



Demystifying education for the development of underdevelopment: A critical expose' of Paulo Freire (1990)'s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997) book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in relation to the current Zimbabwean education system. The authors believe that the education system is still rooted in the colonial education system, four decades after attaining independence. Although concepts such as Education 5.0, together with the new curriculum have been implemented in the education sector, the subjects' content do not subscribe to the idea of industrialisation, research and innovation thus maintaining in the students, the colonial culture of domination, subordination and subjugation. Freire considers the education system as an instrument for social transformation, that can promote revolutionary social change, a situation urgently needed in the current Zimbabwean education system. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be regarded as a struggle against mental colonisation and social annihilation and a positive path towards mental emancipation and total empowerment. The aim of this paper is to analyse the extent to which the new Zimbabwean curriculum is being used as a tool to emancipate students as the education sector embraces the concept of Education 5.0 with a special focus on the high school history subject. The study adopted a qualitative approach located within the contours of interpretivism to analyse Freire's ideas on education of the oppressed masses. The study found that the current education system still entraps students in the colonial thinking of completing studies and finding employment rather than creating employment.

KEYWORDS: pedagogy, empowerment, banking education, liberative pedagogy.



Introduction

Education is the key to move the world, develop a country's economy and the power to provide more opportunities and prosperity to the individual (Idris et al., 2011). It is defined as "the socially organised and regulated process of continuous transference of socially significant experience from previous to following generations" (Naziev, 2017 p. 1). Socrates (in Bussanich & Smith, 2013) further defines education as the process by which human beings are trained to fulfil their intention by exercising all their faculties to their fullest potential and extent.

Different definitions prove that education is shaped by different worldviews, opinions and assumptions that are taken to be true at any given point in time. Freire (1990) has analysed education as a means of cultural action which instils conformity and 'domesticates' the young generation into the existing order of oppression. His argument contradicts Socrates' definition of education, as he emphasises how nations have used the education system offered to students as a tool that has the capacity to produce docile and uncreative students, thus, hindering the critical thinking which Freire advocates for. He maintains that education can never be neutral, but, its essential political nature depends on whose purpose and interests it represents, who creates it and to what purpose it exists in its established form.

The identification of the elements of this domestication through education is, for Freire, not merely an exercise in narration, but a quest on how education can be used to achieve freedom. Educational issues are for him integral to the political debate whilst the role of criticism only has meaning if linked to the possibilities of action. Freire's basic thesis is the statement that "neutral education cannot in fact exist. It is fundamental to know that, when educators work on the content of the educational curriculum, discuss methods, processes, plans, and draw up educational policies they are engaged "in political acts which imply an ideological choice" (Freire, 1990 p. 98). In his view, to recognise that neutral education does not exist involves a critical form of thinking and perceiving reality.

In the Zimbabwean context, the fact that education cannot be neutral and either serves to domesticate or liberate becomes clear after comparing the education system run by the colonial government before 1980 with that introduced in post-

independence Zimbabwe with a focus on the Ordinary level history Syllabus 2166 designed with a socialist perspective (Chitate, 2010).

Background

Zimbabwe was liberated from colonial rule on 18 April 1980 at a time when some African states had already gained independence from their colonisers. The government introduced new policies under Robert Mugabe's, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). Thereafter, the new government went into overdrive in establishing policies such as 'Education for all by the year 2000' which saw the country increasing its literacy rate from 77.8% in 1982 to 88.7% in 2014 with an estimated average annual rate of 4.52% and topping most African countries (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2022) in providing basic education to its citizens.

Education became the cornerstone of the small landlocked country as new schools were built everywhere to ensure that there was a school within walking distance for every child. The populace grabbed the Marxist education with such vigour, hope and dreams of brighter days (Chitate 2010).

The attainment of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 came with an urgent need to revamp the History subject content which once served to uphold the interest of the colonial masters. Chitate (2010) states that the Marxist-Leninist ideology meant that the high school history subject was a critical ground on which the basic ideologies of the state could be both projected and contested with the aim of replacing capitalism with socialism. The History subject, code 2166, was birthed from new pressure groups which advocated for a new curriculum meant to improve student skills and abilities, rather than just mastery of the history subject (Chitate, 2010). This idea is in tandem with the Government of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework for Higher and Tertiary education whose mandate is driven by heritage-based philosophy of innovation, industrialisation, teaching, research and community service.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed – Overview

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a book based on Freire's observations from his education work in Chile and Brazil as well as his political exile. As a radical educator from Brazil his work was strongly linked to the struggle for human

freedom and dignity. His main idea is centred on the observation of his students' initial fear of critical consciousness. They viewed it as dissenting, coming from an internalised fear of freedom. He further contends that critical consciousness is not destructive but instead helps people strive for self-affirmation and allows them to make a meaningful impact in their history. This paper raises the reader's critical consciousness in relation to Freire's (1968) ideas of revolutionary education and the current educational system in Zimbabwe. The idea is to assess whether Education 5.0 has an impact on the educates' minds or it is a simple concept of development of underdevelopment through education. Therefore, the issue under investigation is whether the new education reform will lead to economic growth in both the modern and traditional sectors of the Zimbabwean economy, focusing on the social transformation of the individual's potential to be innovative, creative, and self-reliance.

Freire uses the term 'pedagogy' to refer to the teaching strategies or methods to be employed by the educators and educates as they interact in the learning environment. Taylor (1993 p. 71) has observed that the importance of Freire's pedagogy lies in the emphasis it gives to the ignored political nature of education. This view draws similarities with Rodney's (1981 p. 264) argument where he demonstrates that the colonial schooling was 'education for subordination, domination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of under-development'. However, 'the architects of African Nationalism which culminated in the destruction of colonial rule in Africa were the very products of colonial education' (Mugodzwa, 2011 p. 76), demonstrating how political education is. Freire's work demonstrates the power of education as a liberating force.

To achieve liberation, according to Freire, the oppressed require their own pedagogy because one of the basic elements of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is prescription. It is noted that:

Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed into that which conforms to the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does, the guidelines of the oppressor (Freire, 1990 p. 23); and that

It is a rare peasant who once promoted to the rank of overseer, does not become more of a tyrant than the original owner (Freire, 1990 p. 118).

The pertinent questions that arise from Freire's thesis are; who must be liberated; from what must they be liberated; and how should the liberation be achieved.

The so-called 'third world' community should not be limited to the so-called 'under-developed' nations as the so-called 'first world' has within it and against it, its own 'third world'. While on the other hand, the 'third world' has its own 'first world', represented by the ideology of domination and the power of the ruling classes. Accordingly, Freire (1990) clearly states that the people to be liberated are those who suffer from the culture of domination, oppression, exploitation, dependency and general suffering in silence, mostly workers, peasants, educators, educatees and females the world over.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's audience are the oppressed and the excluded everywhere. In fact, the dedication of the text under discussion states the intention clearly. Freire's 'third world' is not located solely among former colonial nations as the world want to believe, nor is it limited to the so-called under-developed nations of Latin America, South America, Africa or Asia. Freire is explicit that, "the concept of the 'third world' is ideological, not geographic" (Freire, 1990 p. 118). The 'third world' is in the last analysis the world of suffering in silence, of oppression, of domination, of dependence, of exploitation, of violence exercised by the ruling class on the oppressed" (Freire, 1990 p. 118).

From the on-going discussion, the oppressed are found everywhere, in the 'developed' and 'under-developed' countries. The oppressed in Freire's view are those subjects who are subjected to landlessness, unemployment, poverty, gross under-payment amid overworking and exploitative conditions and whose means of production have been appropriated and privatised by the bourgeois class. Girls and women have been turned into properties labourers, domestic servants, housewives and /or peasants, in relation to boys and men. Such people, according to Freire (1990), have developed a culture of docility and suffering in silence and have therefore been dehumanised to the extent that to live well, one has to aspire to be like the oppressor. For example, picture a situation where there are women only, the woman who is culturally perceived as the most senior in that context will exercise power and authority over the perceived junior women on behalf of men and patriarchy. That both the oppressors and the oppressed need to be liberated is a central issue in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as noted by Njobe (1990 p. 54) who maintains that: "societies that were colonisers also need

to decolonise own systems of education just as the formerly colonised societies need education for liberation (humanisation)'. What is striking in Freire's book is the assertion that in the process of dehumanising others, the oppressors also become dehumanised. The oppressors, therefore, need to be liberated, to be humanised just as much as their oppressed victims

The central issue in the above assertion is that the once oppressed and now independent, but dependent states, and their former oppressors (the colonial masters) both need to be re-educated on new ways of relating to each other as equals, as human beings with full human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Charter of 1945 in general and the constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment number 20 Act, 2013) in particular. The former oppressors need to revise their curriculum and philosophies especially in the high school history subject guiding them so as to promote new attitudes and outlook towards their formerly oppressed subjects compatible with equality in the post-colonial era. Freire insists that the liberation of the mind should be central in attempts towards developing a liberated personality.

The concepts of 'humanisation' and 'dehumanisation' are of paramount importance in the understanding of 'Pedagogy of the oppressed'. Moyana (1989) argues that it is what happens to a person's consciousness that determines whether that person is being completed (humanisation) or depleted (dehumanisation). Moyana further advances that humanisation involves the raising of people's consciousness. Dehumanisation on the other hand, consists of inhibiting or "domesticating the intentionality of consciousness" thereby denying men and women their ontological and historical vocation of becoming fully human (Moyana, 1989 p. 27). As conscious beings, people can reflect on their own existence and base their actions on their own experiences and objectives. Liberation starts with a restoration of people's intentionality, their self-awareness as creative beings engaged in a historical process of becoming more humans.

Freire sees consciousness as that aspect of humanity through which a person can either be humanised or dehumanised. The idea of consciousness arises from his view of people as historical beings with a role in history. For example, females in Zimbabwean history are conspicuous by their absence largely because none or very few authors who are mostly male have bothered to document their roles in the development of the country. Freire's pedagogy is a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' and excluded. The theory of consciousness and praxis recognises a need "to make oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed,

and from the reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation" (Freire, 1990 p. 33).

According to this paper, Freire is talking about a world divided between the rich and the poor (mostly workers and females), the privileged and the under-privileged, the haves and the have nots, the oppressor and the oppressed. Within the system of oppression Freire identifies a view of consciousness that separates the individual from the world. He argues that, 'man is merely in the world not with the world, not with others, man is spectator not re-creator' (Freire, 1990 p. 90). In other words, the individual is not a conscious being, but empty and the mind is seen as passively open to the reception of what Freire describes as 'deposits of reality' from the outside world. This static and flat view of consciousness ultimately makes any revolutionary change by the oppressed impossible. Such is the situation of most poor people especially females. It implies that the only way the poor could achieve a place in the sun is by receiving generous deposits of wisdom or material aid from the privileged.

Freire's pedagogy and Zimbabwe's education system

What Freire refers to, above is what is probably happening in modern day Zimbabwe and other African countries. To solve economic problems, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted string attached ideas compounded with financial aid from the Eastern or Western world while implementing programmes such as the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), the Zimbabwe Program for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET, or whatever adjective is used in the Zimbabwean context. What is strikingly interesting in these borrowed ideologies is that most of the people (about 70% who live in the rural areas in Zimbabwe and living in abject poverty), are not even consulted by the dominant class and are largely ignorant of ZIMPREST or ZIMASSET, neither do they gain much from the foreign aid programmes except, of course, increased unemployment now standing at 96% in Zimbabwe, landlessness, absolute poverty. In such situations, women are the hardest hit and are in dire need of "conscientisation" (Freire 1990). The education that they received from school does not prepare them for these harsh economic conditions or provide them with the necessary survival skills. Revamping the school curriculum was supposed to correct this anomaly and provide a critical consciousness that questions the status quo and provide solutions. Most

Zimbabweans who supposedly went through high school do not understand these foreign ideologies and are unable to question their impact on their lives because of an education system that did not give them the power to think critically and ask questions.

Relating Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 to Freire's *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'* reveals that Freire rejects the positions taken by what he calls the left and right 'sectarians. Sectarianism is an ideology that aims to treat the world as a static and controllable entity. Whether left or right wing, sectarians thrive on preventing people from having freedom by distorting reality. He argues that the perception of the present and the future, held by both groups, is trapped in 'circles of uncertainty'. From the context of oppression portrayed in his text, these views have contributed to a culture of suffering in silence in which large numbers of people experience the power of their oppressors as natural and God-given, inevitable and unchangeable. This is the situation of most Zimbabwean women and girls in their everyday social interaction with not both men and boys in their communities, but to the government as well. There are many policies and laws that bear a negative impact on their lives, of which they lack understanding. However, they believe that whatever the men or the government says is the truth which should not be questioned, this is confirmed by Freire's concept of fear of freedom'. the fear also coming from the education curriculum which they went through which had no room for critical thinking. The oppressed women and girls, the poor and the subject class as depicted in *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*, house the oppressors within themselves. They fear freedom and therefore co-operate in the conspiracy of the dominating elites by their acceptance of both their passive role and repression. Once the people feel this way, the sectarians would have achieved their goal of twisting the truth in order to match their own ideas of what the world should be and must be, and in the process maintain a status quo.

The premise of Freire's analysis of education as it develops is evident in the statement: 'every educational practice implies a concept of man and of the world' (Freire, 1990 p. 117). Thus, then, within every educational formation, one may find the creation of different forms of consciousness. In *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*, Freire analyses firstly what he calls "education for domestication" or "banking education", and secondly, "education for liberation", or "dialogical education". In each of the two educational forms, he discusses the concept of the individual produced, which shall be elaborated further in this paper.

In *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"*, Freire completely rejects the narrative nature of education which he calls the 'banking concept' in its entirety mainly because he sees the approach as an instrument for oppression. Freire (1990) further argues that education based on the 'banking' concept suffers from what he calls "narration sickness." In banking education, the teacher-pupil relationship involves a narrative subject (the teacher) and listening objects (the students). The teacher's task, argues Freire, is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his / her narration, but these contents are usually detached from the students' life experiences and reality. This is the case of the History subject in Zimbabwe's high schools. Students are encouraged to memorise and regurgitate moments in history that do not add value to their present day. Narration leads the students to memorise 'mechanically' the narrated content and in the process, turns them into what Freire terms 'containers' to be filled by the teacher. The new curriculum still contains events in history such as the first and second chimurenga and the Rudd concession which they are supposed to regurgitate to the teacher to gain marks. They do not and are not expected to have a critical urge or ask questions. In truth, students in Zimbabwe ordinary level history class collect fictitious information about past events but, in actual fact, remain uneducated. All they gain is mere quantities of information that is not consciousness raising (Mabhena). Freire believes that the education starts when students begin to ask questions and their consciousness is no longer what it used to be but willing to question the status quo. Education will no longer be about answering the questions correctly but possessing a certain attitude and mental and emotional deportment.

Freire (1990 p. 27) concludes that; "the more completely s/he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he / she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are; this is also evident in how students are rewarded for being very disciplined. In other words, following all the rules laid by the school without question. The perceived rebel students are not tolerated to the extent of being expelled, in case they spoil the other 'good' students. Education then becomes an act of depositing in which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. This is the banking concept of education in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. Freire also notes that it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge in this misguided system. What is appalling about the banking

concept of education is the power differential bestowed between the teacher and the student.

Thus, what this speaks to is the need to rethink the education programme so that it is not detached from the learners' realities. Education should be consciousness raising and not simply the ability to read and write, which are not knowledge in themselves. In the end, the O level students in Zimbabwe will be called educated when they are simply informed and deskilled. These students will not compare to many out there who would not be informed or skilled but educated in terms of their consciousness and sensibility (Mabhena). Freire insists that education should bring about a change in the educates minds and not just for the accumulation of certificates with no tangible value.

In the banking concept of education, the relationship between the teacher and the taught is one directional and the students rely heavily upon the teacher's judgement as to what is worth learning and how it should be learnt. In such an educational system, learners become passive objects, just like most women and girl children in patriarchal families, unable to grasp the nature of their own experiences or to realise their own conditions. This consciousness is distorted, and they become alienated. Sociologists such as Ballantine (1989) assert that through the labelling of students according to such categories as intelligent, mediocre or slow learners, through the objective structures of the curriculum external to and imposed on students, awareness of both the objective conditions under which they live, and the possibilities for action to transform those conditions are denied to them. Turaram and Machisela (2018) concluded that teaching strategies that have traditionally been used in most African countries provide students with no valuable learning skills such that students do not recall any body of knowledge beyond exams. This is the banking concept which Freire is against. His idea is that after learning and after exams, students should be able to use what they learnt to not only better their lives but for critical thinking and for social transformation.

Alexander (1989) similarly observes that through the banking concept of education, the power of the dominators and the oppression of the dominated are hidden and mystified. The banking concept of education then, is a tool for education for domination, slavery and mental colonisation. In Freire's opinion, education for domination stimulates the credibility of students with ideological intent for indoctrinating them to adapt to the ideology of domination. This is one form of 'epistemic violence' that the educates must fight against. Taking possession and control of a student's mind means that they cannot independently

think for themselves and are working under mind- colonisation. The post independent Zimbabwean curriculum carried this form of mind colonisation whereby students are supposed to pass exams as set by the examining boards. Once a student passes the exam, they are considered as educated and should freely seek employment and not to create employment. The education system keeps the students entrapped in the same cycle of colonized and colonizer. The employer replacing the teacher as the colonizer whilst the student, who becomes the employee, remains the colonized. However, the colonised also wants, at any cost to resemble the coloniser, leading to an ongoing vicious cycle. As long as the colonised do not re-examine themselves constantly and critically think of changing their situation, the upcoming generations in Zimbabwe will remain the same under the guise of a new curriculum that carries the old colonial mode of teaching and learning.

Freire (1990) suggests that dialogue is the principal means by which the banking concept can be deconstructed. He urges educators to refrain from separating the stage of gaining existing knowledge from the stage of discovering and creating new knowledge. In both stages, Freire insists that the subjects who desire to know must face the objects of their knowledge from the stage of discovering and creating new knowledge. In the dialogical method, the students in this complementary dialectical relationship while being taught also teaches the teacher. Freire says teacher and students co-operate in an activity in which all of them grow for social transformation. He further stresses that authoritarianism has no place in a dialogical situation. The approach must always be problematic; asking questions and seeking the semblance of truth. Freire's approach involves themes or the investigation of how people think. He argues that thematic investigation and problem posing education are not to be separated; they are simply different moments of the same process.

In Freire's view, dialogue in the *Pedagogy of the oppressed* involves the encounter between people, mediated by the world, in order to name the world and change it. For Freire, dialogue is that form of inter-personal relationship between subjects which not only interpret the world, but seeks to transform it. The influence of Karl Marx's philosophy is apparently visible in this argument. What Freire is driving at here is an explanation of dialogue from the point of view of the oppressed. To be precise, the oppressed can only perceive how they have been conditioned when they are confronted with problems arising from their existential situation. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is largely based on this insight.

For Freire, one of the conditions for liberation from the situation of domination is an educational practice which actively creates political consciousness. Mackie (1981) has noted that the influence of existentialism on Freire's thinking is highlighted by the sharp distinction he draws between the banking approach to education and problem posing. The problem posing approach is a teaching technique that capitalises on the personal experiences of the learners. Its advantage is that it brings about connectedness and mutual responsibility for the students that can lead to social transformation. In this approach, the teacher poses questions, and the students work together to find answers. Freire asserts that; "in problem posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (Freire, 1990 p. 70). Where the banking method emphasises permanence and becomes conservative and reactionary, problem posing education is rooted in the dynamic present and is thus revolutionary. Zimbabwe's new ordinary level school curriculum aims at providing this revolutionary type of education compared to the old curriculum which concentrated on the banking method. The problem posing approach would ensure that the students would become critical thinkers and bring about better teaching approaches and development strategies for the country.

It is clear from this discussion that denunciation of oppression, critical awareness and action are possible within the contradictions of domestication. The first task in any cultural and social revolution according to Freire, must be based upon a dialectical relationship between the teacher and the taught. He insists that the teacher must become the pupil and vice versa. Students and teachers become co-investigators in the learning process. The banking system of education is erased as the teacher no longer views the student as an empty vessel. In essence the student learns from the teacher and the teacher also learns from the student. His central thesis is that experience of learning must be within a "cultural circle" where co-operation and collective learning are the basis of an ongoing dialogue among all participants. Using dialogue in the learning process means that the teacher has time to pose questions to the students and the students are also given time to question the content of their syllabus and the benefits that it has to their future. This can be done through a process of learning which Freire calls conscientisation. This is where individuals acquire a deeper awareness of the social and cultural order which shapes their lives and perceive their own capacity to transform it.

Freire also says conscientisation seeks the awakening of critical consciousness and results in the identification and naming of social ills which constitute oppressive circumstances. Conscientisation and consciousness are strongly linked concepts in *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'* and both processes, in Freire's view are vital in the development of critical thinking and carrying out pedagogy of the oppressed. In short then, conscientisation is a process of developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality.

5.Recommendations

Implementing a new 'O' Level history curriculum is a complex task which is filled with uncertainty. A successful implementation starts with a paradigm shift from the educators. Teachers need to change the way they think, their teaching methods and student assessments. In their study of the implementation of the new O level History curriculum in Zimbabwe Sibanda and Blignaut (2020) discovered that teachers were fitting in the new curriculum into their old traditional way of thinking and in some cases, to suit their contextual realities.

For the new curriculum to make meaningful social change and national transformation, there is need to introduce Learner Centred Pedagogy (LCP) to teaching and learning as opposed to the old Teacher Centred Pedagogy whereby students passively receive information from the teacher. In LCP students actively participate in their education adapted to learners needs and preferences. There is need for the dialogue process to be authentic and creative and taking place in an environment of peace, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Students should participate and learn with each other within their frame of reference, realities of cultures and values. The school curriculum should be based on issues that are relevant and important to the learners whilst providing actions that can change their reality.

6. Conclusion

Freire considers the educational system as an instrument of social transformation strongly opposing the myths of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality which percolate every facet of education, Freire convincingly demonstrates that literacy can serve either to liberate human beings or domesticate them. His discussion of education has as one of its principal concerns, the promotion of revolutionary social change. Freire's pedagogy focuses on human liberation from all forms of domination and oppression not only in Brazil but in Zimbabwe, and globally. He advocates for liberation in every context in which oppression exists, including women and the girl child in relation to men and the boy child. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's central argument is his insistence that the aim of good pedagogy is to enable people to increase their understanding of their own objective conditions. Such an understanding argues Freire, will inevitably lead them to change the world as they climb out of the oppression in which they have been submerged. In short then, the pedagogy of the oppressed can be regarded as a struggle against mental colonisation, oppression, subjugation, subordination, domination, exploitation, and social annihilation, and a step towards mental emancipation, liberation, freedom, and total empowerment. However, it can only come into effect when the masses are conscientised to the extent of questioning the systems that surround their daily existence.

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