

The school improvement policy context in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

There have been numerous appeals to explore more non-westernized and developing country contexts, (Dimmock, 2000; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006; Mc Mahon, 2006 & Harris, 2009). This paper is a response to those appeals. The study maps the school improvement educational policy contexts of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), which is a developing country in the Caribbean.. This paper attempts to illuminate on research, which reviewed the development of school improvement particularly in the secondary school sector. It identifies distinct phases of school improvement in T&T and proposes that these phases are linked to significant educational policy development eras within the country. A documentary based research approach that involved the analysis of educational documents and a review of the literature on historical and educational policy was employed. This investigation is significant because it documents the school improvement movement in T&T and provides an understanding of how the country experienced educational change.

Keywords: school improvement; Trinidad and Tobago; school improvement phases; educational policy

Introduction

This paper reports on the findings of a study which reviewed the development of the educational policy and school improvement contexts in the secondary sector in T&T and to identified phases of school improvement. Literature on the development of education in T&T is thin; hence this synthesis was constructed from drawing together the relevant, scant literature from within various disciplines, (history, education and sociology) in the social sciences field. Drawing on policy documents, historical data and secondary data, the investigation was read through the analytical framework for policy engagement proposed by Hodgson & Spours (2006), which engages four related conceptual tools: political eras, the education state, the policy process and the operation of political space (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, p.685).

The concept of ‘political era’ involves interpreting policy creation via an historical and contextual analysis that includes examining the ideology underscoring the political decision making (Hodgson & Spours, 2006). The term ‘political era’ also refers to historical factors which determine the dimensions of an education system; the political ideology which shapes the reform agenda and national and international education discourse and debates. The concept of the ‘education state’ relates to the range of national, regional and local structures and institutions concerned with education. The third dimension of the analytical framework is ‘policy process’ which acknowledges the complex range of activities, people and relationships involved in the process of moving policy from paper to practice. Finally, the concept of ‘political space’ describes the opening up of opportunity for different stakeholders to bring pressure to bear on the process through which policy is developed’ (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, p. 690).

The study used this analytical framework as a tool to investigate school improvement policy development. The purpose of this engagement with educational policy over time and space was to identify the distinctive school improvement eras and phases in the development of education in T&T from the post-emancipation period to present. Three key research questions guided the investigation:

- (1) What are the key developments in education in T&T from the post-emancipation era to present?
- (2) How do these developments relate to political eras in T&T?
- (3) In relation to the international school improvement policy context, what phases of school improvement can be identified in T&T?

The phases outlined in Harris and Chrispeels (2006) were used as a framework to determine and identify the phases of school improvement in T&T.

The aims of the investigation were firstly, to conduct a review of the literature on the history of education in T&T with a focus on the development of secondary education. Secondly, to identify significant educational policy changes or reforms that took place within the education system and analyze these policy developments within the framework outlined by using Hodgson and Spours (2006). Finally, based on this analysis to recognize distinctive school improvement phases within the development of education in T&T.

A historical overview of Trinidad and Tobago's education system

The education system in T&T historically has been and to some extent continues to be shaped by its colonial past. This is evident in the distrust that remains among some members of the society about the goals and purpose of education and the value of engaging in educational activities, (Campbell, 1992; Ragguet-Dardain, Windborne & Rajack, 1994 & George, Mohammed & Quamina, 2003). This overview critically examines significant policy eras and documents.

During slavery and in the post emancipation era, slaves and ex-slaves were educated through the work of missionaries. Religion therefore played an important role in developing education in T&T. This religious influence in education was partly responsible for the formation of the denominational type schools, (also called traditional secondary assisted schools), which are owned and governed by religious organizations. In the post emancipation era, the religious organizations continued to be the main providers of primary and secondary schools. In the decade after emancipation, the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and the Mico Charity provided primary education. Although the Mico Charity was non-denominational, Protestants funded it. Cultural, religious and socio-economic controversy plagued the T&T education system for many years and the denominational schools contributed to the perpetuation of these controversies. Campbell (1992, p. 12), states that: "...denominational schools were socially divisive and financially wasteful; fomented religious rivalries and hardened cultural differences..." These tensions which Campbell (1992) alludes to provided the motivation for the rise of state schools from the 1850's, well into the 1960's when T&T became independent in 1962. These state schools are now called traditional government schools. Both the traditional secondary assisted and government schools followed a predominantly academic curriculum. That is to say they didn't offer technical vocational subjects. When the government took control of the education system, it entered into an agreement in 1960 called the 'Concordat' with the religious boards that owned schools. Under the terms of this agreement the government provided a percentage of the revenue to operate these schools, hence their being called 'Secondary Assisted Schools' (SAS). Nevertheless, the religious organizations retained ownership and governance of their schools. This agreement is still in effect today.

Although the influx of government schools over a century and a half after independence considerably minimized the concerns raised about the divisiveness of denominational/Secondary Assisted Schools, these concerns continued to form part of the practical reality of the education system and still play a very significant role in the system today. This is largely because these schools are seen to be the higher performing schools, using purely academic criteria as measurements, but they are also viewed as the more disciplined schools and those in greatest demand by parents.

Hegemonic features of a post-colonial society also affected the education system. Education was and to a lesser extent is still seen as a mechanism for controlling the thinking of the masses and further perpetuating colonialist and Eurocentric values, (Beckford, 1972 and Best, 1986). The education system was also seen as a mechanism that perpetuated dangerous socio-economic and racial divisions in the country, thereby maintaining the status quo among the various classes. Even so,

education was viewed as one of the significant drivers of upward social mobility in the post-colonial countries of the Caribbean.

In more recent years, the T&T society has become one in which the economic factors are fast taking precedence over those of ancestry and race in determining social status. As a result, the role of education as a route to ascertaining upward social mobility has diminished. Conversely, global imperatives are calling for more specialized training to transform economic potential, especially in developing countries, and therefore, the education system continues to have a significant role as it is directly linked to economic growth and development of the nation. However, in the current T&T context this role is different in that the demand for traditional forms of education, that is, more purely academic in orientation, non-technically specific forms of education has diminished. There is now an increased demand for more organic forms of learning, which are more skills-based and practice-centred rather than content centred; vocational in orientation and globally relevant.

The rise of state schools and the comprehensive system

Trinidad and Tobago's education system has had to cater to the needs of a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic society. Further, the influence of socio-economic factors on the education system, particularly the way in which these factors marginalized some members of the society and in some cases inhibited some from attaining an education, historically has made education in T&T 'elitist' on the one hand and a source of social mobility on the other, (Campbell, 1992). This has been perpetuated over decades in spite of national educational policy changes. Therefore, access to quality education was a central issue and continues to challenge the education system in T&T. Jules (1999, p. 9) highlighted how socio-economic factors affect how education is perceived and valued:

The perception of education as a basic need may not be shared by everyone, especially when priorities must be ranked in a daily battle for survival. So, while up to 41.8% of the education budget is annually allocated to this sector of the education system to meet that need, the question remains as to how many of those who access secondary schooling see it as relevant or are able to make use of it.

In the wider research domain, Chubb and Moe (1992) speak about family background influencing the educational values and scholastic work habits of its members, and how these in turn impact on the family's perception of the relevance of education in their lives. A central aspect of the history of education in T&T therefore has been equality and opportunity for all to have access to quality education. In an effort to address this issue, the first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams and his Peoples' National Movement (PNM) government sought to increase the number and varieties of schools available in the country, especially at the secondary level. Their plan included construction of co-educational schools, (which formerly was a rarity) in T&T and also expanding public sector secondary schools. Campbell (1992, p. 105) noted that, "The expansion of education of all types was essential to the PNM's goal of equal opportunity for all in education." Campbell (1992) also noted that the government's ability to increase the number of schools in rural areas was perhaps the most successful aspect of its policy of equalizing educational opportunity.

The PNM government also moved to vary the type of curriculum offered from essentially academic to include technical-vocational studies. This signalled the birth of the Junior and Senior Secondary schools. The rise of these types of schools created uncertainty within the education system, to which the Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams responded with nationalistic rhetoric, revealing his anti-clerical disposition. Such rhetoric sat well with those who shared his opinions, but did little to salve the uncertainty and discomfort felt by those who were directly experiencing the change, (Fullan, 1991). Campbell (1992) while acknowledging that there was not enough research to support the claim stated that the technical-vocational schools failed to deliver and to engender the positive academic outcomes anticipated. He saw the PNM's initiative on the whole as not impacting positively on student achievement, or raising standards. He noted that there was a significant drop in the achievement of students in public secondary schools, judged by students' performance in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Cambridge School Certificate examinations, (Campbell, 1992, p. 106). His assessment of the performance of the schools and students was largely based on academic results. As he admitted that enough research was not done to assess the performance of these types of schools using criteria other than academic performance, one cannot make a fair assessment of the merits or demerits of these schools. However, one can say that if the government's agenda was to get students of varying socio-economic, ethnic and cultural suasions into schools, especially at secondary level, then, it would have achieved its goal. Further, if the agenda was to give a wider pool of students access to free education, then it would have achieved its goals.

Fullan (1991) suggests that in theory the purpose of educational change is to help schools accomplish their goals more effectively, by changing some structures, programmes and or practices with better ones. The reform that took place under Dr. Eric Williams had other agendas, including the actual construction and creation of new schools and more so, the attempt to develop a new culture towards education in T&T, via the introduction of the Junior and Senior Secondary schools. The type of change the education system underwent within Dr. William's era was complex. It also met many of Morrison (1998, p. 7) criteria for failure, particularly in terms of over-complexity, lack of clarity, being untested and incompatibility with existing values and beliefs. This type of reform focused on the wrong type of variables to engender change in student achievement. It focused on structure and political policy, or '*distil*' variables rather than '*proximal*' variables, such as psychological, instructional and home environment, (Wang et al, 1993). Riley (2004) refers to these variables fitting into two black boxes respectively, the structural reform box and the cognition and learning box. She posits: "that while most of the time and energy goes into the structural reform box, the decisions made in the cognition box are more likely to have the greatest impact on teaching and learning." (Riley, 2004).

Nationalism and education

Campbell (1992) links the failures in the education system to the PNM's nationalistic agenda which created a highly centralized system of education that consolidated the government's power over education. Educational change, reform and improvement literature caution against this centralized control of education, (Fullan, 1991; Dale, 1997 and Hopkins, 2001). The PNM's approach to education reform in T&T gave credence to Fullan (1991, p.28) statement that 'innovations can be adopted for

symbolic, political or personal reasons to appease community pressure, to appear innovative, to gain more resources.’ However, in the T&T case the reform at that time was not to gain resources, but because there were resources, significant revenue from the crude oil production in the seventies and eighties. Further, Campbell (1992) commented that although the PNM succeeded in reversing all of the ‘colonial features’ of education, they did not eliminate them completely. Fullan (1991, p. 17), commenting on educational policy change states that ‘in examining how and what decisions are made we should keep in mind two critical questions: who benefits from the change’, (the values issue) and ‘how sound or feasible are the ideas and approach’, (capacity for implementation). It would seem that the intentions of the reform efforts under the PNM were worthwhile in terms of the ‘values issues’, in that access to education was made available for more members of the society. However, ‘the capacity to implement’ aspect of the reform was not as effective, thus compromising the success of the reform impacting positively on student outcomes and organizational conditions.

The nationalistic orientation of the 1960s left its legacy of a centralized education system which has perpetuated up to today. The education system continues to be largely centralized. However, attempts started during the 2002- 2007 period to decentralize and devolve some aspects of the administrative systems to education divisions and give these agencies more autonomy.

The education system in T&T is politically controlled, in that the elected government of the day determines policy. The body responsible for education in T&T is called the Ministry of Education, and is headed by the Minister of Education, which is a political post. Therefore, when governments change, there is the possibility that policies can also change, (except where the country is bounded to agreements with external donor agencies, such as the World Bank) be it for better or worse. There are concerns as to whether the state should control education. There is also the counter argument that it is probably only the state that is in a position to ensure the role of education in equalizing opportunities for all, (T&T, 1974 and Dale, 1997).

Teacher training

At both the secondary and primary levels, the recruitment policy is such that teachers are not necessarily professionally trained before they enter the teaching service. Therefore in analyzing teacher training in T&T, there is a disparity between the general education of teachers and their professional training. During the colonial era there were ‘pupil teachers’, who were appointed to teach on the basis that they had completed elementary schooling and in their teachers’ opinions were capable to teach the younger students. They however worked under the supervision of a more experienced teacher. After working for a period of time in the primary system, teachers were sent to teacher training colleges, to engage in professional teacher training. In the secondary school system the government funded the professional training for teachers at the University of the West Indies through a programme called the Diploma in Education. Gaining this professional teacher training was optional (the government is currently moving to change it to being mandatory) in that the choice to participate in it was left entirely up to the teacher. A number of teachers failed to access this professional training for a variety of reasons, including the fact that teachers were supposed to do this professional training, while they were still working

and in some cases with their full quota of classes. As a result, there remain a number of untrained secondary school teachers. In an effort to treat with the issue of untrained teachers in schools, the government offers periodical in-service training and workshops.

The teaching fraternity is inundated with differences that create the conditions that allow disunity and distrust to perpetuate. For example, there are differences in the types of teachers: professionally trained and not professionally trained; denominational school teachers versus non-denominational school teachers; teachers qualified upon entry into the service, (that is, having a bachelor's degree) and teachers not qualified upon entry or (just having A' levels) and all of this notwithstanding differing cultural, religious and social values. All these differences are manifested in the lack of trust, poor collegial relationships, and apathy among staff. This disunity and distrust that define the relationships in some schools may account for the difficulties experienced in implementing change in some schools. These conditions stymie improvement efforts, no matter how well-intentioned the motives or programme for change and development, (Harris, 2009; Hadfield, 2003; Halsall, 1998 and Day, 2004). Riley (2004, p. 13), states: "*reforms fail for a number of reasons, lack of trust being one of these...*" Additionally, policy cannot mandate what actually happens in schools and classrooms; the critical site of change is the classroom and the teacher (James, 2008; Dimmock, 2000; Dalin et al, 1994 & Hargreaves, 1994). Therefore, if the necessary changes do not occur with the teachers in terms of building their capacity to implement, manage and sustain change, improvement in students' outcomes and organizational conditions at schools may not occur (Fullan, 2009 & Stoll, 2009).

As noted earlier, during the 1960s to early 1970s under the PNM the emphasis in educational reform was on the construction of schools and getting students into schools. Although teacher-training colleges were built for the training of primary school teachers and teachers underwent training, the expected improvement in student outcomes was not realised, (Campbell, 1992). It is possible that the reform lacked the capacity for implementation, (Fullan, 1991). There is the possibility that it could have been the over-complexity of the change, (Morrison, 1998). It is also possible that the reforms did not focus enough on relationships, teacher commitment, parent involvement and student enthusiasm, (Riley, 2004). Whatever might have been the reason for this gap, teachers were held accountable as part of the system (Campbell, 1992).

Education in the post oil boom era: 1980s and 1990s

The year 1983 signalled the official end of the education plan (1968-1983) that governed the educational policy agenda during the 1960s and 1970s. It also signalled the beginning of a global recession. Oil prices were declining and the T&T economy was preparing for a recession. This meant that government's expenditure would be cautious and in some instances curtailed. The irony was that the new education plan for the period 1985-1990 highlighted the need for capital expenditure, (Campbell, 1992). According to Campbell (1992), the government's focus now shifted from expansion of the system to enhancing the quality of education. This was understandable, since the government that had spent huge amounts of revenue on the expansion of education now had to deal with the fact that in spite of their efforts the

outcomes they expected to realize in terms of teaching and learning were invisible. This coupled with the fact that revenue from oil was fast diminishing as T&T felt the effects of a global economic downturn which incapacitated the government's spending on education.

Ironically, global developments in terms of information technology made parents and educators in T&T more aware of the inadequacies in the education system, as they made comparisons with global practices and this in turn brought continuous pressure to bear on the national government to make changes. The lack of capital expenditure in education meant that new schools were not being built or repaired for an expanded population. People were clamouring for change. Campbell (1992) noted that educators had been expressing their concern about the quality of education and these concerns were noted in Reports of the Teacher Committee (1979-80). According to Campbell (1992, p. 112), these reports identified the main problem to be “*the need for the training of teachers, even those on peripheral sectors of the education system, and the periodic training of those in main-stream educational institutions*”. The government, while acknowledging the need for change, was declaring that the only way reform could take place was if the country was able to secure a loan. The government made efforts to secure a loan from an international lending agency, such as the World Bank and formulate a new policy to take the education system into the twenty-first century.

Education Policy Paper (1993-2003)

This policy document represented one of the most comprehensive approaches to education planning in T&T. The writers stated that the plan was set within the context of the government's vision for the society in the 1990s and beyond. The Education Policy Paper 1993-2003, (1993, p. viii-ix), in recognizing the issues to be addressed within the education system, acknowledged a need for a broad spectrum approach and took into consideration the following:

- The human resource issues, including recruitment, attracting the most qualified graduates, low teacher morale and training; the expectation of the population which they submit, “*...was bred largely from government's commitment, policy and practice in the past...*”
- That demographic trends indicated that the provision of primary and early childhood education would be inadequate.
- The economic situation within the country which caused the retraction in capital expenditure and recurrent expenditure for educational growth.
- The fact that past systems had not delivered the quality education desired, especially to cater to the needs of those considered ‘educationally at risk’ in the society.
- The fact that past policy reforms “*failed to deal adequately with the innovations set out in the Draft Plan (1968-83.)*”

This document showed that the goal of ‘education for all’ as espoused by UNESCO had entered into the national discourse on education in T&T prior to the global imperative taking shape. The plans to realise this goal were articulated in the Ministry of Education's, Education Policy Paper (1993-2003), produced by the National Task Force on Education. Therefore, when the global commitment to implement education for all became a reality for T&T, the proposals outlined in this Policy Paper were adapted, or incorporated into T&T's strategic agenda for

implementation of the EFA global initiative. In other words, this policy paper provided the framework for action to implement the global initiative, and the EFA goals articulated in this document at the national level were parallel to those articulated at the global level.

The following sections present the strategic agenda for implementing the EFA goals outlined in the Education Policy Paper (1993-2003) as they relate to, achieving goals of improving education in the secondary sector and addressing needs of teachers and administration of the system.

Secondary Education

- (1) To improve the quality of teaching and learning and to enhance student attainment by implementing the following:
 - a. Psycho-metric testing.
 - b. Norm referencing.
 - c. Promotion by attainment.
 - d. Continuous diagnostic testing and remediation built into the system.
 - e. Strengthening curriculum, making it more relevant by consulting with stakeholders and classroom instruction.
 - f. Creation of textbooks and instructional materials.
 - g. Upgrading of the physical environment for teaching and learning via school construction and reconstruction; school extension and renovation.
- (2) Improving educational management and instructional strengthening via reconstructing and decentralizing the Ministry of Education and school based management strengthening.

There was a proposal to do some de-shifting in the junior and senior secondary schools with the hope of phasing out the two-tier system. There was also an agenda to provide subsidized public and private transport to enable all students, regardless of their economic circumstance to get to school and a school feeding programme to provide lunches for students in schools.

Special Needs Students

The action plan for the delivery of suitable and professional services to this group of students according to the policy paper, (1993-2003, p. xv) was as follows:

- (1) Mainstreaming of children with special needs except for severe cases will be the norm.
- (2) Diagnostic Prescriptive Centres must be established to provide the necessary support services to schools, to educate the public at large about their responsibilities and to provide central administration with information about the training needs for the system.
- (3) All schools must develop clearly articulated plans and programmes for children with special needs.
- (4) Special schools must continue to provide specialized services and should be given the requisite financial and technical assistance. They should also be provided with access to training programmes mounted by the state.

Needs of Teachers

The action plan in this area was prefaced on establishing professionalism within the teaching service and thereafter encouraging continuous professional development of personnel, through training and retraining. The policy paper, (1993-2003, p. 132-140) outlined a comprehensive strategy which included:

- Compulsory and optional training programmes.
- Additional increment for additional qualifications.
- More modules to meet these requirements.
- More appropriate selection in recruiting teachers.
- Course in middle management for Heads and Deans in large schools.
- Liaison with Guidance Unit and other support services.
- Linking tenure with good teaching and with appropriate professional certification
- In the short term, an increased number of teacher training programmes to accommodate those now teaching without teacher qualifications.
- Upgrade the skills of principals and good senior teachers so that they can play a major role together with teacher training institutions in the professional development classification of untrained teachers.
- Meeting with relevant teacher representatives, in an effort to sort out remuneration for teachers via a reclassification and rationalization scheme.

Administration of the System

The strategy for administering the education system was centered on professionalization of the entire public service through reform and restructuring of institutions and functions and creation of new policies and practices where necessary, including constitutional reform. Setting up of administrative agencies and committees, such as a human resource unit within the Ministry of Education was part of the strategic agenda for implementation of the *Education for All* goals. Further, the action plan was premised on a multi-sectoral type of development, with community participation and contribution as the overarching theme.

The Policy Paper, (1993-2003, p. 110-131) articulated a comprehensive strategy for restructuring of the education system and linking of this system with others in the society, such as economic and social systems. Also on the agenda, was a plan for educational planning to take place at both the national and sub-national levels. The establishment of a sound research capacity through the use of computerisation was an effort to buttress the system. The agenda also catered for the provision of other educational support systems, such as libraries and curriculum development with the participation of all stakeholders to make it more relevant and suitable for the needs of the community.

The Current Reality

Trinidad and Tobago realized universal primary education in the 1950s. It achieved universal secondary education in 2000, (Manning, undated). Remnants of a colonial

past are still evident in the education system, in the various categories of schools that exist, particularly the denominational school type. The current secondary school provision in T&T falls into the three main sectors: private, international and public. Attendees of the private and international schools have to pay for their tuition, while the public schools are free. The present study is concerned with the public sector schools of which there are 134 across eight educational districts. There are two main categories of public schools (Traditional and New Sector).

In the T&T culture and the family's orientation toward education continues to play a critical role in determining parents' choices. Chubb and Moe (1992) noted that in terms of factors which influence choices, economic resources and school organization may be subordinate to family background and culture and this is true in the Trinidad and Tobago context. Although in T&T education is seen as a means toward social mobility, there are varying cultural values that influence compliance with the requirements of the educational system. There remain some sub-cultural groups who are distrustful of schools because of their perceived colonial dominance associated with schooling. These perceptions reduce their motivation to engage in the learning process and cause some to avoid educational opportunities, (Ragguet-Dardain et al, 1994).

There is a strong demand for places in the secondary assisted/denominational schools, especially as traditionally they have done better academically than the state governed schools. Arguably, this can be due to the fact that the more academically capable students gain access to these schools because of the meritocratic criteria used for entry into secondary schools and because of the more stringent insistence on discipline and values in these schools. Further, it can also be because of the close affiliation established between the school and their parents. Additionally, there exists a somewhat incestuous culture in this type of school, as generations of the same families continue to attend these schools, and return to teach in them. This incestuous character of some schools of this type can also mean the perpetuation of dominant, singular cultures, which can facilitate or impede change in schools, (Bennett, 1997 & Stoll, 1999).

School improvement in T&T, though less concerned with issues of access, continues to be concerned with issues of quality, equality and equity. The current school improvement initiative in the secondary school sector is based on the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP). According to the Ministry of Education the initiatives derive from 'international best practices' and is underscored by the philosophy that 'Every Child Can Learn.' The main school improvement initiatives are:

- to introduce school-based management, including the establishment of local school boards
- reconfiguration of the Ministry's structure and services at the levels of school, local school boards, education districts/offices and the ministry's head office
- institutional strengthening of the ministry's head offices to improve capacity and human resources to enable delivery of an improved service
- making the reform process more systemic by creating alliances with other public services
- integrating information and communication technology

- establishing a team to coordinate the school improvement implementation process.

The Ministry of Education further states that these initiatives are expected to improve: effectiveness and success of schools; student achievement; delivery of services and resources to schools; supervision and evaluation; democratization of the system, thereby allowing for greater stakeholder and community involvement in the decision-making

The next section aims to synthesize the preceding critical review of the development of school improvement in the secondary sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and make a proposition about the phases of school improvement in Trinidad and Tobago.

Phases of School Improvement in the Secondary Sector in T&T

The previous discussion demonstrated that there were distinctive school improvement eras in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago and these eras coincide with eras in the political development of the country. The school improvement phases emerged within these key educational policy and political development eras in Trinidad and Tobago from the post-emancipation period to present. This synthesis generates and documents new understandings of how the country experienced school improvement and how these developments were set within significant political eras. These phases described below are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and relate to phases of school improvement delineated by Harris and Chrispeels (2006).

Phase One: Post Emancipation-Independence (1850-1960s)

This phase was marked by the rise of State Schools to balance denominational schools and provide greater educational access and equality of opportunity. The focus was on construction of schools and enrolment.

Phase Two: Post-Independence (1960s-1980s)

This second phase can be described as the era of the Comprehensive Secondary Schools. This phase of improvement was politically driven, particularly by the first Prime Minister of the newly independent country, Dr. Eric Williams. The main focus of this phase again was to ensure equality of opportunity to all. There was an emphasis on education planning and teacher training. This phase was marked by centralization of education and greater state input. Development of human resources to fulfil economic expectations was also a focus within this phase.

Phase Three: Education for All (1990s-present).

The country is still experiencing this phase of school improvement. Again, this era was marked by an emphasis on equity, access, quality and equality. There was an emphasis on institutional strengthening and structuring of the education system. Features of this era are: decentralization, school governance, site-based management, emphasis on teacher training, curriculum development, standardization, evaluation

and assessments. Also, the school as the unit of change was recognized. Development of human resources to fulfil economic expectations remains a focus in this phase. The central themes of this phase are the recognition that local educational districts have a role to play in school improvement and a drive to scale up educational reform.

Phase Four: Towards developed status 2010-2020.

The current phase of school improvement is already evolving into a fourth phase, which is predicted to be steeped in the political era of developed status. In addition to a continuation of the features of phase three, predicted features of this fourth phase would be greater accountability via legislation; enhanced professional development of all school staff and balancing educational input with outputs, particularly student outcomes. A central theme within this phase would be meeting global standards of education delivery and quality.

Conclusion

The paper provided an introduction into the education system in T&T and a comprehensive analysis of the development of school improvement policies in T&T, particularly in the secondary school sector. Drawing on policy documents, historical data and secondary data the investigation was read through an analytical framework for policy engagement, (Hodgson & Spours, 2006). This analytical framework was used as a tool to investigate educational school improvement policy development. Such analysis allowed for the identification and construction of distinct phases in the development of school improvement in the secondary sector in Trinidad and Tobago and as a result of this analysis, determined and identified distinctive phases in school improvement in T&T.

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