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Initial Challenges When Introducing Business Subjects into the South African School Curriculum

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Abstract: Following the country's first democratic election in 1994 the government introduced a new school curriculum as part of its restructuring process. Entrepreneurship and a range of related business subjects were included in one of the designated 'learning areas', called Economic and Management Sciences. However, during subsequent revisions it was removed from two of the country's three education bands and the philosophy underlying it (outcomes based education (OBE)) was rejected. The proposed paper reflects on the socio-historical context for what was branded as an outright failure of the South African government's choice of education system. The proposed paper provides a framework for viewing the difficulties of implementing a new and contended subject into the school curriculum. The proposed paper focusses on the introduction of one of the subjects related to entrepreneurship, namely Accounting, at schools in an area of the Western Cape Province which had been systematically impoverished, oppressed and neglected under white minority rule. The difficulties of implementing a contended curriculum and an enlightened style of free-thinking, open-questioning and constructivist education in a community trained to be obedient for decades, are mapped and comprehended within social, fiscal and ultimately broad political emphases.

Keywords: teacher roles, learner competencies, policy implementation, Economic and Management Sciences, Accounting

1. Introduction

British imperial education in South Africa (1905-1948) aimed, broadly, to privilege and train a class of white colonial administrators loyal to the King. Across the country, government schools such as Pretoria Boys and Girls High, Durban Boys and Girls High Schools replicated Arnoldian models of public schools in England to forge a new ruler class of public servants, officers, academics and professionals in South Africa: a colony which had been won at great cost and loss of life but which promised to be a coruscating jewel in the Empire's Crown.

After the Second World War, however, Boer resentment grew and in 1948 the Nationalist party took control and vowed to win the peace even if Afrikaners had lost the Anglo-Boer War. The racist hierarchies of white privilege which British imperial rule had entrenched between 1905 and 1948 were largely sustained and reproduced by white supremacist Afrikaner government; they were formally elaborated and legislated upon in the form of racial separation or apartheid. In order to secure stratum of racial obedience and create the majority black servant class that the Nationalist model envisaged, schooling was overtly restricted for African blacks and other people of colour but boosted for whites; especially poor whites who had been impoverished and oppressed under imperial rule. To sustain its power, the nature of education in a white minority totalitarian state strongly emphasised obedience: of thought and behaviour, at all levels. Textbooks, setbooks and rote-learning were key as a means of entrenching white propaganda and obedience to state structure.

Keeping a small group of whites in power over a large mass of non-whites required an ethos of utter obedience. Questioning and debating the system were not encouraged or made a part of the philosophical underpinnings of Christian Nationalist education.

Black indignation and refusal to remain a servant or helot class grew to the point that the ANC government ended a century of Imperial and Nationalist white rule. The liberated democratic South African state turned immediately to education as the first and best means of redressing the oppression of the twentieth century.

Understandably, given the extent and duration of injustice wreaked upon people of colour in the country, they searched for a system which was internationally recognised to be the best. They identified outcomes based education (OBE) as the best system and introduced it in 1997. They sought a philosophical structure that emphasised democratic principles of co-operation in the classroom, mutual construction of knowledge, open debate and freedom of thought. But, between the dream of rapid transformation and the reality there fell a

long and dark shadow. There was a substantial divide between instigating an enlightened system of mass education for all, and the reality of training thousands of new teachers and overcoming the prejudices, at the time, still installed in many universities and schools who still reproduced the notions of rote learning in which they had been trained.

2. The Problem of Implementation

The range of curricula and single-discipline subjects (e.g. Mathematics, Science or Accounting) that had been established by the apartheid government was replaced with a single curriculum framework as part of its broader democratic programme of social transformation: upliftment, reparation and reconstruction. The philosophy underlying the new curriculum framework was specifically that of Spady's outcomes based education (OBE). There was considerable optimism nationally and internationally about the adoption of this liberal new model. Implementation of it, however, was hampered by the task of training so many new teachers conversant with OBE methodology and re-training established teachers. The implementation failed and results were so dismal that curriculum revisions overhauled and even replaced in some respects the vision of OBE.

Revisions in 2002, 2004 and 2011 showed a return to old patterns of textbook education and rote-learning which eroded the outcomes-based philosophy and the way in which the state aimed to implement the new policy. This article reflects on an element of one research project in particular (Schreuder, 2009) which tracks and records the difficulty teachers experienced in implementing the new curriculum framework [and its various latter revised forms] introduced in South Africa from 1997 onwards.

Schreuder's research confirms that teachers do not merely implement curriculum policy; they interpret and filter it to suit their preferences and local conditions: i.e. the challenge of what Ni (2009) calls the 'inconsistency' between curriculum innovation and classroom implementation. Shortcomings in adequate OBE training was a key reason for the failure of OBE and its curriculum framework. Micro-level reactions to implementation of the new curriculum framework quickly manifested in: (i) the differences between the actual outcomes produced by teachers and learners, and those intended or planned for in the OBE system and (ii) in the ways in which teachers had to justify such discrepancies between actual outcomes and intended outcomes. An analysis of the complexity of this two-tired predicament (i. differences and ii. justification) is conducted by Schreuder. Analysis shows the gravity of the situation in which teachers are, predictably and understandably, un- and/or under-prepared in under-resourced conditions. ANC government had underestimated the enormity and expense of re-imagining and entirely replacing a whole national education system. Schreuder's examination reveals the influence of community dynamics; indicating that teachers were unfairly obliged to make impossible decisions that resonate in classroom, the community and the lives of both teachers and learners.

3. Methodology, data collection and analysis

Data used for the production of this article involves an analysis of aspects of Schreuder's (2009) research that addressed teacher responses to implementation of new curriculum policy. Data were collected from five schools over a period of one month. All data were collected in November: the month in the school year during which academic inputs have been completed but annual assessments have not yet commenced. In addition to being an appropriate month for assessing learning, November is a suitable month for evaluating teachers. By November, teachers should have completed their annual classroom administration which includes classroom planning and assessment documents.

Purposive sampling was used: the community for the sampling was deliberately selected for its social, financial and educational deprivations. Schools sampled were all in close proximity to each other and located in low-income areas. All scored badly in terms of learner pass rates. Schools sampled represented a combination of low-performance indicators: namely historical oppression, social inequalities and remote geographic location (worker townships were kept far away from the white city areas of privilege).

Data were collected from three main sources. The first data source comprised learners themselves who were given a one-hour assessment: designed to assess whether they had achieved Accounting-related competencies required for the grade level. Teachers' subject portfolios formed the second source of data. Teachers were required to compile portfolios during the course of the year and to present these for moderation by subject

advisers¹. Portfolios provided information on what teachers had taught in class. The third form of data comprised in-depth interviews with teachers. Interview responses were later transcribed and analysed.

4. First post-apartheid education structure

South Africa's first non-racial, post-apartheid elections in 1994 resulted in the implementation of a new school structure and curriculum in 1997 (South Africa, s.a.[a]). The curriculum was implemented as part of a broader process of national reform of the country's education system.

The 1997 curriculum framework was described as an 'ambitious attempt to re-format teaching and learning in schools by focusing on outcomes which all learners should be able to attain and demonstrate as a result of specific learning programmes' (Jansen, 1998, p. 3).

The current South African thirteen-year schooling system, introduced after the country's first non-racial democratic election, functions under a single ministry and consists of two bands: the General Education and Training (GET) band and the Further Education and Training (FET) band. The GET band consists of three phases: Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3, for ages 5 to 8), Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6, for ages 9 to 12), and Senior Phase (Grades 7 to 9 for ages 13 to 16). The FET band is the final stage of schooling, and takes a learner from Grade 10 to 12 (Education Information Centre and Independent Examinations Board, 1996, p. 24; Olivier, 1998, p. 4–8). This unified system replaced a conglomeration of 29 education separate and separated apartheid departments: each with its own curriculum and bureaucratic framework.

The 1997 school curriculum, introduced by the state as Curriculum 2005 (C2005), (South Africa s.a.[a]), subscribed to an outcomes-based philosophy (Du Plessis, Conley & Du Plessis, 2007, p. 42), and has been subject to numerous revisions. The framework, described by Jansen (1998, p. 3) as 'ambitious' included a number of new design elements. Its underlying philosophy was that of the outcomes-based philosophy devised by William Spady and introduced to replace apartheid education (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2007, p. 2). The South African application of outcomes-based education was described by Jacobs (1999, p. 18) as 'a theory that branched out of competency-based teaching and mastery learning which, in turn, are rooted in behaviourist theory'. At the time, Jansen (1998, p. 321) claimed that the introduction of OBE was primarily a knee-jerk political response to apartheid schooling rather than a considered concern for change at classroom level.

Jansen (1998, p. 321) accurately warned that OBE would 'further undermine the already weak culture of teaching and learning in South African schools and classrooms by escalating the administrative burden of change'.

Flaws in implementing the curriculum were soon identified, resulting in revision by 2002 and again from 2006. The first revision of Curriculum 2005 resulted in the introduction of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (South Africa, 2002, p. 1–3), which was implemented incrementally between 2004 and 2008. The second revision resulted in the promulgation of what has been called the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (South Africa, 2011[a], p. 6–7), which was implemented incrementally between 2012 and 2014. The curriculum of the GET band was reviewed; resulting in the introduction of curriculum 2005 in 1997 but the FET band remained unchanged for almost a decade; following the pre-1994 National Education Department Report 550 curriculum. The National Curriculum Statements (NCS) for the FET band were written for progressive implementation from 2006 onward (South Africa, s.a.[b]). Implementation of the RNCS and later the NCS revealed a number of shortcomings and implementation obstacles (South Africa, 2000c, p. 13–14). The state responded to these difficulties by means of broad-based discussions conducted by a ministerial review team and the revised curriculum developed by a task team appointed by the Minister of Education (Bantwini & King-McKenzie, 2011, p. 6).

The 1997 curriculum framework involved re-grouping school subjects into what were called 'learning areas': one of which was Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) (South Africa, 1997). The EMS learning area aimed at equipping 'learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will enable them to adapt, participate and survive in an economically complex society' (South Africa, 2002, p. 4). EMS included knowledge drawn from economics, business studies and accounting. Initially, EMS was offered in all phases but during the

¹Subject advisers are the state's curriculum specialists who monitor and support teachers in schools. (South Africa, 2013, p. 26).

second revision, resulting in the introduction of the CAPS, the learning area was limited to the senior phase of the GET band and FET (South Africa, 2011[b], p. 4).

The rationale for including EMS into the post-apartheid school curriculum is reflected in a statement by Kader Asmal, the Minister of Education from 1999 to 2004:

... people who possess critical entrepreneurial flair to support a growing economy and people who are in control of their destiny. Our economic future depends on people, who can think, who can access and who can apply knowledge to take advantage of existing opportunities and create new opportunities for employment, increased earnings, and improved productivity (South Africa, 2001, p. 6).

The ideological notion for advancing EMS faced a number of challenges. Kruss (1998, p. 97) noted at the time:

A great deal of concern has been expressed by teachers and educators at the rapid pace at which this new curriculum policy has been developed, and the ambitious proposed time line for curriculum and materials development and implementation through the programme of Curriculum 2005.

A decade later Isaacs, Visser, Frederich and Brijlal (2007) blamed poor training and lack of resources. Consequently, -in the Western Cape, short courses were offered. Limited resources were made available.

Schreuder's (2009) initial study shows that, despite the provision of some short courses and the inclusion of EMS in pre-service teacher education, a lack of sufficient subject knowledge gravely constrained development of Accounting skills in the senior phase of the GET band. Schreuder (2009, p. 6) notes, 'in my engagement with teachers and Accounting curriculum officials it would appear that learners enter Grade 10 with little or no exposure to Accounting ... learners who are entering Grade 10 Accounting have not achieved the required accounting competencies'. In determining why Accounting competencies were not achieved, a number of key indicators were identified:

- Resources and social factors;
- Teacher qualifications and content knowledge;
- Content knowledge and subject management skills
- Curriculum policy development/impletion gaps.

4.1 Resource and social factors

Of the many difficulties they encountered, all teachers interviewed by Schreuder (2009) cited as a major shortcoming a lack of resources to which they had access or which existed in the school where they worked.

According to the teachers, the tension between the curriculum and its implementation was caused most obviously by a lack of resources at the school and a lack of appropriate textbooks. Teachers blamed the school's immediate environment for learning problems: the socio-economic environment and a lack of parental involvement. [Again this finding re-iterates the socio-economic damage caused by a century of racist deprivation.] Participating teachers indicated that learners' reading/comprehension skills were inadequate and that learners did not exhibit a conducive attitude.

A result of this unsuitable environment was that not all sections of the official curriculum were covered. Teachers routinely explained the gap between expected and actual outcomes by projecting their own inadequacies onto learners, the community or a lack of resources. In contrast to the expected attitude, all but one of the teachers interviewed believed that their content knowledge was adequate. All indicated that they would like to continue teaching the subject but, when asked to describe the content, none of them could fully describe the content, or they produced descriptions that were vague. This last response points to teacher incompetency.

4.2 Teacher qualifications and content knowledge

The most startling realisation was that virtually none of the teachers who took part in Schreuder's (2009) study was appropriately qualified in terms of the subject they were teaching or the extent of their experience. All teachers had qualifications required by the state (South Africa, 2000[a]) and were therefore, officially,

professionally qualified. All had teaching experience; most had considerable teaching experience. But only three teachers had qualifications that included the subject (learning area) they were teaching.

Participating teachers' experience in teaching the subject was limited. Only one of the teachers interviewed was appropriately qualified and experienced. This teacher had taught for nine years; four of which involved teaching the subject (EMS) and other related subjects.

Of the others:

- Two teachers were qualified but had virtually no experience in teaching the subject. One had taught for twenty years, but only had only four weeks' experience in teaching EMS. This teacher's qualifications and experience were in Arts and Culture and Languages. Another had been teaching for sixteen years but had only taught the EMS for three months. The second teacher in question was no longer in a permanent position, filling temporary positions for short periods at a time.
- One appeared to be appropriately qualified. He had taught for twelve years but the year of evaluation was the first year of teaching EMS. His teaching experience was in Business Economics, Accounting and Mathematics, with a preference for Accounting, at FET level. While his qualifications were in the general subject discipline, however, his interest and experience was at a different level of schooling.
- One teacher, while being appropriately qualified, had one year's teaching experience only. While all teachers interviewed were qualified to teach, with the exception of one, the time they had spent on the element of the subject (Accountancy) made their subject-related knowledge competencies questionable.

5. Content knowledge and subject management skills

All teachers interviewed could speak about the subject and its value but they struggled to do so clearly. One indicated:

[The subject is] part of reality, they work with it every day ... [however] ... I am very honest, in the time I am here there is very little interest, particularly the learners who are weak, maybe there is too much work and they can't cope with it.

All teachers found it difficult to judge how much of the curriculum they were able to cover that year. One teacher guessed that they had probably covered approximately 55% of the curriculum, while another teacher complained about the subject structure: which seemed a challenge for many teachers. They appeared not to appreciate the way in which the different disciplines (economics, business studies and accounting) were incorporated into one learning area. The teachers interviewed believed too little time was allocated to cover the required work and that they had not been supplied with enough subject matter or given clarity on guidelines. They believed that the subject matter should be more clearly demarcated and aligned with broader subject discipline: accounting and business studies.

The teachers interviewed received almost no training in the knowledge structure or the curriculum within which they were expected to work. The curriculum policy provided to them was vague, broad and described an ideal situation: which was different from that faced by the participating teachers. Different recommended textbooks had different content structures, caused by different interpretations of the curriculum by different publishers. Teachers found this confusing. They were used to being provided with a single prescribed book which was based on a detailed state curriculum. [This proof of overdependence on textbook learning is a significant indicator of the after-effects of obedience education from 1948-1994]. As a result, teachers felt justified in deciding which sections to cover, how much to cover and what to emphasise. Decisions on emphasis, they argued, were their right and function. Leaving out work was facilitated first by the curriculum policy requirement that 75% of a promotion mark is based on work covered in the classroom, and second, a practice in the GET band to carry work over to the next grade.

Departmental training was available but three of the five teachers interviewed had not attended any learning area training. None of the teachers interviewed was involved in teacher professional development (TPD): a practice associated with enhancement of professional practice (Goodson, 1992 in Harley *et al.* 2000; Maistry, 2006; Mason, 1999). In addition to little or no training, (with the exception of one school), no community of practice existed, either within the schools or between them. Communities of practice could have been

developmental: research (Maistry, 2006) indicates that its development has potential in the South African context, where there is an absence of formal TPD programmes. Two teachers indicated that they did not receive any support: both indicated that they were the only members of staff teaching the subject at the school. The teacher from one school indicated that he had to 'find his own feet'. Schools had teachers teaching Accounting in higher grades and all schools were in close proximity to each other: so communities of practice could have been developed. In contrast to the other schools, the school where the highest individual and average marks were recorded, teachers worked together as a group, assisting one another and receiving support from the head of department.

Despite the poor learner performance, planning and learning transfer inadequacies, all interviewees believed that their knowledge was adequate. Three of the five noted that they had good subject knowledge. The other two believed that their knowledge was, respectively superficial and adequate. The teacher whose knowledge was described as 'very superficial' indicated, 'I am not that au fait with the learning area yet. I am still finding my feet, very much so. It's a challenge for me and I enjoy challenges.' Participating teachers regarded themselves as competent and doing the best they could under the circumstances. They were aware that the realities of their teaching and learning situation were different from those described in policies and that they allowed the curriculum policy/reality gap to justify their struggling classes.

6. Social and contextual challenges

It could reasonably be expected of professional teachers to explore new teaching strategies creatively and to design their own learning programmes and materials to overcome the social and learner inadequacies inherent in impoverished communities.

The participating teachers did not appear to be bound to the principles underlying teacher professionalism. They expected to be provided with detailed and descriptive curriculum guidelines. [Again, such overdependence on a structure of obedience and total provision is a throw-back to apartheid era paternalist hegemonic structures of thought and habits of administration.] Despite the fact that they did not attend voluntary training, they expected to be provided with the resources required to deliver the curriculum.

Resources included definitive textbooks and classroom-based resources required for teaching and learning. [Once more the need for textbook learning re-invokes the propaganda habits of white minority rule.] Those who were business specialists, and by implication EMS specialists, appeared to expect the school's curriculum structure to mirror their own knowledge structure; one that was developed earlier in a different educational context and at a different educational level.

The performance of the teachers reflected the negative social dynamics of the community within which the schools were located but teachers failed to take responsibility for their own actions. Their attitude towards TPD aligned with their learners' attitudes towards the subject. With one exception, which had positive results, schools made no noticeable attempt to develop communities of practice. At the time of the study:

- Training was available and there were local universities offering a variety of formal learning programmes, with contents including subject content and pedagogic issues.
- There were FET-level subject specialists at the schools who formed part of the sample.
- Schools were all located relatively close to each other but there appeared to be little effort on the side of the teachers to collaborate.

With reference to the argument by Harley et al. (2000), the challenge was not that policy ignored the context within which curriculum was delivered. What was ignored was the effect the social context had on teacher motivation and performance. It appeared that the teachers interviewed saw themselves as conveyors of content in a situation within which, they believed, they were, proverbially, fighting a losing battle.

Collectively, the group interviewed seemed to miss the point that they were sociologically expected and professionally qualified to facilitate learning regardless of the schools' social conditions. Collectively, they appeared to be oblivious of their own part in the learners' lack of success. Poor planning characterised the portfolios of all but one of the teachers interviewed. Paucity of planning and, as a result, haphazard implementation did not appear to the interviewees to be a cause of learners' bad performance. Similarly, a

lack of learner discipline and not that of classroom management was noted as underlying reasons for disruptive classrooms.

In addition to not trying to develop themselves, participating teachers tended to ignore or circumvent existing curriculum policy. They ignored policy that identified the ideal teacher and the roles of teachers. They flouted policy on curriculum planning and implementation, relying instead on their general knowledge and a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the utilisation of time.

Teachers' non-performance was not limited to, as Isaacs *et al.* (2007, p. 613) argue, poor training of teachers or a lack of adequate resources. Schreuder's (2009) research points towards five primary reasons that can be linked to teacher preparedness, namely:

- Some teachers were inappropriately qualified. In this sample, one had an Arts and Culture background, while most of the others had qualifications that only partially prepared them to teach the learning area they were expected to teach.
- Some teachers lacked appropriate experience. Four of the five teachers interviewed were new to the learning situation and had obviously not developed an acceptable level of expertise. One could look to school management for making incorrect appointments but the teachers did, after all, accept the work. On accepting the work, management could legitimately expect that teachers acquaint themselves sufficiently with the basic required content, policy and methodology.
- Some teachers lacked the required subject knowledge. Lack of content knowledge was, no doubt, a result of the two shortcomings mentioned above. Inappropriate qualifications and a lack of experience are factors out of the teachers' control but they could have been expected to develop the required subject matter expertise after accepting the work.
- Most teachers lacked the required knowledge of the relevant curriculum policy. As with subject matter expertise, the legitimate expectation from the state, school management and learners was that teachers would be familiar with the curriculum policy framework that determined the application of their subject matter expertise in the classroom. A lack of subject matter expertise and curriculum policy knowledge was further exacerbated by a lack of curriculum management skills and classroom management skills which resulted in difficulty identifying how much of the curriculum had been covered.
- Managerial support, in the opinion of the teachers, was lacking in some cases.

It could be convenient to apportion blame as management–staff dynamics are complex in both functional and dysfunctional working environments. Similarly, an argument could be made in justification of the teachers' lack of performance versus state expectations. The reality was, however, that there was an insurmountable imbalance. Policy requirements were far removed from teacher knowledge, abilities and initiative in strained environments. Most teachers interviewed did not take ownership for the educational situation in which they had been placed, preferring to project poor results onto the curriculum, management, the lack of resources, learners and the surrounding community.

7. Subsequent developments

Since the interviews were conducted, the educational authorities have developed comprehensive and concise curriculum and assessment curriculum policy statements which replaced the subject statements, learning programme guidelines and subject assessment guidelines in both the GET and FET phases (South Africa, s.a.[c], p. 6). With the implementation of this revised curriculum, there has been an increased focus on improving classroom practice. Measures include curriculum refinement, textbook screening and comprehensive staff training conducted at provincial and local level (South Africa, 2011[a], p. 16–17). It has become increasingly difficult for teachers not to attend up-skilling and refresher courses.

State improvements notwithstanding, this article serves to emphasise the danger of unrealistic and over-ambitious attempts to re-imagine and utterly replace a national education system: however well-meant or understandable such an attempt may have been, given the history of inequality and the damage caused by a century of racist-class exploitation, structuring and social engineering. The social challenges faced by teachers in disadvantaged communities, however, remain the central problem: the direct result of historical oppression of the masses. The initial error of introducing a curriculum without properly preparing teachers was repeated a decade later, in 2006, when the country's technical colleges were re-constructed into technical vocational

education and training (TVET) colleges. Once again, the Minister of Education announced a new curriculum as a major achievement: in this case with the intention of enabling the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills, applied competence and understanding required for employment at an elementary level of a particular occupation or trade (South Africa, 2006). Failure rates were high: teachers were placed in an invidious position and learners suffered.

8. Conclusion

When the democratic ANC government introduced its school curriculum, teacher compliance, good-will and co-operation was assumed; in the flurry of optimism, hope, freedom, pride in Nelson Mandela's leadership and international recognition. However, as this article indicates, systemic shortcomings, including lack of teacher competencies and social factors, such as dire poverty and illiteracy, inherited from the past, negated this assumption. As a result, implementation of the new curriculum appeared to fail and had to be revised. This article highlights the results of unforeseen consequences at the micro-level in implementation of curriculum reform which, however broad and noble its social intentions, had to be abandoned. Teachers with limited expertise and skills, working in impossible teaching environments, even though they failed to justify their decisions and subsequent actions, were not motivated or in most cases even able to adopt the new curriculum.

Before implementing large-scale national revisions of a curriculum, which involves a major philosophical shift in didactic approach, lengthy and careful structural seminars and review sessions should be used to assess teacher positionality, and adapt and adjust broad intention of revision to micro-level realities of teacher availability and training. Most importantly, political conditions and conditioning cannot be ignored: both historically, and to the extent that inherited injustices affect revision or replacement of new systems.

Resistance to change among old guard academics and teachers, lack of training among new teachers and the impossibility of transforming overnight impoverished communities crippled by racist regimes, cause complex socio-economic problems which have to be factored in: especially when quality mass education is recognised as the best means of uplifting those millions who through no fault of their own came from families systematically denied literacy and the most basic education.

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