" (Kabeer, 2000) resonates strongly with the human development and capabilities approach. Sen (1999) made clear that capabilities were not simply about individual agency and freedoms, crucial though these are. Rather, he insisted that we also consider those factors that limited the ability to choose.

A growing concern for human development accounts is the likelihood of occasions when the "weight of the world" leads to a downward adjustment of preferences (Nussbaum, 2011). The language of aspirations offers a rich account of this, beginning with the work of Appadurai (2004). In his words, poverty tends to result in a "more brittle horizon of aspirations" (Appadurai 2004, p.69) for individuals and communities so that they cannot imagine, let alone achieve, what might be possible in other circumstances.

Thus, a "capability to aspire" (Powell, 2012; McGrath and Powell, 2015) is essential if other capabilities are to be realised. This account has been developed usefully through a number of empirical studies from Africa, by Ibrahim (2011) on Egypt, by Conradie and Robeyns (2013) and Powell (2012; 2014) on South Africa, and by DeJaeghere and Baxter (2014; 2016) on Uganda and Tanzania. Conradie and Robeyns (2013) argue that if people have low aspirations, then they may believe that certain capabilities are unavailable even if they are achievable, if only implausibly. They note that the central capabilities of expanding "people's beings and doings that they have reason to value" is challenged by a deflation of aspirations caused by adaptive preferences:

But the valuation process is vulnerable to people's adaptation to adverse circumstances: if people have limited ambitions, wishes or preferences, then they will be very modest when they formulate which capabilities they find valuable. The same applies to aspirations: if people have adapted aspirations, they will only have modest goals, ambitions, and hopes, even if there are much more valuable options open to them. (Conradie and Robeyns 2013, p.566)

In work from Egypt, Ibrahim (2011) argues that there is a cyclical relationship between poverty and failed aspirations. She shows how the two most unfulfilled capabilities of poor people in Egypt were decent work and decent education, and how these were mutually reinforcing, across generations. Educational failure undermined the communication skills and access to information of poor people. This in turn prevented them from achieving their job aspirations, something that was also undermined by poverty, high levels of unemployment, nepotism and asymmetrical labour market information. Failed aspirations for decent work undermined income, the ability to play a full role in the community, business start-up opportunities and marriage prospects. In the next generation, access to decent schooling and health were undermined, starting a new spiral of aspiration deflation.

However, a more positive story is told in literature from sub-Saharan Africa. Conradie and Robeyns, DeJaeghere and Powell suggest that development interventions can make a positive difference in this aspirational space. Powell's research with public TVET college students in Cape Town found that their experience at the college had helped many of them develop a new sense

of who they could be and provided the impetus for them to develop larger aspirations. This, she argues, is a key potential role for formal education providers (Powell, 2012). Working in the same location, Conradie and Robeyns also point to the transformational possibilities of interventions that build aspirations. They note the importance of capability obstacles, barriers to successful conversion of resources into capabilities. In their case, these included inadequate income, lack of supportive organisations, an unhelpful state, conflict, cultural norms and education (Conradie and Robeyns 2013, p.570). These obstacles act in large part through their reduction of aspirations. Thus, to achieve capabilities, it is necessary to overcome capability obstacles. Conradie and Robeyns suggest that aspirations can play at least two roles here: a capabilities-selecting role and an agency-unlocking role (Conradie and Robeyns 2013, p.559).

Moreover, aspirations do not simply lie dormant within people, waiting to be activated. Rather, they come into existence through the process of exploring them. Thus, it makes little sense to think about aspirations in the abstract or see them as stable. Instead, they are dynamic, potentially both built from wide and positive experiences but also created in respect to goals that appear untenable from where a person finds themselves at present. Even then, they require some spark, such as the ability to see or read about others who have an apparently better life. In the Palestinian case, the proximity of Israel and illegal settlers within Palestine is likely to be pertinent here.

For Dejaeghere (2016), aspirations and agency are situated within a dialectic tension within structures that both constrain and offer possibilities. In contrast with Ibrahim's story of an intergenerational downward spiral, Dejaeghere focuses on sites of possibility where better futures can be imagined. She argues that this makes it possible for aspirations to result in agency. In her view, a crucial aspect of identifying capabilities and achieving functionings begins with an ability to "see the future".

Thus, the study seeks to integrate accounts of gender and development, and linked arguments about intersectionality, with a human development account in exploring the important ways in which VET supports the life chances of marginalised young people. This offers a new enrichment of the VET and human development account by making its gender analysis more robust.

## Methodology

This article reports on part of the data and analysis of a larger, ongoing doctoral project. For the larger project, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. Data was collected using a VET graduate survey, interviews, focus group discussions, case studies of key VET institutions and a review of available documents. However, this article focuses on the data from the survey.

This survey was conducted between January and July 2015 and included a representative sample of 2,011 graduates, from 31 VET institutes constituting the main governmental and nongovernmental VET providers. These graduates were surveyed four years after graduation to measure the longer-term impact of their education. 764 questionnaires were filled, giving a response rate of 38%, which was considered more than adequate. Twenty nine (29) percent were females and 71% male, reflecting the representation of females in VET institutes, of which 16% were from Gaza, 7% Jerusalem and the 76% from the West Bank. The sample from Gaza is unrepresentatively small due to difficulties of surveying in Gaza.

The survey contained a series of questions about socio-economic status, education and impacts of the wider political situation. These were followed by questions that explored various aspects of what we considered to be major possible impacts of VET. These included labour market transitions; ability to contribute to household income; empowerment; and capability identification and functioning achievement. The survey concluded with an exploration of the structural obstacles to wellbeing. Key concepts were operationalised into a set of statements to be rated on a five-point Likert scale. Percentages in Figures 2 and 5 below are calculated by aggregating responses of "satisfied" and "highly satisfied" on these scales. The data generated was analysed using the SPSS

software package, informed by the theoretical framework of the larger study. Data in Figures 3 and 4 below are compared with official statistical data as a means of benchmarking findings.

## **The Effects of VET on Those Experiencing Intersectional Poverty and Inequality**

### *VET Graduates are Predominantly from the Most Impoverished and Disempowered Backgrounds*

Although not exclusively, the VET system caters for those who have performed less well in the school system. Inevitably, performance here is closely related with socio-economic status. It is not surprising, therefore, that VET graduates are largely from poor and disempowered backgrounds, with many impoverished and disempowered as a result of the occupation. According to the survey data, 66% of the VET graduates came from families that were under the national poverty line when they enrolled, as opposed to the national figure of 26% of households living in poverty found in national statistics for the year that they enrolled (PCBS, 2012). In Gaza, this rose to 93%. Overall, 50% were considered to be in “deep poverty” (calculated as less than US Dollars 1.40 per day in 2010). This was almost double the national average. Moreover, more than two-thirds displayed clear intersectional effects, such as coming from large families, having family members living with disability and/or chronic disease. Across indicators, female graduates were on average from families with greater poverty and marginalisation.

The impacts of poverty and inequality in Palestine are profoundly shaped by spatial effects, which are, in turn, deeply inscribed with the effects of the occupation. As Figure 1 above illustrates, those living in the West Bank are all affected by the occupation, although differentially according to which zone they live. Movement between the fragments of the zones, into and out of East Jerusalem, and across into Israel are all constrained and complicated by numerous checkpoints, which may be closed according to Israel’s strategic concerns. As has been well-publicised, Gaza is effectively under siege, cut off from almost any movement into Israel or Egypt.

The occupation’s direct and indirect effect on the impoverishment and further marginalisation of the VET graduates families is strongly spatially influenced. Overall, 1 in 5 graduates’ households were directly affected by the context of occupation, but this became more than 1 in 4 for those living in Jerusalem outside the Wall and, 1 in 3 for those living adjacent to the Wall. Graduates indicated how they were affected, including: loss of land (24%), loss of residence (7%), loss of livelihood system (45%) and loss of water/ other resources (3.4%). Other effects included the siege of Gaza, the overall worsened economic situation affecting their work, the lack of permits for work, and the existence of a gate to their community. Moreover, 46% of the sample were refugees, against a national average of 43% (PCBS, 2016), with two-thirds in Gaza having refugee status, while 14% lived in refugee camps.

Marginalisation also comes from negative experiences of the formal education system and from the differential status of different aspects of the lifelong learning system. More than two-third of the graduates had low grades when enrolling at VET institutes, and some had failed their previous grade, which would not allow them to continue their academic studies after the 12<sup>th</sup> grade national examinations, hence would be drop-out or potential drop-out of the system, as students cannot progress to higher education without passing the 12<sup>th</sup> grade national exam (the *Tawjihi*) and if they leave the general academic streams, they have inadequate skills for work.

Previous academic performance is likely to be a factor in over 80% reporting that they preferred practical training to academic studies although it is important to remember the common correlation between poverty and academic performance. Poverty loomed large in choices to pursue vocational programmes, something that human capital accounts are poor at capturing. Over two-thirds reported that their choice was influenced by the affordability of VET as compared to higher education; whilst 82% reported wanting to join the labour market as quickly as possible to support their families. The latter rationale was even stronger amongst female graduates, 88% of whom reported wanting rapid labour market insertion.

Inevitably, there is a hierarchy of status of vocational providers. Institutions under the Ministry of Education had the smallest proportions of graduates from poor backgrounds and the highest numbers who saw vocational education as a pathway to higher education. Those who studied within the Ministry of Social Affairs sub-system were the poorest and most marginalised across a range of indicators, with UNRWA and NGO systems also appearing to be particularly common routes for the poor. UNRWA targets refugees and it was noticeable that proportions of refugees were much lower in institutions under the Ministries of Education or Labour.

### *Moreover, They Experience Many Structural Obstacles to Achieving Their Wellbeing*

Graduates reported experiencing multiple effects of these structural factors as affecting their wellbeing. First, they noted that the context of the occupation is a massive obstacle to the achievement of valued functionings and hence wellbeing. The onerous security checks and limits on travel between areas seriously undermined graduates' ability to secure decent work and generate income. Incomes were further depressed by the costs that were added to travel, and the general cost of living in Palestine is inflated by blockades, most especially in Gaza. The history of military occupation has seriously undermined economic growth and, as reported above, the data shows that the majority of graduates had seen their family livelihood assets reduced. Personal, household and community resilience were all reported to have been threatened.

Second, the Palestinian economy is underperforming for internal as well as external reasons. The unequal linkage of the Palestinian and Israeli economy is a problem that inflames the cost of living problem. Domestically, economic policy is weak and implementation and enforcement weaker still. Wages within Palestine remain low, but opportunities to travel into Israel for higher wages are limited and subject to sudden freezes. Some graduates reported earning under the legal Palestinian minimum wage.

Third, graduates made clear that traditional Palestinian gender norms still restricted women's empowerment. The widespread continuation of old views of the expected role of women in the household limited female economic and social participation. Many female graduates know that marriage is likely to mark the end of their paid work in the face of husbands' and in-laws' expectations that wives will restrict their activities to the domestic sphere. Although these graduates were demonstrating far higher levels of labour market participation than the national gender norms, there was a strong sense that the independence gained was under constant familial and societal threat.

Fourth, institutional and national policy frameworks and the legislative system undermine the benefits of VET. The Palestinian Authority policies on employment do not confer any recognition to vocational qualifications and universities largely do not recognise these qualifications either. There is institutional and policy fragmentation in the VET sector and plans for reform remain largely unimplemented.

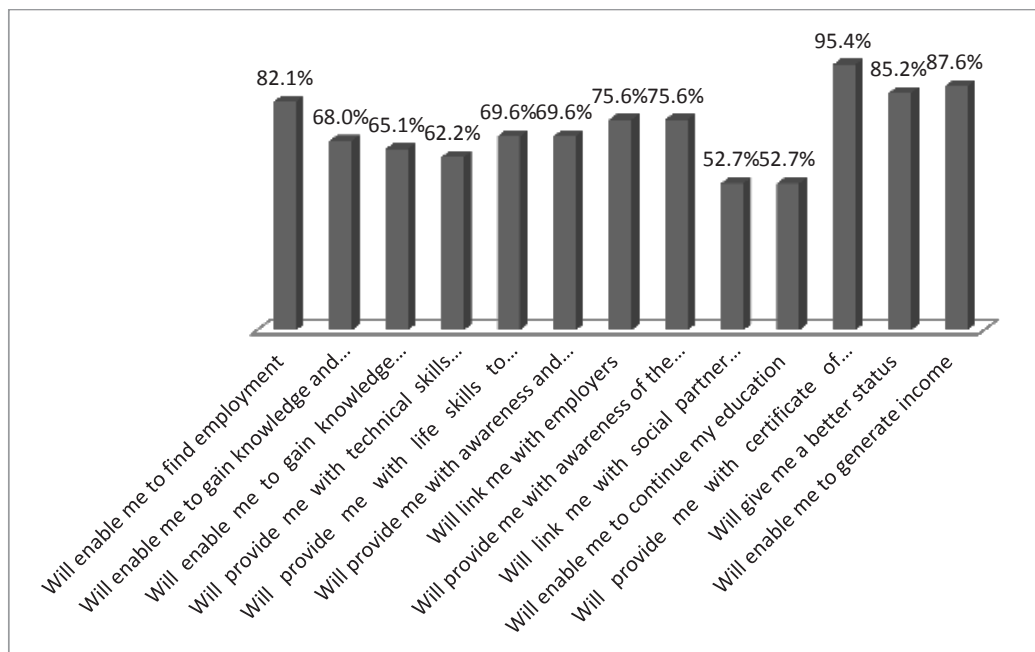
Fifth, VET still suffers from the exclusionary effects of negative public attitudes. Of the graduates, 24% stated that local community perceive VET negatively, as male-oriented and for low achievers. A similar proportion felt that employers discriminated against VET graduates. Even amongst the VET graduates surveyed, such negative attitudes were evident, with one-in-six reporting their own negative perceptions. However, we need to remember that this contrasts with 59% of the graduates perceiving VET positively. Particularly valuable were its contribution to employment and economic returns; and its provision of life skills and employability skills.

### *Yet, Graduates Hoped for Much from VET: Aspirations of the VET Graduates*

In the face of these major structural obstacles, what is most striking from our data is that our respondents had strong aspirations. Graduates were asked to rate a series of 13 possible areas of capabilities that they had hoped to achieve after graduation, the areas being drawn from the existing literature on capability lists constructed in somewhat similar settings. The percentages presented

below indicate that these items were agreed to be valued capabilities. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Expressed capabilities of youth upon graduation from VET**



Source: PhD Survey data

The most valuable element for them was certification. This may seem surprising but certification has very important status value in a society where credentials are important, building self-worth and employability, as well as enhancing the possibility of progressing to higher education, which itself was valued as an important outcome by more than half those sampled. An improvement in personal status was the third highest ranked capability (85% identified this). Understandably, the capability to generate income ranked very highly (88% aspired to this). Employment-related aspects rated as important to at least two-thirds of those surveyed, reinforcing the importance of traditional notions of skills for employability. The acquisition of life and entrepreneurship skills were somewhat lower priorities, but still important for the majority of those surveyed.

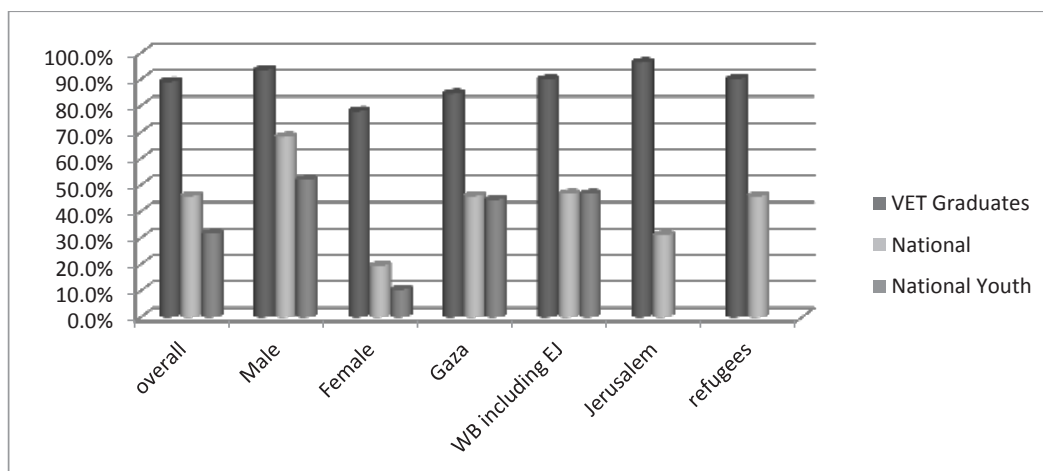
The following sections will explore the achievement of important elements of these aspirations both in terms of objective measures of this achievement and the perceptions of the respondents.

### *They Perform Well in Labour Market Transitions: Graduate Labour Market Participation and Unemployment*

In spite of their largely disadvantaged backgrounds and the intersectional nature of many respondents' experiences of poverty and marginalisation, those graduates surveyed appeared to have benefitted from their participation in vocational education and training in terms of their employment status. This suggests that their aspirations were, at least partially, well-founded.

We look at two measures here: first, the labour force participation rate (LFPR), which measures those who report themselves to be employed or actively seeking employment. Figure 3 summarises this data, disaggregated by gender, refugee status and location, and compared to the overall national labour force participation rate (LFPR) and the national youth LFPR at the time of survey. LFPR is important partly in giving a sense of those who are “discouraged” from seeking work due to their perceived lack of employment prospects. Second, we consider unemployment rates (Figure 4 below), a more stringent measure of labour market transition.

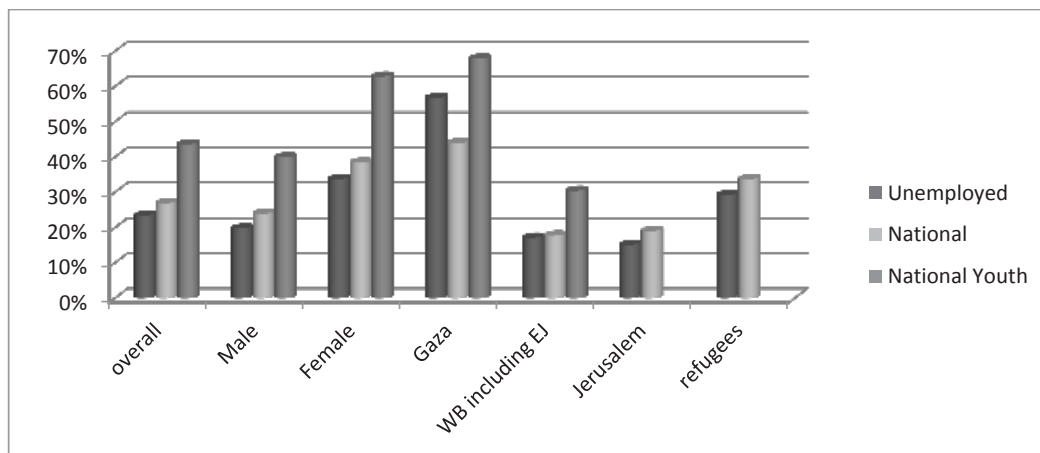
**Figure 3. VET graduates LFPR in comparison with national figures for all of working age and national youth figures**



Sources: PhD survey and PCBS data

The headline figure here is that the LFPR of 89% for the surveyed youth was nearly double the adult LFPR (46%) and triple that of the youth cohort (age 18-24 - 32%) nationally. This is remarkable but the statistics for the young women sampled are even stronger: 78% were participating in the labour force, as opposed to less than 10% of their age cohort. These figures confirm previous studies and findings in the field (Hilal, 2009 and 2012; MAS-PCBS-PMA, 2009) and are also in line with previous studies indicating the high demand for VET graduates from the labour market (Hilal, 2010; 2013). The high LFPR for female VET graduates is comparable to higher education data. It appears that many families are interested in young women participating in the labour force. Nonetheless, for those who were not participating in the labour force, the reasons given were highly gendered: approximately half of male respondents (46%) were studying; approximately half of female respondents (53%) cited household responsibilities, whilst another 24% of young women cited parental or spousal objections to employment outside the household. Whilst VET participation does appear to be possible for a group of young women who are largely able to transform this into labour force participation, these figures suggest that approximately one-quarter of sampled young women entering VET were not able to convert participation in VET programmes into labour market participation. It appears that these young women were able to aspire to labour market participation and had the agency to acquire vocational education and training but were unable to overcome structural factors, including patriarchy, in order to convert what they valued into achieved improvements in their wellbeing.



**Figure 4. VET graduates unemployment rates in comparison with national figures and national youth figures**

Sources: Hilal's doctoral survey and PCBS data

Of course, labour market participation itself does not simply result in achieved employment, let alone decent work or the wellbeing improvements that are presumed to flow from this. At the time of the survey, Palestine had a youth unemployment rate of 41%, rising to 61% for females. More than two-thirds of youth in Gaza were unemployed. The sampled VET graduates performed better than the national youth averages across categories. Overall, they were half as likely to be unemployed as their peers, and this benefit was consistent for both genders. Moreover, even amongst those who were unemployed at the time of the survey, 75% reported having been employed previously.

However, the employment benefits of VET were much more apparent in the West Bank and East Jerusalem than in Gaza. Faced with the overall unemployment crisis in Gaza, the sample were only 10 percentage points better off than their age cohort on this indicator. Nonetheless, given that those surveyed were more likely to be poor and marginalised than the national averages, these findings are impressive.

We surveyed graduates four years after course completion as we were mindful of the often long delays in securing employment. However, 62% had found employment within six months of graduation and 79% within a year. Again, this is impressive when compared with other data. For instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that the mean unemployment period for Palestinian youth on leaving full-time education and training was 19.5 months (Sadeq and Elder, 2014). When the constraints acting upon our sample are remembered, it appears that these findings are very positive. They point to the possibility of VET playing a very powerful role in supporting the process of wellbeing achievement of highly vulnerable young people, particularly young women.

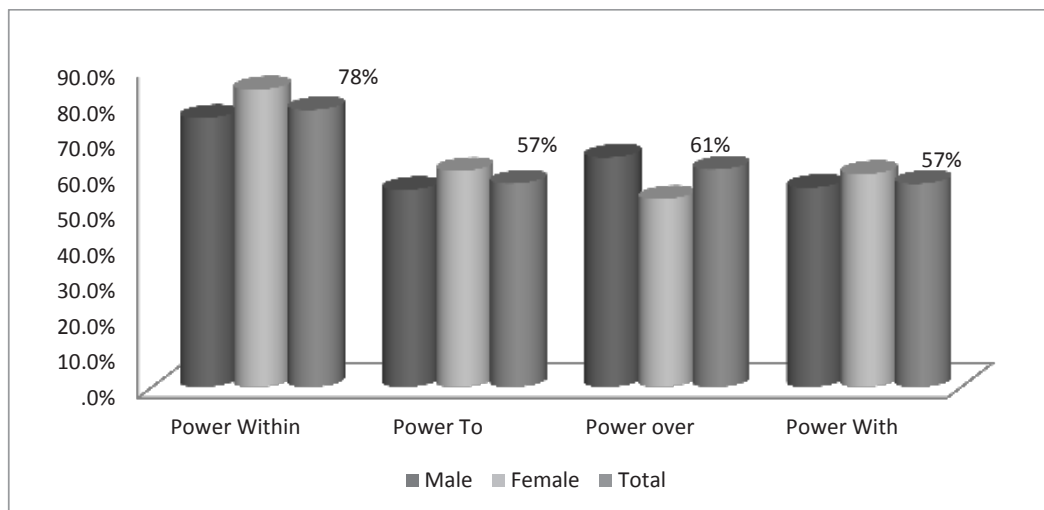
This comparative success in labour market insertion is mirrored in other variables that show that the benefits are shared with others. Of the sample, 58% reported that they were contributing to their family's income, with 26% contributing more than a quarter of their household's income. Additionally, 51% reported that their family had improved their income status compared to when they enrolled in the VET institution. However, this benefit was less apparent for those living in marginalised areas and amongst the poorest. Under 25% of those living in Gaza had seen household income benefits, as compared to over 50% in other areas. Only 23% of the very poorest had seen household income security improve since enrolment, as opposed to 58% in the wealthiest group. Moreover, it was almost twice as common for male graduates to be contributing to family income than was the case for females (65% to 38%). Remembering that in the human development account

vocational education is about supporting the wider life plans of learners, it is striking that one-fifth of graduates had set up new families.

*Moreover, Social Empowerment Indicators for the VET Graduates are High*

The human development approach insists that VET is not just about the labour market. Given our concerns with empowerment, graduates were asked to rate their empowerment through VET across 21 elements reflecting aspects of power within, power to, power with and power over. The following figure shows percentages of respondents who reported being satisfied or highly satisfied for each aspect of power.

**Figure 5. Percentages of VET graduates agreeing to social empowerment change indicators**



Source: Survey data

The results suggest that the surveyed graduates generally feel relatively empowered. The lowest scoring category, “power to” is concerned with aspects of empowerment with respect to family decision-making, including sharing domestic labour. That there is actually a slightly more positive female response here may indicate that continuing challenges with the highly patriarchal nature of Palestinian society are experienced alongside other forms of unequal power such as age hierarchies. To be young is to be relatively disempowered in household decision-making, whether male or female. The highest ratings on empowerment relate to aspects of self-confidence under the “power within” category. This needs further exploration through the qualitative data but it may be that VET institutions are playing a role here in building the self-confidence and empowering of young people and hence are preparing them to enhance their well-being through aspirations and agency, as Powell (2012; 2014) and Dejaeghere (2016) found in South Africa and Tanzania. Moreover, the findings appear to point in the same direction as Conradie and Robeyns (2013) in building these young people’s ability to unlock agency and, in the case of young women, to select employment as something they value in the face of societal obstacles. As we noted above, Dejaeghere understands aspirations and agency as existing in dialectic tension with structures that both constrain and offer possibilities. Her suggestion that a crucial aspect of identifying capabilities and achieving functionings begins with an ability to “see the future” seems pertinent here.

Again, it is noteworthy that the surveyed VET graduates display a slight gender difference in response here with more positive female responses. Given the effects of gender injustice, this may also point to an important positive effect of VET institutions in promoting social justice, a finding that resonates with the authors cited in the previous paragraph.

The one dimension on which female graduates are less positive than their male counterparts is “power over”, areas that reflect control over engagement with the world-of-work and wider life (such as choices about marriage and place to live). As we have already seen, female access to the labour market is significantly less than male, so such a finding is not surprising, suggesting the gender-based social constraints when it comes to decision making of choices related to their lives. As regards locational effects, those living in refugee camps report the lowest levels of empowerment.

As the literature on VET and human development makes clear, it is one thing to identify a series of things to value from vocational education and another thing to achieve these. If the bulk of the popular and academic literature about VET was to be believed, then we would expect very low levels of conversion of these capabilities into functionings, VET having widely been derided as a second class learning system. Yet, overall, 80% of graduates reported at least a 50% conversion rate, and 42% reported more than 75%. What is most striking in this aspect is that those from poorer and more disadvantaged backgrounds reported stronger conversion rates. Those reporting 75% or more conversion rose to 46% for the poor; 50% for those in deep poverty; and 64% for those living in Gaza. There were slightly higher female levels of reported meeting of expectations.

## Conclusion

VET in Palestine serves many of the poorest and most disenfranchised in Palestinian society in a context of profound structural obstacles to wellbeing achievement. These obstacles are inextricably linked to the continued occupation and the 70 years of refugee status endured by millions of Palestinians. Moreover, for young Palestinian women in particular there are also cultural norms that constrain aspirations, agency and the achievement of wellbeing.

The quantitative data is in need of further analysis alongside the qualitative data, which was collected subsequent to the survey. Nonetheless, it appears to show a very positive story of how VET has helped highly disadvantaged young Palestinians, particularly young women, to make progress on their human development. An important step towards achieving improved wellbeing comes from being able to gain certification and become active in the labour market. For the latter, a participation rate triple that of the wider youth cohort is impressive, but nothing to the nearly eight-fold benefit for young women compared to their non-VET peers. As we noted above, it is important to turn labour force participation into employment. There is a sizeable gap here, unsurprisingly. Nonetheless, VET graduates of both sexes were half as likely to be unemployed than their peers. The benefits of this were seen in terms of personal and household income. A sizeable number of young people gained the financial resources to get married, whilst others noted a range of benefits in terms of aspirations and their achievement.

As far as the wider literature on VET is concerned, this article adds weight to the human development arguments about the inadequacy of the human capital account. Whilst the human capital argument stands to the extent that young people and their families are investing in their education and training in the hope of higher incomes, it focuses too simplistically on labour market outcomes and ignores both the structural obstacles to achievement and the wider human goals that vocational learners possess (e.g., Powell, 2014; McGrath and Powell, 2015).

Rather, our account reinforces the human development account by building on existing work that has argued that VET graduates are not simply motivated by a desire to secure paid work (Lopez-Fogues, 2012; Powell, 2012; 2014). Whilst this is a very important capability, it stands in a complex relationship with a wider set of life outcomes that are of value to VET graduates. The evidence here that VET is serving many of the most marginalised and is successfully advancing their aspirations, agency and the achievement of wellbeing supports Powell’s claims about the possibilities of thinking

about VET institutions as key agents of human development advancement and reinforces her pro-poor claims for such institutions (Powell, 2014). The advancement towards achievement of their wellbeing, gaining control over resources, achieving certain degrees of empowerment and the change of some power relations within the household and the community had a valuable effect on reducing inequality. Nonetheless, these gains are fragile and are still challenged by structural obstacles and societal attitudes, some of which would require institutional and policy related actions in order to convert aspirations into achievement, which we will discuss in further work.

Moreover, this paper takes further the increasing explicitly feminist tone of much of the skills for human development literature by giving more explicit attention to GaD. Whilst Dejaeghere, cited elsewhere in this paper, has recently made an important step of linking GaD and human development (Dejaeghere, 2015), this was for general education rather than VET. The VET-specific argument about gender and human development is an area in which further work is needed, particularly in building in insights from feminist economics (cf. McGrath, 2012) but we believe we have made a contribution here.

We believe also that the Palestinian case provides a far richer sense of the multi-dimensional poverty, inequality and disempowerment experienced by many of those accessing VET than has been presented thus far in the human development and VET literature. This is an even more challenging situation than existed in South Africa (Powell, 2012; 2014) or Spain (Lopez-Fogues, 2012) after the global crash. This makes even clearer the power of a human development account of VET that stresses agency and structure and which is profoundly concerned with the need to support both the expansion of aspirations and the successful conversion of capabilities into functions (cf. Dejaeghere and Baxter, 2014; Dejaeghere, 2016). The case illustrates that this perspective makes sense when thinking about those who are very poor and highly constrained by structural factors. Indeed, we argue that it is precisely in thinking about skills development that can counter social injustice, gender violence and multidimensional poverty and marginalisation that a critical human development approach has most potential.

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# UNDERSTANDING 'EDUCATION FOR ALL' IN CONTEXTS OF EXTREME POVERTY: EXPERIENCES FROM BURKINA FASO<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the meanings attached to Education for All from the often ignored or misunderstood perspectives of people living in extreme poverty. Allowing people to voice their own understandings of the difficulties they face offers new insights into the essence of the tension between the worlds of reproduction and innovation and the possibilities of achieving harmony between them. Community meanings attached to Education for All were explored by way of a major participatory, action-oriented research project conducted in contexts of poverty in Burkina Faso. The study noted that the experience of poverty and famine influence the value that parents and children attached to formal education, and therefore their interest and ability to engage with it. Community-based education, for example, helped to reproduce knowledge associated with day-to-day living and achieving, at least, a basic livelihood. Formal schooling, on the other hand, was associated with developing new understandings and ambitions, yet also distanced children and young people from local knowledge, social networks and sources of support often needed if the outcomes of school-based education did not lead to improved livelihoods.*

**Keywords:** *Education for All, merging of knowledge, extreme poverty, world of reproduction, world of innovation*

## Introduction

Children who go to school don't know how to grow things anymore, and there aren't enough offices for everyone, so what are we going to do?

As the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2000) ended their term in 2015, the second of these goals, universal primary *Education for All*, has posed particular challenges for countries with limited resources and where other complex social, cultural, economic and logistical constraints limit access to and participation in education. *Education for All* poses, therefore, complex questions about the meaning and value of education in societies facing extreme poverty and famine.

The United Nations human development index ranks Burkina Faso as 183 out of 187 countries globally, with 84 per cent of its population estimated as living in poverty according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (UNDP, 2013). Food scarcity and famine are major challenges, and in 2012 the country was ranked 46 out of 76 on the global hunger index (World Food Programme, 2013). Famine is the result of a cumulation of natural disasters such as drought, floods and locusts which have led to increased desertification and reduced access to water and pasture land. Its land-locked position means that the country is also vulnerable to economic shocks such as sudden hikes in food prices which limit access to affordable food for the vast majority of people.

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Within two or three generations, Burkinabe society has seen itself caught between two worlds: the world of *reproduction*—an agrarian/pastoral way of life; and the world of *innovation*—urban life, offering alternatives to the scarcity of arable land, and to which are attached certain ideas of social and economic success and well-being (such as access to electricity, running water, among others). The attractions of the latter have resulted in large demographic shift and rapid social change accompanied by a growing tension between these two different ways of life. Like other countries in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa, educational researchers in Burkina Faso have observed this tension reflected in the gap between the realities of family life and what children learn at school. One of the consequences of this disconnect is the perception that community life is not valued and that children who attend school seek ultimately to distance themselves from their family and their surroundings. Equally, parents may stop sending children to school, evidenced by the fact that the mean duration of school attendance for adults is just 1.3 years (UNDP, 2013).

The generalized precariousness of life in terms of health, nutrition and access to water and education forces families to try and broker a balanced relationship between two modes of life with vastly different value systems: on the one hand a world structured by urbanization, increasing individualization and modernity; and on the other hand rural life, underpinned by notions of community and tradition. The contradiction between the school and the home environment outlined above is rooted in the difference between these different worlds and the sorts of knowledge required to exist and survive in each of them.

This paper highlights the educational challenges for a society in transition from the often ignored or misunderstood perspectives of people living in extreme poverty. Allowing people to voice their own understandings of the difficulties they face offers new insights into the essence of the tension between the worlds of *reproduction* and *innovation* and the possibilities of achieving harmony between them. The paper begins with a brief overview of the origins of action research and its methodology. It then goes on to present some of the key findings from the research before discussing their implications for the question of *Education for All* in Burkina Faso and beyond.

## Methodology

In the social sciences, action research is characterized by its transformative impact on the reality of the subject of its investigation, and by the production of new knowledge about this reality (Freire 1972, 1974). The action research methodology employed in the current project was inspired by the transversal approach developed by Rene Barbier within his body of work on existential action research (1996). A fundamental principle underpins the method—the need to begin with people’s own knowledge and expertise and not from an assumption of their ignorance. A wooden plaque displayed at the Burkina Faso headquarters in Ouagadougou captured this philosophy:

### *Let Those Who Think They Don’t Know Anything Teach Those Who Think They Do*

The methodology works from the understanding that people with the most essential knowledge are those who struggle to make ends meet in the most difficult circumstances. It encompasses a radically different approach to orthodox social science in that it aims to produce knowledge with people rather than about them. Action research of this type incorporates two methodological components—*sharing knowledge* and *recognizing knowledge*. Combined, these lay the basis for *reconciling knowledge*, which, as we will see later, helps bridge the gap between the world of *reproduction* (tradition) and the world of *innovation* (modernity).

The action research project was carried out over a period of 18 months, involving 335 men, women and children in urban and rural settings across Burkina Faso. The fundamental question underpinning the research was: *What knowledge do we need to build a future for everyone?* The topic relates directly to the meaning of *Education for All* in a country like Burkina Faso.



The work culminated in a seminar that took place during the first quarter of 2013 in Ouagadougou and involved 65 participants from Belgium, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Mali, Senegal and from all the provinces of Burkina Faso. Participants were drawn from very different backgrounds and with different family, communal, professional or institutional responsibilities. While some had a university education, others had never picked up a pen; and while some had spent their lives working the land, others had never pulled a weed.

Findings from the wider research programme were incorporated into a process of knowledge sharing, which ensured that the ideas of those most likely to be excluded are placed at the heart of these interactions. The focus is on the reciprocal value of knowledge brought about through a permanent dialogue between community knowledge, expressed by those living in marginalized communities, and the knowledge of books and educational institutions. The transmission of knowledge is not structured on the idea of one-way exchange but on a dynamic of mutual and collective learning which assumes the fragmented nature of knowledge – no single person can know everything. Knowledge emerges as a collective construction carried out through three critical stages to which each person is able to make his or her contribution.

Time was first spent working and reflecting together in distinct groups made up of (a) representatives of national and international institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities; (b) those working in the field of education or related areas; and (c) families living in poverty and activists that work alongside them. This first stage is when each participant becomes conscious of the value of his or her life experience. Those living in extreme poverty and having been subjected to discrimination realize that everyone, not just those in poverty, shares the same goal of eradicating misery. Once this condition is in place, those in poverty can say things that would normally remain unspoken. As one young mother put it:

*Often, when I speak, I want to say certain things but the problem is that other thoughts come to me. Often when problems come into my head like that, I prefer not to say anything. I just let it go.<sup>2</sup>*

The second critical stage consists of validating the legitimacy of each person's knowledge in peer groups. This enables each participant to move from the individual life experience towards constructing knowledge through dialogue with those people whose life experiences have forged similar understandings of the world to their own. The third stage is when the knowledge generated within the peer group is endorsed more widely and becomes recognized as established knowledge. This third stage is dialectic because it transmits the shared knowledge beyond the peer group to enrich other people's knowledge. From the point of view of action research, this wider exchange enables a growth in intelligence – that is, it enables participants to recognize how to expand the breadth of their understanding and ultimately to make valid judgements about the value of knowledge from other sources. Following are the themes that emerged from this work, both in terms of the process of research and its outcomes, which are relevant to the question of *Education for All*.

### **The Relevance of Action Research to Education for All**

The research revealed how those in poverty often feel that their own knowledge is dismissed as false, as one participant put it, *'people in poverty have no truth because even if what they say is true, others don't believe it'*. Thus action research, through creating an environment in which people are recognized for the first time as speaking the truth, promotes cohesion and inclusion of those most likely to be marginalized in society.

Throughout the action research, a degree of unity emerged between vastly different groups concerning the fundamental knowledge underpinning their lives, irrespective of whether it was acquired in academic circles, through school, the community or directly from experience. Several crossroads in the process illustrated how action research has the potential to identify common ground and mutual understanding between people with very different experiences; those in poverty

discover the value of their knowledge and skills and others recognize its worth. In this way everyone begins to have a say and to play their part in the shared struggle for humanity. One participant in the research told the following fable that illustrates this point:

*One day in the bush, a chief invited all the animals to beat his millet. The elephant came and beat a lot of it. The buffalo managed to beat an impressive amount. Then the smallest of all frogs also joined in the work. Once all the work was done, the chief sent his supervisor to congratulate everyone. When he got to the two grains that the little frog had managed to beat, he became very angry and said, 'Is that all you can do, you lazy creature!' And he immediately dragged him before the chief. In front of the chief the frog explained himself, 'I didn't refuse to work but here's my stick and here is my hand. My hand did what it could with the stick that it had'. The chief, who was a just man, congratulated the frog, 'the little frog did not refuse to beat the millet, he took part in the shared task, let's not exclude him by humiliating him'. And everyone clapped.*

Through giving equal value to different types of knowledge, this type of participatory action research encourages everyone to review the judgements they make about themselves and others; those having experienced the depths of poverty and exclusion suddenly find themselves recognized as experts in their own right. So, there is a shift from certain knowledge being unappreciated and associated with humiliation, towards knowledge which is recognized and accompanied by a sense of pride and inclusion. This was alluded to by one participant in the following way:

*I have had many difficulties in my life. What I have lived through is not easy but it is nobody's fault. Today, if it wasn't for my children I could say that everything is fine. If it wasn't for my sister who lives on the streets in town and who I worry about, I could declare that my misery is over. When I say my misery is over, what does that mean? It's because people I didn't know before, and even those that I did, have become closer to me. That's why I can say that my misery is over. I am now among people.*

### **Defining What Constitutes Knowledge**

Throughout the research, participants identified at least four different types of accumulated knowledge, central to influencing them through life: knowledge that imbued them with a sense of resistance; knowledge that empowered them to hope for a better life; knowledge that bridged the realities of their traditional lives with the social and professional demands of the modern world; and an awareness that knowledge could be destructive, creating a rupture between the self and community.

Knowledge of resistance was said to derive from the harshness of life experiences and enabled people to face the daily demands of extreme poverty and its associated exclusion:

*If you have suffered in life, you will know how to behave, but for someone who has never had to struggle, they would find it hard to deal with that life. Misery gives you advice... There are people who criticize me because I am poor, because I wear the same clothes every day.... They are right but the problem is that these people live their lives in a way that doesn't allow them to be my friends.*

Knowledge of empowerment was largely associated with formal education and its promise of a 'better life', for children and grandchildren. Such knowledge was directed towards the future, even if it meant making sacrifices in the here and now as exemplified by the thoughts of these parents:

*Whatever misery you face, don't allow your children to live it, do everything you can to send your children to school. Nowadays, I thank God, I sell second hand shoes to*

*make-do but sometimes it is really difficult for me. If I manage to pay school fees this year, I pray that I don't have a problem next year.*

*In May, I take my children out of school to work in the fields. I do this because we have to have enough to eat and to be able to send the children to school the following year.*

Knowledge bridging traditional and modern worlds was often described in terms of the skills acquired and transmitted through generations and which inscribe a process of intergenerational learning of fundamental knowledge:

*My father sent me to live with my very old aunt who has never been to school. But she gave me knowledge about becoming a woman for the future. She worked in the fields and sold produce at the market. I learned from her how to grow things, how to sell the crops, she advised me. At the age of seven I was doing the same work as my aunt. She taught me good behaviour. From her I learned about respect for others. She taught me how to bring up children.*

Likewise, knowledge gained from living in the family and community was also considered empowering because it lays the basis for learning in school. For example the respect taught within the family was seen as essential as the basis for learning in school.

### **Knowledge for a Divided Society**

A strong theme that emerged throughout the research was the extent to which the educational choices for the majority of parents living in poverty are polarized around the possibilities of enabling their children to belong to one of two worlds outlined earlier on in the chapter: the world of *reproduction* – the agricultural and pastoral way of life, based on imitation and repetition; and the world of *innovation* – linked to the emergence of individual gains, rapid social transformation and technological change. The educational choices that parents make for their children are determined by their understandings and perceptions of these worlds and how they define the future.

Yet these choices are further complicated by the fact that the value sets which organize and orientate these worlds are often incompatible with each other. Even the modes of teaching they each use are contradictory. The world of *innovation* supposes the creativity of each generation, while that of *reproduction* rests on the repetition of methods, ideas and ways of doing things, from one generation to the next. As one woman put it:

*That [knowledge of reproduction] is the knowledge of everyone, the knowledge my mother gave to me and that I have passed on to my daughter, you can't get better than that. What didn't my mother tell me: how to grow things and grind wheat, how to fetch water and firewood, how to go to the market – my mother taught me all of that. If you accept what she taught us, you will see that one day you can do anything.... I myself learned to prepare by watching others do it and when I tried to do it, I could. I watched carefully because I knew that it would do me good.*

School, the driver of the world of *innovation*, prioritizes the emergence of individuals while communitarian education, that of *reproduction*, situates the child in a social context where 'I' never usurps the 'we'. This subjection to the community, the driver of the world of *reproduction*, has less and less importance in the world of *innovation*. Hence success, whether shared or individual, only has meaning within specific contexts. What's more, the value systems on which these worlds are built are mutually exclusive and hence incompatible, explaining the disconnection suggested in the introduction to this chapter. Useful knowledge in one world is determined as useless in the

other. If a child learns to grow crops, this knowledge has limited relevance if he or she identifies with an idea of success linked to city life. And conversely, theoretical knowledge gained in school may have no direct relevance to the realities of village life:

*They say that if you don't go to school you won't have knowledge... but we know that there are those who did go to school and who don't have the knowledge that others have; and others who have not gone to school and who have knowledge.*

Participants repeatedly reflected on how different understandings of knowledge influence wider processes of inclusion and exclusion. For example, school is uniformly presented as a tool for empowerment. Research in recent years in Burkina Faso (ATD Fourth World, 2004) has, however, shown how children who attended primary school but have been unable, usually due to family difficulties or lack of resources, to proceed to secondary school often end up living on the street; they fit neither in the world of *reproduction* nor in the world of *innovation*. Conversely, children who have rarely or never been to school often reconnect more easily with their families.

### The Meaning of Educational Success

Participants' views about what signified educational success were inevitably tied to their own understandings of what constituted the most valid and useful knowledge for their daily lives. Nonetheless, the action research and the seminar generated some consensus concerning basic values which were vital for everyone to succeed in educational terms.

Solidarity and mutual support were seen as a fundamental pre-requisite for learning, especially in circumstances of extreme poverty. One man who earned his living through begging on the streets spoke of how when one of his children's friends came from school not having eaten, he took 100 CFA francs from his box and gave it to him, even though he did not know if he would have anything to give his own children that day. Another example was given of a child who had to repeat the first year of school five years in a row because his mother could not afford to pay the annual supplement of 1,500 CFA francs. The child started to become violent and alienated himself from others. The teacher offered to pay some of the contribution and the child was appointed as class prefect. Gradually he regained trust and confidence and was able to succeed.

Educational success was also thought to be reflected in values of respect, forgiveness, humility, courage and dignity not only for oneself but also for others. One girl said,

*When my friends went off somewhere to eat and I had no money, I preferred to say that I wasn't hungry, rather than admit that my father had nothing to give me. That would show a lack of respect for him. I passed the BEPC [exam] with an empty stomach, but I didn't tell my friends that my father hadn't given me anything to eat, I said that I was too preoccupied by the exam to eat.*

Success was also defined in terms of becoming useful to self, family, community and society as a whole. Those who became a reference point in their communities, who guided others and were consulted for advice, typified what it meant to be successful. This notion of educational success as being useful to oneself and others implies a sense of belonging to a community – being able to acquire knowledge, share it with others and then collectively put it into practice. As one participant put it:

*Knowledge that is most important to me is being able to get people together so that those who know things teach those who don't, so that collectively we can exploit this*

*knowledge. Nowadays we don't listen to those who are in poverty but we do listen to those who are better off. Yet those who don't have anything may sometimes have really good ideas for us. We have to do everything we can to listen to them.*

Many participants defined the essence of knowledge not as the means for becoming 'master and possessor of nature' (Descartes, 1637) but as the basis for belonging to a community of other humans. Knowledge makes sense when it creates cohesion within a community around a set of shared values. These values have to be learned and they constitute a body of knowledge in their own right, sustaining social ties and enabling people to live together in ways shaped by culture. From the perspective of those living in extreme poverty, this knowledge is fundamental because the security of existence and the ability to feel human amongst humans depends on it. This vision of educational success thus emerges as a project understood as discovering knowledge that unites society as a whole.

### **Factors that Prevent Educational Success**

However, the achievement of this shared vision for educational success, grounded in the experience of community, was thought to be constantly challenged by the evolution of modern society, by the daily constraints imposed by extreme poverty and, as noted earlier, by a growing division within society into two separate worlds.

The research and the seminar during which the findings were discussed revealed several fundamental factors that got in the way of attaining educational success. An absence of birth certificates for many children was a recurrent concern, one mother describing the certificate as '*the first diploma of life*' without which children could not be enrolled in schools. Others described long periods of sickness during which children could not attend school either because they were ill themselves or because they were caring for others who were ill.

Overcrowded classes and de-motivated teachers, the irrelevance of the school curricula and the hidden costs of education, such as the contributions for school meals or to the parent teachers associations, all created further barriers to accessing school for many. Yet there were also other social challenges described, such as discrimination, humiliation, mockery and violence, typically experienced by those in poverty (see Walker et al., 2013). One parent explained,

*One day my daughter said to me, 'Papa, they told me at the school that it is pointless me studying and that I will never have my certificate because my father is poor. He empties the public toilets, he makes ropes in order to sell them.*

And one young man describing his earlier experience of school said,

*When I was in class it was hard. The teacher said to me, 'your mother can't buy you a school bag!' And they made fun of me. Some pupils were laughing. As I was only a child, I was ashamed and I often got angry. That's how violence begins.*

Hunger and famine emerged as further challenges to learning for many children and their families. People spoke of how the climatic conditions of Burkina Faso often affected food production and generated sometimes extended periods of famine across the country. Hunger was said to affect the lives of communities living in poverty in a number of ways. At a very basic level, it made learning extremely difficult:

*You get up, you have eaten nothing, you leave for school with a cramping stomach. Who is going to get up in the morning have a small bowl of millet and go to school? On top*

*of eating the small bowl of millet, I think it is the efforts of our parents that are in our hearts. Our parent's efforts are like a meal, it was that which filled our stomachs so that we could carry on.*

*When my daughter went to school, our main worry was hunger, because it was hunger that was killing us. So we would send our child to school but a child can't learn if they are hungry.*

Secondly, hunger was also considered to be central to the relationships between families living in extreme poverty and the communities they belong to. Hunger, it was said, generated such a powerful obstacle to educational success that it was possible to succeed only if families and communities pulled together. In reality, however, families were increasingly forced to choose between preserving their dignity and subjecting themselves to humiliation in order to survive. As one participant put it,

*Sometimes they give us leftovers on dirty plates. It makes us feel bad, but what can we do?*

More broadly, hunger was described as threatening the social bonds within communities. Families in extreme poverty were constantly posed with the dilemma of how to belong to a community when they had nothing to share. This concern was coupled with a profound sense that any collective responsibility for each other within communities was diminishing in modern society, as one participant put it;

*Today, man has less pity in his heart. He only looks after his brother, his child and his wife. But if you are poor, you don't have a wife or a brother... who is going to look after you? And who are you going to look after?*

### **The Meaning of Education for All**

The wider question concerning what *Education for All* means in a country like Burkina Faso is illustrated by the following quote from one participant in the research:

*If educational success is to work in offices or be a politician, I can say that amongst the poor, those who succeed are very few. That is why so many families living in poverty stop sending their children to school. That is why I suggest that at school they also teach children training in how to do things. If they did that, then we could believe that school is for everyone.*

In effect, parents are often forced to take a gamble over which world their children should stake a claim to, a gamble which has several consequences. First, it results in parents choosing to assign their children to different worlds. Within the same family, some will go to school while others will stay and learn about agricultural and pastoral life. Since success is understood collectively rather than on an individual basis, the chances of success for the whole family are thus increased through the diversity of the choices made.

The demands for children to fit into either one world or the other generate a major stumbling block for policies concerning *Education for All*. It's not a lack of understanding on the part of the school about how to enlighten parents which undermines such policies, but rather their rational underlying value system. At the heart of the world of *reproduction*, socio-economic success is concentrated within the family to enable them to face the precariousness of the family's existence. Does it make sense, therefore, to choose a single pathway towards success for all while the future of the whole community depends on it? After all, the pathway that takes children through school and leads to regular paid activity in town is just as precarious and is no more likely to offer security. Taken

within this reference system, choices made by parents are logical and rational, emanating from the sense of collective determinism at work within the world of *reproduction*. Hence as one parent put it, *'of my nine children, two are going to school, the girls are going to learn about work within the family, the others will look after the cattle in the fields.'*

Yet, from the point of view of the world of *innovation* to which are attached values of empowerment and freedom, such choices are not morally acceptable; why should some have the chance to go to school and not others? Each logic drawing its reference from its own value system, and these systems being exclusive of each other, there is no real meeting point through which one world can influence the other. And value systems that do not meet tend to become value systems which are judgemental of each other:

*At school, one learns to become a big person. A big person is what? It is someone that works in an air-conditioned office. At home, one learns what you need to be able help the family survive tomorrow, when your parents aren't there any longer.*

What emerges therefore is an inherent uselessness of knowledge produced in one world when it is transferred to the other – *'Children who go to school, no longer want to grow crops.'* Here we stress that it is not a lack of knowledge that creates an incapacity to use your abilities for the good of society, but the irrelevance of such knowledge to the world in which it is to be applied. In other words, each world sees the knowledge of the other as useless because they each employ their own value systems and attach very different values to different types of knowledge.

From the point of view of putting in place policies for *Education for All* – predominantly a view of *education* relevant to the world of *innovation* – it is imperative to address the fundamental chasm between these radically different value systems. In order to be effective, those implementing these policies must begin to appreciate the knowledge base within the world of *reproduction* and how easy it is to misconstrue it as irrelevant when one belongs to the world of *innovation*. Given the dominance and power inherent in the world of *innovation*, it is only through actively engaging people living in extreme poverty in dialogue that we can begin to break down these silos and really understand what *Education for All* means for the whole of society.

Participants in the research were acutely aware of the tensions between these two worlds. They expressed concern that the modern education system in Burkina Faso often represents the antithesis of the sorts of traditional education they value and undermines the importance of hard physical work. They spoke of the enormous efforts to educate their children which remained largely unrecognized by the formal education system. As one participant put it:

*Traditional knowledge and specialized knowledge should complement each other. Unfortunately, however, there is a tension between them. Those who have been to school take one side and think they are always right. And those who haven't been to school take their side and believe that the others have made a mistake and are wrong. But I think this is unfortunate because we have to pull all this knowledge together. If not, then those who have learned traditional ways and those who learned from school can never be reunited.*

Importantly, however, participants also gave examples of their efforts to reconcile different types of knowledge and to keep their children grounded in both worlds:

*I have chosen to send my children to school but it is not school alone that will enable them to succeed. I send my sons to sell things during the holidays. That experience will also give them opportunities; that way they understand that it is not only school that gives success. Even if they don't succeed at school they will have other ways of making ends meet.*

*What our parents bequeathed to us as knowledge and what we learned at the school, I can say often do not go hand in hand – but it often requires work to reconcile these two forms of knowledge so that in the end there is no contradiction. Because what I learn at school, I can say is beneficial for me, the knowledge I gained from my parents I consider as traditional, also beneficial for me. I always think about how best to combine these types of knowledge and move forward.*

## Discussion and Conclusion

The process of action research and the seminar which drew it all together developed a shared vision of the meaning of *Education for All*, what prevents it and what might enable it to be attained. The question of what is knowledge – its acquisition and transmission, its underlying values and its usefulness – brings out the tensions within Burkinabe society as it struggles for harmony between community and global value systems and considers the meaning of *Education for All*. This observation is not new; the tension between local and global knowledge has been examined in previous research and certain key lessons have been drawn (Tourneaux, 2011). Such work has shown, for example, that the exclusive use of French penalizes those children whose parents cannot speak it. Equally that developing appropriate educational curricula is not just a question of taking educational programmes conceptualized in French or English and translating them into African languages, but ensuring that languages and local knowledge are integrated into the educational system so that it is possible to bring about endogenous social change. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain which typify the difficulties faced by Burkina Faso in implementing the Millennium Development Goal of *Education for All*. The persistence of these challenges makes it imperative to continue to pay attention to them.

One way of approaching and beginning to understand this tension with respect to education is to consider the social representations at work – the ways in which society communicates and teaches about the social, material and ideological environment (Jodelet, 1984). Our analysis shows that the possible tensions relating to different understandings of knowledge and educational success arise out of an incompatibility between systems which renders them entirely exclusive of each other. In addition, such analysis allows us to specify the nature of this incompatibility in relation to education and to think about its consequences.

In our view, the failure to effectively implement policies offering *Education for All* is linked to a presupposition, itself dependent exclusively on the social representations contained in the world of *innovation*, of society's responsibility to eradicate ignorance. The reality is, however, that such policies are not responding to ignorance but to knowledge. Yet, since the exclusivity of these worlds means that where one has knowledge in one world it is not recognized as valid in the other, these different types of knowledge remain unappreciated, unless there is commitment to reconcile them.

The participatory research reported on here demonstrates one approach towards achieving a degree of reconciliation between these different worlds. We have seen that the original principle which underpins and gives meaning to basic knowledge is the capacity of such knowledge to nurture a sense of belonging. In a cultural context where the community is paramount and gives meaning to the individual, it is these social ties which support the transmission of knowledge. Speaking of our cultural activities in rural and urban environments, many parents told us, *'it is good what you are doing, you reunite children and with that they learn.'*

*Educational for All* appears to depend on several things. Bringing about educational policies rooted in shared knowledge and understanding necessitates a permanent dialogue between the family, the community and the school. This must ensure the involvement of everyone and should recognize that each child belongs to a diversified and expansive educational community encompassing different conceptualizations of educational success. The methodology presented in this chapter allows the generation of shared knowledge grounded in the lived experience and values of those



living in extreme poverty. The process of reconciling different types of knowledge helps bridge the gap between the world of *reproduction* (that of tradition) and the world of *innovation* (that of modernity).

To put in place educational policies which are for everyone and adapted to their environments, it is necessary to start from appreciating the knowledge base of any community and not from the presumption of ignorance. Facilitating the sharing and uniting of different types of knowledge provides the basis for designing an educational system that is really for everyone. The ways in which we have worked through these pilot projects to ensure dialogue between the environment and school in order to generate a common educational project could be replicated in other contexts.

From the perspective of international institutions that make their case on the evidence available, it should be remembered that those in extreme poverty have high expectations of school because it offers the promise of social inclusion compared to a community which often alienates and excludes them. As one mother put it, *'I send my children to school because I don't want them to lead the same life that I have known'*. If we are to respond to the expectations of populations who have been repeatedly socially excluded, schools with the mission of *Education for All* must support and strengthen learning about the dynamics of belonging and in this way satisfy the ambition of this mother.

The need for dialogue between the different actors within the educational community has to be integrated into global policies on *Education for All*, paying particular attention to strengthening cooperation between all its actors – between children, between teachers and pupils and between teachers and families. Building such cooperation requires each actor to recognize the contribution of the others within the educational community and to understand how these different contributions complement each other.

For researchers and universities, we learn that the concept of education has to be expanded to include work on understanding conceptualizations of basic knowledge and what constitutes educational success; being useful to oneself, to the family and having a sense of belonging to the community and to society. Researchers from the universities who participated in this process of understanding knowledge also questioned their own responsibilities concerning this quest for *Education for All*. As one explained,

*We often think that if we listen carefully to what people tell us about their daily struggles, we can analyse their words and come up with some good solutions to present to those who have positions of responsibility: the government, policy makers, representatives of international organizations etc. But, the problem with this approach is that something is missing, we lose the opportunity to enable people to find their own solutions to these problems and so our research methods are inherently limited. A major challenge for us is to think about how we can work better with people living in extreme poverty across the world so that they discover and voice their own solutions.*

For those who have faced the daily struggles of resisting extreme poverty, the experience of action research was enlightening, summarized here:

*We knew that we had ideas and that these ideas are important for others. We have understood that understanding life enables us to change it. These words that have been said, they remind us of what we know, but we have forgotten and now we can apply this knowledge and the whole country can move forward.*

Education clearly has the potential for alleviating extreme poverty in countries such as Burkina Faso in economic, social and political terms. Provided there is a supportive economic environment, it may widen opportunities and choices and increase financial capacity, thus improving the quality of people's lives. Equally, it can play a significant role in reducing social marginalization, giving people greater control over their lives and sustaining systems of good governance. As we have seen

in this chapter, however, the capacity of education to enhance economic, social and human capital is contingent on education systems being relevant and appropriate to the context in which they are designed and implemented. Understanding where formal educational provision sits within the wider context of children and young people's lives; recognizing the importance of the learning that takes place outside of as well as within the school context; and being cognizant of the cultural norms, values and expectations of parents and the wider community are all vital in creating educational provisions which support economic, social and human development. As we have outlined here, such understanding comes from a continuous process of dialogue, interaction and mutual learning between educational structures and the wider communities they are intended to serve.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was originally published as part of the book *Education, Poverty, Malnutrition and Famine* (2014). London: Bloomsbury Academic. Revisions were made to suit the journal

<sup>2</sup>The findings presented in this chapter are from a project conducted by the ATD (Agir Tous pour La Dignité – All Together in Dignity) Fourth World movement, which has worked in Burkina Faso for almost 30 years, striving to promote solidarity among those facing extreme poverty and exclusion (<http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/International-Movement-ATD-Fourth.html>). Our sincere thanks go to all those who took part in the action research project and who shared their experiences.

<sup>3</sup> The quotes used throughout the chapter are anonymized extracts taken from the action research which were filmed and used (with participants' permission) as prompts for discussion throughout the seminar in Ouagadougou.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Preventing Human Trafficking: Education and NGOs in Thailand. By Robert W. Spires (2015), 155pp. ISBN: 9781472443021, Farnham, UK and Burlington, US: Ashgate.

Education is key to countering human trafficking. Not just education as a response, but also having an educated response—based not on mere assumptions but on an accurate understanding of the problem. Robert Spires' *Preventing Human Trafficking* is one scholar's attempt to address both goals. This book is the result of Spires' 2009-2011 doctoral research exploring the role of education in trafficking prevention and rehabilitation by two Thai Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

In building a case for education as a response to trafficking, Spires embarked on his own journey of learning about how complex the issue is, and how education is necessary—but not sufficient—to respond to a fuller understanding of the problem. Spires' initial research question assumed that social capital and relationship-building were crucial to the success of education programmes. However, the pilot study taught him that relationship-building was not as straightforward as it seemed; but instead the multiple political, economic, and social factors that create the context for trafficking require a complex response. Despite the clear connection between education and trafficking in the literature, the simple question: "Does education reduce vulnerability?" cannot be easily answered—at least not without reference to other crucial issues including poverty, statelessness, and other types of vulnerabilities that are not directly related to education, but which have a direct and profound impact on the ability of education to be an effective anti-trafficking response.

In reaching this important conclusion, the book follows a typical dissertation structure. Chapter 1 outlines the importance of trafficking, as well as the relevance of Thailand, NGOs, and education to his inquiry. The most important contribution of this chapter is the realisation that initial assumptions needed to change as he learned the actual on-the-ground reality from the education providers and recipients—the children themselves.

Chapter 2 reviews literature in the fields of human trafficking, globalisation, and education. Spires describes the evolution of the concept of human trafficking and discusses key considerations relevant to trafficking globally. However, there is limited consideration of literature specific to Thailand, or that explicitly examines education as a response to trafficking. There is an even greater dearth of literature available on the impact of education as a response to trafficking—globally and in Thailand—which Spires acknowledges as one of his motivations for this important contribution to the field. The literature reviewed posits that the effects of globalisation (such as economic disparity among countries, shifting labour markets, and undocumented migration) limit access to education by society's most vulnerable. The literature also describes the effect of national education policies, including inaccessibility to stateless people, allocation of resources to urban over rural areas, and language of instruction that excludes minority groups. The literature correlates these global and domestic effects on education with poverty and other marginalisation, with migrant children, child labourers, and orphans being the most educationally disadvantaged. Consequently, Spires argues for a correlation between lack of education and vulnerability to human trafficking. While anti-trafficking experts would agree, this conclusion is drawn from Spires' research experiences and supported only implicitly by the literature reviewed; which is surprising given Spires' claim that there is a clear connection in the literature between education and prevention of trafficking. Nonetheless, the literature review is comprehensive and lays a foundation for the important conclusions drawn by Spires' own research.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology: a qualitative, ethnographic, comparative study of two NGO-shelter education programmes with the purpose of examining the factors that push and pull the students to and from education. An important part of this chapter is Spires' realisation that no single theoretical approach is sufficient to explain all aspects of the trafficking problem. In fact, even social-capital, critical-theory, globalisation, and post-colonial studies combined is insufficient, but rather a comparative perspective is required. This is a critical recognition—given that human trafficking is a multi-dimensional problem that demands a multi-disciplinary response.

Chapter 4 discusses the research results. The research questions can be summarised in two parts: (1) How do the characteristics, processes, and issues of the NGOs impact students and organisations; and (2) what contextual factors impact students and how. The first set of research questions reveal important factors affecting education, including attrition of older children to work, government policy on whether stateless children could attend school, accreditation of in-house educational programmes, validity of non-formal education certificates, and effectiveness of "life-skills" training. The local context is influential, with different official positions and practical implications in different parts of the country. Another important observation relates to life-skills training. Life-skills are widely assumed essential to any prevention or rehabilitation programme. In fact, most NGOs offer some form of life-skills training, while only a few provide more formal education. However, despite the presumptive importance of life-skills, Spires found it "difficult to clearly link these life-skills to actual prevention of human trafficking" and "would infer that there was not a long-term effect of life-skills training preventing the children from exposure to human trafficking" (p.67). Spires admits this conclusion is based on informal conversations and needs further investigation. But, if true, this would have serious implications for the programming of NGOs in Thailand and beyond.

The second set of research questions identify the contextual factors impacting students' education. Three major themes emerged from analysis of the data: goals, benefits, and problems. Goals of the students and NGOs consisted of educational, work, and altruistic goals. Benefits to the students encompassed literacy, life-skills, protection, opportunity, care, confidence-building, relationship-building, and free education. Problems of the students and the NGOs presented the most interesting and important findings. Participants identified three main obstacles: statelessness, poverty, and "secondary problems" (including family and social pressure to earn money, limitations on movement and migration, among others). These obstacles clearly illustrate Spires' crucial realisation that in evaluating the effectiveness of education to prevent human trafficking, a simple examination of the education programme alone in itself is not sufficient, but must be viewed in light of the entire political, economic, and social context that either supports or undermines that education.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the book, outlining implications from the findings and recommendations for action by the Thai government and others, including providing funding, accreditation, and other formal support for NGOs so that their educational efforts are not in vain, and addressing issues of statelessness and migration in ways that reduce rather than increase trafficking vulnerability (directly and indirectly). The chapter (and book) ends with suggestions for further research, including examining how NGOs can effectively provide education to trafficking victims (stateless or otherwise), and identifying and eliminating barriers between NGOs and governments in the provision of education and other care.

While the question of whether education is an effective response to human trafficking may be hard to answer, it is clear from this comprehensive book that the quest for a deeper understanding of the problem is an educational undertaking that all those seeking to end human trafficking should pursue.

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# BOOK REVIEW

**Researching Private Supplementary Tutoring: Methodological Lessons from Diverse Cultures.** By Mark Bray, Ora Kwo and Boris Jokic (Eds.) (2015), 292pp. ISBN: 9789881424136, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

This book is the latest in a series covering the phenomenon of private tutoring. Previous books have discussed the phenomenon and its implications for policy makers, however as the introductory chapter highlights, less is known about the research methodologies involved in studying private tutoring. Hence, this book is the first of its kind on research methodologies in the study of private tutoring. The book had its origins in a 2014 Colloquium hosted by the Comparative Education Research Centre at The University of Hong Kong, and contains five chapters written by Colloquium participants who report on their attempts to adapt research instruments developed in Hong Kong for use in their own countries. The editors mention that the term ‘diverse cultures’ in the book title refers not only to variations of cultures within and across national boundaries, but also to diverse research cultures. They also claim that the collection of chapters in the book is by no means comprehensive either geographically or methodologically.

The first three chapters focus on quantitative research instruments. Chapter one reports on the collection of data on shadow education in Georgia during two large-scale international studies – Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) – in 2011. Among the questions raised are the difficulty in ensuring that questions are worded in an accurate and age-specific manner, as well as if research ethics are universal or subject to variations across individual countries. In chapter two, Kenyathulla analyses the dilemmas she faced in enlisting government’s support and involvement in questionnaire distribution. In addition, she echoes the point made in chapter one about the need for questionnaire items to reflect socio-cultural factors in particular national contexts.

The next four chapters discuss qualitative research methodologies. Jokic highlights the difficulties in conducting cross-national research on private tutoring in Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia and Georgia. Prime among these was the need to ensure common understanding of research concepts and design elements among a diverse cross-national team. The intensive communication had trade-offs in terms of budgetary strains and a slower pace of work. Yung’s case study of a large Hong Kong tutorial centre offers several lessons for researchers: seeking participants’ informed consent; the ethics of offering incentives to recruit participants; managing the balance between familiarity and distance in participant-researcher relationships; the pros and cons of insider versus outsider researcher status; and ensuring participants’ data confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter eight is the first of four chapters in a section dealing with mixed research methods. Bray and Kwo led a research team studying Hong Kong teachers’ and students’ perceptions of private tutoring. Their team encountered challenges in sampling and in matching questionnaire and interview data for individual students. Another challenge was the difficulty of getting students and teachers to be candid in their responses owing to the sensitivity of private tutoring.

The final two chapters sum up key lessons learnt from the previous chapters. Liu considers major issues that emerged during the adaptation of the original research instrument for use in other countries. These included the adaptation of questionnaire items for reasons such as varying

socio-cultural contexts and researcher agendas, as well as differing target respondents. Seemingly mundane issues such as questionnaire layout, question format and questionnaire administration are crucial in establishing a meaningful basis for comparability. Bray and Kwo point out that private supplementary tutoring takes on diverse forms in different contexts. Researchers therefore need extreme clarity in their definitions and parameters. The authors also encourage the use of multi disciplinary lens in the analysis of private tutoring. Other lessons include the importance of researcher identity and the dilemmas involved in research ethics.

This book fills a crucial gap in research knowledge about methodological issues facing researchers exploring the worldwide phenomenon of private tutoring. It is indeed impressive for the editors to have assembled a cross-national collection of chapters that focus on a variety of research methods. Every chapter provides helpful lessons and points the way forward for future research on private tutoring.

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