

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Language, education and poverty

by

Abram L Mawasha

Carnegie Conference Paper No.105

Cape Town

13 - 19 April 1984

ISBN 0 7992 0884 1

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND POVERTY.

Prof. Abram L Mawasha,
University of the North.

I. Introduction

I want to start-off my paper with a word of appreciation and encouragement to the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit for having identified, inter alia, the area of language, education and poverty for research and discussion.

The importance of language in education and the effect of deprivation on both cannot be over-emphasised. Although the problem has universal relevance and application... notably in the Third or developing world...I have elected to focus on the Republic of South Africa with an accentuation on Black South Africa, it being the area that constitutes the context of my work and research.

2. Aim of paper

The aim of this paper is two-fold:

- 2.1 to describe the effect of poverty on performance in language and education and the concomitance of this on overall scholastic achievement of Black learners;
- 2.2 to show that enrichment can enhance performance in language and education and so overall scholastic achievement.

3. The problem in perspective

There are several problems that jointly or separately exacerbate issues bearing on the relationship between language, education and poverty. We note some of these:

3.1 General poverty

Successive governments in South Africa have tended to plan remunerations in favour of White South Africans. Accordingly, salary scales have always been differentiated in terms of race broadly in the order of White, Indian/Coloured and African. In the long term this disparity has created a situation in which the degree of intensity of deprivation

tended to follow this order.

The spin-off of this unfortunate salary discrimination has been that African homes have become characteristically deprived homes. From an educational point of view Black homes have become educationally unsupporting. In a comprehensive research among North Sotho speaking secondary school children, Dr J.G Garbers (currently President of the Human Science Research Council), noted the adverse effect that a deprived home and school environments have on the North Sotho Speaking pupils' chances of positive scholastic achievement (2, 89).

His findings are in line with similar findings by other researchers who worked on specific topics such as "The socio-economically deprived," "the socially disadvantaged," "the poverty stricken," "die sosiaal belemmerde" and "die skoolswakke." (ibid) Garbers summarises the characteristics of the environment of the North Sotho school child as follows:

- 3.I.1 "an academically unstimulating home milieu,
- 3.I.2 late entry into school with a cumulative deficit of cultural, formal language and other deprivations;
- 3.I.3 multiple school failures;
- 3.I.4 generally lower standard of living;
- 3.I.5 poor facilities for doing home work;
- 3.I.6 poor participation in extra- curricular activities;
- 3.I.7 lack of education of the fathers and mothers"(ibid.)

Garbers, in a conclusion, that is as decisive as it is far-reaching for this paper asserts:

"The fact remains, however, that a great number of Pedi(North Sotho) pupil is battling along at school with little hope of success. They suffer from scholastically insurmountable cumulative deficit originating in various ways from home milieux giving little support to the child in the type of experience, which are necessary, even a precondition for school success " (ibid).

At the base of all these problems and compounding them immensely, is the question of language. The medium of education in Black schools is English. Deprived and educationally unsupporting home milieux coupled with inadequate teaching learning school environments, provide very little compensatory education to boost the learners' communicative competence in English sufficiently to maximise benefits from-instructions through the medium of this language. The negative consequences of linguistic inadequacy in teaching and learning is well documented in relevant literature. We cite examples:

Doughlas Barnes writes,

"Language is so deeply embedded in many subjects of the secondary school curriculum that it is sometimes difficult to separate learning the concepts and processes of a subject from learning to use language to represent and use these concepts and processes" (5,4):

W.P Robinson, is in broad agreement with Doughlas Barnes. He writes:

"The language we command affect our capacity for communication... When material to be comprehended or learned is presented verbally or when verbal answers are required, the language we have available constrains (or facilitates) our verbal and non-verbal behaviour" (5,4).

The somewhat bleak picture so far painted can be improved appreciably by enriching at least the teaching learning environment of the learners.

In 1976/77, I carried out studies to show that if Black secondary school children with serious deficiencies in oral English (notably pronunciation) are exposed to a reasonably enriched educational environment in a form of appropriate aural-oral teaching aids and research-based audio-lingual programmes, the level of aberrancy in their oral English decreased appreciably (7, chapt's 5 and 6).

In 1980/81, I exposed post-graduate Method of English teacher-trainees (University Education diploma), to a planned (that is) supervised and controlled reading programme involving journals on language teaching.

The students were able to read at a rate of one article in two to three days over and above their regular studies.

Although I am yet to write-up the results of this simple experiment, I was nonetheless able to conclude that if Black learners are exposed to an educationally enriched environment (such as a reading environment) they tend to utilise it to some advantage.

In 1981/82, I exposed first year science students with deficiencies in the listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking skills to a concentrated teaching-learning programme involving these skills for an uninterrupted period of four months.

The teaching-learning environment was enriched by introducing basic and support language materials covering all the language skills involved. ^Anoticeable improvement in performance in these skills was realised at the end of the programme. Significantly the improvement was a lasting one in that when the same students were tested again after another four months (during which period they were not exposed to any further instruction in the language skills), they showed no marked deterioration in performance (10; ~~see also appendix~~).

Another important observation made in the 1982-3 study with first year science students was that those science freshmen who for some reason or other could not enrol for the special English course with their colleagues but were pre-tested along with them), showed an improvement on their pre-test scores when tested again after four months.

The general conclusion that could be drawn from these studies, is that if learners from deprived homes are taught in a similar school environment, they tend to show certain levels of deficiencies in their education but if the same learners are exposed uninterruptedly to a well structured, adequately supported and reasonably motivated teaching-learning environment (such as at a residential university) they show noticeable improvement which they sustain over a long period. This conclusion seem to point to the fact that poor scholastic achievement on the part of the Black learners is more a product of a deprived home and school environment rather than of innate cognitive limitation.

3.2 Wastage

A Johannesburg Daily (I2) recently. (7 July 1983.) cited a report by the Research Institute for Education Planning of the University of the Orange Free State to the effect that: "More than 52% of black South African students leave school illiterate or semi-illiterate with the highest qualification among this group being a standard II pass..."

The report, according to the daily, also states that only 3,5% of the Black population reach matriculation. The report also notes that the pass rate at matriculation level often fluctuates. For example of the II 095 candidates who set the final year matriculation examination in 1977 an encouraging 77% passed; but of the 59 44I who set the same examination in 1981 just under 50% passed (ibid).

If these facts are read together with the effects of an impoverished environment described under 3.1 above, it will not be unreasonable to read into this wastage consequences of general deprivation among Black South Africans.

It should be emphasised that if 52% of Black children drop-out at standard II level, they are not only illiterate as described above but are also handicapped in the use of the languages of commerce and industry in South Africa namely English and/or Afrikaans. The 1971 Spro-cas Education Report points out further that at standard II level the pupils are hardly literate even in their own mother tongue (I5,24).

The Eiselen Commission Report stated that at this level the child has "benefitted so little that the money spent on this education is virtually lost" (Quoted I5, 24).

The Advisory Committee for Human Sciences Research of South West Africa (Namibia) saw the inadequacy of the current system of education for Blacks itself as a precipitory factor towards drop-out at a pre-literate level. "The system is breeding a nation of drop-outs..." (I2). It also noted a disparity in the standards as between the education for White Namibians and their Black county-men (ibid).

Wastage or drop-out rate is not wholly unconnected with deprivation in that an unsupporting home environment coupled

with a similar school environment can hardly add-up to a motivating environment for enjoyable and successful learning.

3.3 Funding of Education

One of the provisions that followed in the wake of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, was the creation of the Bantu Education Account in 1955 in terms of which Black education whose expenditure over the past ten years upto 1954-5 had increased ten-fold to £8 500 000 would no longer be subsidized wholly from the General Revenue Account; instead a fixed amount of £6½ million would be paid from the General Revenue Account and any excess over this amount would be met by the Black tax-payers themselves (4,94).

Given the fact that Black South Africans comprise the poorer sector of the citizenry a "pegged account" was hardly the best way to encourage accelerated development.

Prof W.M Kgwere, in an inaugural address entitled "In search of an Education System" in 1961, described the Bantu Education Account as "odd" for a developmental account.

In 1954 the Minister of Native Affairs supported the "pegging" provision as follows:

"I want to state very clearly that I take full responsibility for the pegging of that subsidy on that basis (i.e fixed £6½ million) and I support it because I think it is a wise thing to do in the interest of the country and its finances but also because Bantu Education can only be guided along sound lines when built on the principle that while the European is prepared to make heavy contributions to Native Education, the Native Community will have to shoulder their share of the responsibility for their development" (3,55-56).

In 1958 the Minister of Finance stated inter alia, that: "If the State is simply continually to give money it will undoubtedly undermine sound development of the Bantu community and the White guardian would be failing in its duty" (3, 56).

What the two Ministers overlooked, however, was the fact that at the time the Black communities were too poor to contribute adequately to their education to enable it to keep pace with White education.

The disparity in basic and back-up materials for effective teaching and learning between Black and White schools is clear for everyone to see upto this day and therefore needs no further emphasis.

Need and sheer common-sense have long unpegged the "pegged account" and comparatively speaking much more funds are made available for the education of Black children. The 1982 South African Institute of Race Relation Survey, for example, points out that:

"The estimated expenditure by the Department of Education and Training for 1982-3 shows an increase of R106 010 million over the previous year's estimate of R369 748 million" (I4, 463).

If the additional amount of R14 213 million by the Department of Community Development for the provision of facilities for technical and vocational education for Africans is added "the total estimates for African education for 1982-3 thus amounted to R489 971 million" (I4, 464). In all R3, 16 billion has been budgeted for the education of all groups in the R.S.A for the year 1982-3 (I4, 465).

Despite these welcome adjustments in the subsidy of Black education sad to say that the disparity in actual allocations between White and Black continues. In 1968 the per capita expenditure on Black pupils was R14,48c as against an average of R228,00 on White pupils in all provinces (I5, 24). In 1978/79 per capita expenditure on Black pupils increased to R71,28 as against R724,00 for White pupils (I3, 460). In 1980/81 per capita expenditure on Black pupils increased further to R176,20c as against R1 021,00 for White pupils (I4, 465).

4. Some recommendations

4.1 Education and population growth

The De Lange Commission Report observed:

"Because of differing growth rates among the population groups the relative proportion of Whites, Coloured and Asians, will decrease while that of Blacks will increase steadily. Although a decline in the birth rate is also evident among Blacks, the death rate is also declining rapidly and consequently natural population growth will still take place at a rapid pace for a considerable time" (II, 21).

If this quotation is viewed against the background of the discussions above, the implications are far-reaching in the sense that if educational planning in the R.S.A is not strongly targeted on accelerated development and upliftment of the Black South Africans their poverty level may be slow in disappearing. This in time will not only create an invidious situations in terms of human relations in the country but will also put South Africa in an untenable position in which a White minority provides the bulk of the skilled manpower. To obviate such a situation literacy programmes (I) currently underway in the country will have to be encouraged more vigorously at private and public sector levels to upgrade existing Black labour force and so regularise the trained labour supply in the country. Access to colleges, technicons and universities may have to be de-racialised to diversify and broaden the vista of education and training with a view to acceleratng high quality manpower production for the country at large and so, in the long term, control Black poverty on a country-wide basis. Scholaships by overseas governments notably the United States and Britain (with Canada on the wing) for deserving Black students are a welcome contribution and are to be encouraged and fully utilised.

4.2 Research and training

General deprivation noted above contributed to the delay of the production of Black Senior graduates and so Black orientated research and publications.

When the Report of the Commission on Separate University Education Bill was published in 1958 (U.G.32, '56), the number of Black Senior graduates, that is, M- and D- degrees could be counted on the fingers of a single hand; even then almost all of them where in History of Education.

The number of Black senior graduates is, despite all else, increasing steadily and the future should see more Black orientated research and publications. Such activities should take cognizance of the consequences of deprivation on the scholastic achievement of the Black learner and should seek to produce relavent materials that will be geared towards compensatory teaching- learning activities hopefully to make good whatever damage the environment might have caused on the Black learner.

This will be a short-term solution though; the long-term solution will call for an overall upgrading of the standard of living of Black South Africans to a level commensurate with the needs of a budding industrial giant that South Africa surely is.

4.3 Enrichment courses for pupils and In-service training for teachers.

Enrichment courses for Black pupils currently being offered at certain centres will need to be extended and fairly formally organised to provide the necessary compensatory back-up required by learners from deprived environments.

In-service training courses to up-date and up-grade teachers that are available should also be re-organised and perhaps re-structured to achieve greater effectiveness for those teachers whose qualifications are yet to be adequate.

5. Conclusion

I have described South Africa as a "budding industrial giant" on purpose. If with less than 20% highly skilled manpower she is able to hold her own as part of the Western industrial world, what more will be achieved if through economic, education and training, social and political adjustments her entire population could be harnessed and mobilised onto productivity and "sametrekking!"

ooOoo

mcn.

6. Selected bibliography

- 6.1 FRENCH, Edward, The promotion of literacy in South Africa, H.S.R.C. Pretoria, 1982.
- 6.2 GARBERS, J.G., Pedi Adolescence, Research paper C I, University of Port Elizabeth, 1971.
- 6.3 HURWITZ, Nathan, The Economics of Bantu Education, S A I R R, Johannesburg, 1964.
- 6.4 HORRELL, M., A survey of race relations in South Africa 1953-1954, S A I R R, Johannesburg 1954.
- 6.5 MAWASHA, A.L., Language in Black Education: the politics of language in a multi-lingual situation, Inaugral address, University of the North, Pietersburg, 1982.
- 6.6 MAWASHA, A.L., From missionary and Provincial Control to State and Community Control of Bantu Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1969.
- 6.7 MAWASHA, A.L., The teaching of English as a Second Language to North Sotho-speaking Children with special reference to Oral Communication.. An Empirical Study, Unpublished D.Ed thesis, University of the North, Pietersburg, 1977.
- 6.8 MAWASHA, A.L., "The teaching profession in the world of tomorrow" TUATA, July -December 1978.
- 6.9 MAWASHA, A.L., "Teaching communication skills to Black students," paper read at the conference on Technical Communication, C S I R Pretoria, July 1983.
- 6.10 MAWASHA, A.L., SPENG Report, unpublished report on English Course for first year Science students, University of the North , 1981/82
- 6.11 Provision of Education in the RSA- Investigation into Education, H S R C, 1981 (De Lange Report)
- 6.12 Rand Daily Mail, July 7, 1983.
- 6.13 Survey of Race Relation in South Africa, 1980, S A I R R, 1981.
- 6.14 Survey of Race Relation in South Africa, 1982, S A I R R , 1983.
- 6.14 Spro-cas, Education beyond Apartheid, Johannesburg, 1971.

cmn.

.....