

The Impact of Educational Assessment on National Educational Goals: From Industrialism to Globalization

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Abstract

Educational assessment has often been seen counterproductive to broader educational goals which attempt to ensure greater equity in education. While one may expect assessment to be used as a tool to remedy lack of educational achievement, it is argued that assessment has been shaped by the efforts of elites to create neutral methods of control. This document analysis attempts to determine the goals and roles of educational assessment and its impact on national educational goals. It explores how educational assessment, because of its intrinsic nature for evaluation for selection, has been used from industrialism to globalization as a tool of discrimination rather than an instrument of promoting education. Thus, over the years, it has been used to discriminate sharply among individuals in competitive examinations. It is found out that the insistence on certification tends to reverse the equality of educational opportunity perpetuating the existing social order.

Key words: Educational assessment; educational goals; certification; bureaucracy; globalization

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Introduction

Educational goals, aims and objectives capture the central focus in policy documents and reform programs in every education system in any nation. They are the benign expectations of politicians, policy makers and administrators. The setting up of the curriculum, which forms the core of the education system in any nation state, is thus planned with a view to realizing these national goals which will then be achieved through the aims and objectives of each subject at each level in the education system in that nation. Educational goals are the expression of educational values preferred by a nation state for its people to develop through the particular education system operating in that country. The present paper using the historical method examines the negative impact of educational assessment on educational goals.

Objectives of the Study

The present conceptual paper analyzes some of the published research articles on educational assessment in order to determine in what way such assessment has an influence on the realization of educational goals in a nation state. The analysis of the nature of educational assessment and its impact on educational goals is presented by analyzing documents that deal with the nature of such assessment over a period of time starting from industrialism to globalization. Thus, the objectives of the paper are as follows.

- Determine the nature of educational goals.
- Identify the goals and roles of educational assessment
- Explore how educational assessment functions during various social transformations
- Analyze the impact of educational assessment on educational goals

Methodology

As mentioned above, the present paper analyzes contents of published materials (documents) on educational assessment using the interpretivist tradition. The mode of obtaining conceptual data for the present paper can be termed as 'informal data sharing' through publications (Heaton, 2004, p. 13). Reanalysis of published

documents enables researchers to explore aspects that were not discussed by original contributors. It also provides the way for new explanations on the subject which was investigated. Commenting on the use of secondary analysis Corti (2008) says that,

Reanalysis of qualitative data allows both for new interpretation and new questions to be asked of data. ... Typically, the "richer" the original research material, the more potential there is for further exploitation. Secondary analysis is particularly valuable for studying sensitive topics or hard to reach populations, where access may have been difficult to negotiate. (Corti, 2008, p. 806)

Thus, the present paper, by using a corpus of articles related to educational assessment and its impact on the realization of educational goals, discusses how the former affects the latter in the promotion of educational opportunities in nation states.

Educational Goals

Basic values are common to most nations and include such concepts as equity, democracy, social justice, self-defense, ethnic integrity, national cohesion and freedom. Based on the values, policy makers are centered toward particular aims, structures and working methods. Aims while being expressed as objectives, goals and targets generally focus on developing individual qualities or capacities or on promoting citizenship and safeguarding a cultural heritage (Le Metias, 1999). National values are used as the point of departure when designing the content of national education systems by curriculum planners. Therefore, a given education system would form a unique web from aims to outcomes in the realization of these national values. However, according to Le Metias (1999), this could happen only in an ideal world. Regarding the national values, says, Le Metias:

In an ideal world, national values, clearly understood and shared by all, would form in clear steps a coherent thread through the education system from aims to outcomes. The coherence would flow from aims through educational structure, institutional organization of learners, the selection and deployment of teachers... The curriculum would be consistent with aims and structure and supported by appropriate teaching styles and materials. Finally, the

methods and frequency of assessment would be chosen to enable all learners to demonstrate the extent to which they had achieved the educational aims and internalized national values...Where discrepancies arose deficiencies of many of the stages could be identified and addressed. (Le Metias, 1999, p, 95)

While basic values remain unchanged, certain other values change over a period of time. For example, when a student completes his cycle of learning from primary to university level, the values he started with may have been conquered by new values in a new era and thus old values may stand quite a contrast to the new ones prevailing in society. Furthermore, countries experience a situation where their traditional values seem obsolete in a specific curriculum which creates feelings of individualism as opposed to group feelings, in their educational systems. Traditionally, a sense of togetherness and generosity would be highly valued and as such promoted through the education system in different societies. However, recent individual pursuits for material and social advancement conflicts with conventional values. Moreover, nation states' persistent stress and the urge by market forces on individual creativity to be able to compete in the new global economy in this era of globalization (Castells, 1996, Carnoy, 2000), too, act as a hindrance to the realization of certain national values. Thus, the aims of education as outlined in policy documents and reform programs may differ and even conflict with, those pursued by learners, teachers and parents.

Educational Assessment

The educational assessment procedure, since its origin, seems to have been making the realization of the expressive functions of education, namely the drive for social tolerance, ethnic integrity and national cohesion in multicultural nations, difficult because of its intrinsic nature of evaluation for selection. Moreover, assessment has shown a greater degree of deviation from its supposed role as a tool of measuring the achievement of the expected aims and objectives and thereby promotes learning. It has, however, succumbed to its now much dominant role of selection (Little, & Wolf, 1996).

This is more so in developing countries which were compelled to borrow the education systems of those who colonized them. For example, in many African and Asian countries the idea of individualism is a borrowed concept from the West through the

education systems which they inherited from their former colonizers. Before, examining how the educational assessment becomes a hindrance to the realization of the national goals of a nation, it is important to clarify certain terms associated with examinations.

The term 'evaluation' is used in educational assessment to describe various aspects associated with it. According to Scriven (1994), "Evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, quality, worth, or value of entities, and to the product of that process" (p. 2097). While Scriven describes things that are being evaluated as 'evaluands', the six most noted evaluands are referred to as programs, products, policies, personnel, proposals and performances. When the term "evaluation is used in the context of examinations, it refers to the process of evaluating the performance of students determining the quality of student achievement" (p. 2097). Worthen & Van Dusen (1994) note, Scriven argued that the goals of evaluation differ from the roles of evaluation. Commenting on the difference, Worthen & Van Dusen go on to say:

He (Scriven) argues that the goal of evaluation is that of providing answers to significant evaluation questions (e.g., how well students achieve in mathematics), whereas its roles refer to various ways those answers are used (e.g., using these students achievement data to determine the adequacy of the mathematics curriculum, or the competence of the teachers, or the ability of the students. (Worthen & Van Dusen, 1994, p. 2109)

Evaluation is then divided into two parts as formative and summative evaluation. The former is informal and conducted during the development or improvement of an evaluand (e.g., student performance) and is mostly administered by the teacher by way of weekly, monthly and term tests with the intention of improving the evaluand whereas the latter is more formal and is typically conducted after completion of a program (e.g., completion of a six year junior secondary syllabus or a two-year senior secondary syllabus). In the field of education, the purpose of the summative evaluation is the externalization of information about the process of education so that those personally not involved in it can still be provided with reliable information about learning that has taken place (Broadfoot, 1996). Describing the summative evaluation, Broadfoot, (1996) continues, "On the basis of such information, the characteristics and hence quality, of pupils, teachers, institutions and even the education

system as whole can be judged". (p. 5). Broadfoot's view here is similar to that of Scriven mentioned above when he said that the roles of evaluation are the various ways in which the data (scores of students) gathered is used to determine the adequacy of curriculum, competence of teachers and ability of teachers.

In this paper, the term assessment is used to refer to both formative and summative evaluation of student performance at schools. It is used to refer to the explicit educational evaluation carried out through school examinations. The spectrum of educational assessment could vary from teacher marked essays to public examinations.

The Emergence of Assessment

Despite these intended roles of educational evaluation, assessment has taken an altogether a different form in the post industrialist world. The history of public examinations could be traced as far back as to the Imperial China 2000 years ago where competitive examinations were held to select public servants for administrative positions in the state. In fact, it is this Chinese examination system that "influenced the development of competitive examinations (for) selecting senior government officials" (Holmes & McLean, 1989, p. 6). However, the widespread use of such examinations took place in the past century during which competition was rapidly increasing as a result of the expansion and participation in education (Keeves, 1994).

Examinations and Industrialism

Industrialism developed a new order in society where high rates of upward social mobility depended on the capacity of the individual's commitment for hard work with money and materialism characterizing the status quo intensifying individual competition. This discouraged collective efforts for group success. Moreover, in the industrialist societies, social roles are not only unequally distributed but they are also highly limited. To perform these roles, those most competent, should be selected through competition. This is done through competitive examinations issuing certificates which bear testimony to competence and hence a passport for employment. When everybody is given a chance to prove their competence at competitive examinations, it would be seen as an equal opportunity. However, this mechanism of selection is seen as a means of social

control. Therefore, western nations sought the help of assessment for effective selection purposes. Commenting on this aspect of evaluation Broadfoot says:

The provision of a competition which is apparently open and fair suggests that those who are not successful in achieving their aspirations will accept the rational selection criteria being applied and, hence, their own failure. In so doing they acquiesce not only in their own defeat but in the legitimacy of the prevailing social order. To this extent, the provision of an apparently fair competition controls the build-up of frustration and resentment among the least privileged. (Broadfoot, 1999, p. 10b)

On the other hand, Collins (1979, p, 252) quoted by Broadfoot, argues:

Education, which has arisen as part of bureaucratization, has been shaped by the efforts of elites to establish impersonal methods of control; the content of education here is irrelevant but the structure of grades, ranks, degrees and other formal credentials is of central importance as a means of discipline through hierarchy and specialization. (Broadfoot, 1999, p.69)

Thus, the process of evaluation creates a contradiction between the expressive and instrumental functions of education since the instrumental function of education is concerned with training and allocating of people for different jobs creating divisions of labor as opposed to expressive function of education which seeks to integrate persons socially. The rise of individualism as the dominant drive in the contemporary world has become a hindrance to the realization of the expressive function of education because of the prevailing individualist instrumental ideology. Thus the present approaches in educational assessment are 'insufficiently effective' and problems 'arise in the pursuit of equity' in varied social groups (Gorden, 1995, p. 360).

Assessment as a tool of discrimination

Assessment's tendency to acquire a unique role as a tool of selection was mentioned earlier in the paper. In addition to this with increasing competition for limited rewards, assessment, rather than

promoting and accrediting competence for various positions, has apparently taken the role of controlling such competition. For example, selective assessment requires that items discriminate sharply between individuals, often narrowing the range of competencies tested (Little & Wolf, 1996). Assessment thus instead of testing the skills ensuring the competence of the individuals has taken the form of suppressing those that seek qualification for employment by including contradictory testing techniques. This acquired nature of assessment will worsen the situation in countries where there is already a 'mismatch' between the curriculum and market requirements such as Sri Lanka. A considerable number of productive personnel could be trained even with a curriculum termed as 'outdated', if appropriate techniques testing the skills are used. Nevertheless, this is hindered because of this competence controlling effect of evaluation.

No curriculum is totally irrelevant to the market realities. Even if such a curriculum exists, it is possible to make use of it in preparing individuals for the available jobs. However, the tendency of assessment to control competence seems to make that task difficult. This argument could be supported by citing an example of a situation where a typical English syllabus at a high school level (or even at university level) would require the learners to have a sound grasp of English poetry from Chaucer to Dr. Johnson, from Blake to Eliot and After and not to mention the content of English drama and fiction. The assessment would further require the students to be able to have skills in précis writing, read an unseen poem and a passage and write answers to some traditional evaluative questions. But in actual work places, certain other skills contrary to the ones tested are required. They would include skills such as executive summary writing, preparing reports and presenting them before board of directors, writing project outlines...etc. Therefore, even a graduate having specialized in English would have to join a firm as a trainee despite their supposedly good English language skills. They are victims not of their own inabilities but grotesque evaluative practices. Thus "assessment procedures used may reflect and in turn reinforce not the knowledge and skills that the contemporary economy would appear to require, but rather an essentially arbitrary way of representing knowledge which characterized foreign cultures" of a bygone era (Broadfoot, 1996: 29a). By this, it is not intended to suggest that the history of the subjects and various traditions are unimportant. The present economic context demands multiple and concurrent competencies from individuals and accordingly contents of syllabi and testing techniques need to be revised.

Furthermore, the distribution of educational resources including teachers is always unfavorable for those studying in remote areas. This raises a legal issue where students, who have not had equal opportunities in terms of physical and human resources to complete their studies, are compelled to undergo the same assessment in countries where national examinations are held for selection purposes (Cumming, 2008).

Assessment and Bureaucracy

Since assessment seeks to identify those who are most competent to fill the limited roles in a particular society, these positions naturally gain reputation. For example, there are various positions ranging from the president of a country down to the laborer in public administrative system. The selection and election of politicians have never been on an agreed criterion of educational qualifications in most countries. It is the permanent higher posts ranging from secretaries to junior executives in public sector service that the competence, through competition, has been required for. Thus, this section of public servants forms what is known as the government bureaucracy in a nation. Bureaucracy according to Weber, "is an administrative apparatus which will execute commands of the rulers to the ruled. Hence, this administrative apparatus will serve as a bridge between the ruler and the ruled" (Mouzelis, 1967, p. 28). Broadfoot (1996) quoting Cherkaoui (1977, p. 167) points out that the systems of assessment that emerged with mass production systems must be understood as organically connected with a specific mode of socialization - a mode of socialization in which preparation of a division of labor, bureaucracy and surveillance were dominant characteristics (Broadfoot, 1996, p. 64).

One might argue that everybody gets an equal opportunity to sit for tests which select individuals for bureaucratic posts. Although, the emergence of competitive examinations hindered those who were politically and economically powerful in their access to bureaucratic posts in the administrations, the present insistence of diplomas and degrees for such posts favors those who can afford to take long studies that are required for such diplomas. It is the affluent who, generally, can spend money for study purposes for prolonged periods of time. If this is the case, "the development of bureaucracy destroys real equality of opportunity and favors a plutocratic regime" (Mouzelis, 1967, p. 23).

Educational goals and the theory of the state

Talking about the relationship between the state and education Carnoy (1992) points out that all analyses of educational problems have implicit in them a theory of the state though researchers often keep a low profile about their "underlying view of the state's role in the economy, social relations and relations in the classroom" (p. 143). Thus many of the policy decisions and reform programs are in keeping with the role of the state. Therefore, understanding the state's role is central to interpreting any educational policy analysis as the state would prefer to use its institutes to propagate the values it upholds. Commenting on the state Carnoy says:

As a class state, it is at least as interested in using its institutions for reproducing the class structure... It invests public funds in schooling in a way that caters to the needs of the dominant class not ordinary citizens acting as equally powerful individuals. (Carnoy, 1992, p. 148)

The operation of the state often seems to embody the Weberian view of the state in that, state as representing the general interests of the people. In such a framework the state assumes that it should cater to the needs of the masses in the society. Hence it pays increased attention to the expressive function of education such as, promoting a belief in equality, social mobility, ethnic integration, citizen rights ... etc. Such a state would be more concerned with providing access to education rather than the content of the curriculum and thereby providing the working class increased participation in educative activities. More participation in education could be accelerated through free education through vernacular languages, subsidized transport, free school uniforms and free text books.

However, in most states, be they in developed or developing countries, majority of those in control of the power are intrinsically classist and require a certain status quo to command the respect of the majority of people in such states as a passport to the arena of politics. As long as the rulers are from this social class, it is inevitable that they favor the interests of this class and therefore seem to assume a contradictory role in terms of the state in that while being still classist and hiding the desire for perpetuation of class divisions pretend to stand for the promotion of equity.

This is not to argue that individuals from ordinary families have not been able to enter the arena of politics. Nor is the intention of this paper is to support the view that all those holding higher posts in both public and private sectors are from the affluent classes. But as pointed out earlier, the insistence of certificates bearing testimony to competence becomes counterproductive to the noble idea of equality as the pursuit of such qualifications requires more than access to education.

Thus schooling in democratic capitalist societies is characterized by two contradictory goals reflecting the broader goals. One goal is to reproduce the forces and perpetuate bureaucratic relations upholding the norms of the class-biased society and the other is to bring about social integration through cultivating values related to equality, upward mobility and citizen rights. Hence, Carnoy argues that:

These goals are inherently contradictory because capitalist state, rooted in these unequal relations of production, has difficulty in delivering on the democratic ideals it teaches in school and in other public institutions. Yet the citizenry's willingness to accept these institutions is largely based on the very promises the state cannot deliver. (Carnoy, 1992, p, 150)

From such a view, the most convenient and constant tool for nation states to reproduce unequal division of labor is through competitive examinations. Thus in relation to the theory of the state, educational assessment has a propensity to hinder the realization of democratic values of education.

Educational goals and curriculum theory

Yet another issue faced by the developing countries, was the education tradition they inherited from their former colonizers in providing mass education. The curriculum theory upon which the British education system is founded is known as the essentialism. It is derived from the Platonic view that a truly liberal education could best be provided through certain selected subjects. The purpose of education was to develop moral values (Holmes & McLean, 1989). The philosophy of Plato, continues, Holmes & McLean (1989) "argued that the acquisition of knowledge was the outcome of the interaction between the innate qualities of the learner and potential

sources of reinforcing morality in the texts' "(p. 27). Therefore, in the essentialist tradition, in depth study of a few subjects could be seen. Through such in depth study of a few subjects, elite educational institutes took:

the responsibility for the moral training of future members of the political administrative class which was to participate in the expansion of the empire abroad and the government bureaucracy at home. It was a morality intended to guide the leaders of a hierarchically structured society in their relations with those they governed. (Holmes & McLean, 1989, p. 26)

An education system based on an essentialist tradition obviously was not intended to apply for mass education, and further it excluded vocational studies at schools and ignored mass primary education. In such a context, countries that adopted the British education system based on essentialism are bound to experience issues related to education and employment as the essentialist tradition placed more emphasis on 'wisdom' than 'cleverness'.

Developing countries in Asia and Africa, which were former colonies of various European nations, continued to follow the education models of their colonizers even after their independence from such countries. Most African countries continued to adapt English as the medium of instruction (except where Swahili was used at primary level). However, countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia opted to democratize education by making education more accessible to masses of people through vernacular languages.

When the above newly independent countries formulated their national education and language policies, the reform drafts dominated with the democratic mandate of education. Nevertheless, British colonies, except Tanzania where Julius Nyerere truly wanted to create an education system which is unique to Tanzania, continued to adopt the British model (Pratt, 2009). It should also be mentioned here that with the 1972 education reforms, a genuine attempt was made in Sri Lanka too to formulate an education system that would characterize many socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Sri Lankan society by giving priority to pre-vocational subjects and language. In this regard, even the traditional names of examinations inherited from the British education system were changed with a view to lessening the domineering effect of certification. It was also for the

first time that 'learning by doing' concept was introduced. Commenting on the reforms, Little (1999) observes Ministry of Planning and Employment (1971) in Sri Lanka as citing:

The Educational Reforms introduced in 1972 were radical. A common curriculum was introduced for all students studying up to year 9 and curricular were redesigned for all levels of the primary and secondary cycles of education. A new subject, pre-vocational studies, was introduced. Its aim was to shift labor from its present aimless search for non-existent white collar occupations to economic activities which increases the income of the country. (Ministry of Planning and Employment quoted in Little, 1999, p. 95)

The failure of reform efforts both in Sri Lanka and Tanzania could be attributed to the intensity of the deep rooted classist mentality of each society that had been fashioned by an essentialist curriculum tradition. Since the countries that followed the British model giving priority to specialization through selection to train individuals for bureaucratic public administration in their countries, the end result seems to be anti-productive in their pursuit to promote the expressive function or what we noted as the democratic mandate of education which aims to integrate people socially. Thus, from a perspective of a curriculum theory adopted by some countries, the democratic goals seem to be contradictory to the final outcome of education as well. Here again educational assessment is used to streamline students resulting in major divisions in society.

Educational goals and Globalization

The latest contributor to the debate of educational goals and the role of assessment is, perhaps, the globalization effect. According to Carnoy:

Globalization means increased competition among nations in a more closely intertwined international economy, a competition that is continuously enhanced by more rapid communication and computer technology and by way of business thinking that is increasingly global rather than regional or national. (Carnoy, 2000, p. 12)

According to this new global economic rationalization, which Cox (1996) calls "the new capitalism", privatization of public sector services such as education and health care is a key feature despite impending social damage it may cause. Liberating private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the state, selling state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors and eliminating the concept of 'the public good' and replacing it with individual responsibility are other main features of this new economy. The free market economy, therefore, tends to create economic growth which is unfeeling in that it benefits the rich and does not place everybody on a 'win-win' status (Jones, 1998, p. 146).

According to this new market forces under globalization, education is no longer viewed as a social good but as an economic commodity. Consequently, education is not treated as a mix of social, cultural and economic policy rather it is viewed as a branch of economic policy alone. In this new global economy, "education is not viewed as a right, a joy, a tool for liberation and empowerment, but as an investment" (Brock-Utne, 2000, p. 12). This economic rationalization of education, triggered by the effect of globalization on education, enhances the idea of competition for individual success.

The market is the driving force behind globalization and generally markets set western rules for economic activity. Furthermore, many critics believe that by controlling information flows Western media try to shape the "global consciousness" (p. 3). This way, Leachner and Boli (2000) show, "globalization entails cultural imperialism". Moreover, since the market is the driving force in globalization, "many fear it is bound to exacerbate inequality by creating winners and losers" sensing that globalization may be harmful to "the well-being of individuals, countries and cultures" (p. 3).

When countries in the South as well as those from the former socialist block turn to the IMF, the World Bank and the regional banks for loans for their development projects, the former provide loan packages with covenants. The borrowing countries are advised to readjust their public policies in order to 'develop economically in the new global context'. A major condition for borrowing countries laid down by these organizations is reducing the size of public spending. Since education is a very important aspect of public sector spending, the conditions of the above multi-lateral organizations unfavorably affect it resulting in the reduction of state funding on it. On the other

hand, globalization creates a situation where higher level skills are more sought after than lower level skills and hence, better paid. This compels educational institutes to produce individuals who are better equipped to take up such jobs in an ever changing competitive labour market. Such courses of study once again can only be taken by those who can copiously afford them.

Thus, from a perspective of the impact of globalization on educational planning and assessment, more inequity rather than equity is foreseen. All the high skilled personnel who are computer literate, innovative and have business oriented thinking will have to be selected through tougher evaluation criteria than ever before. Thus the possibility of globalization effect on education to dictate terms to evaluation cannot be easily undermined. Moreover, if a highly skilled labor force is required to handle business, this can further expand the contradiction between educational goals and the role of evaluation. The nation's desire to integrate people socially through specific aims and objectives will be further thwarted by the very process of globalization. Since globalization creates a sense of insecurity in terms of employment because of its very 'competitive' and 'innovative' nature, the labor force involved in its process is unlikely to live 'satisfying lives' which is the ultimate goal of any education system. Instead, they may work with continuous uncertainty.

Conclusion

In the light of the above analysis, it is possible to trace several factors that hinder the realization of educational goals stated in a particular education system. As cited above, the first obstacle to the realization of these goals is due to the nature of educational assessment which serves to function in many different ways. First, according to the analysis, examinations are used as a tool to control the building frustration of the individuals that fail them. Second, assessment favors the present individualist 'instrumental ideology' which seeks to create divisions of labor enhancing class-structured societies. Third assessment has now taken a different role of controlling competence as opposed to promoting and accrediting competence which it was originally supposed to do. This is done through items that 'sharply discriminate' between individuals. Fourth, educational assessment helps promote the perpetuation of bureaucracy whose positions are filled with certification obtained through competitive examinations. The insistence of such certificates destroys the real equality of opportunity. Finally, from a perspective of globalization

entering the educational sector, one foresees tougher evaluation criteria being used for certification creating more inequality than equality. Thus, educational assessment in the contemporary world tends to promote other goals and objectives contrary to the ones expected by the policy makers from such assessment.

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