



Policy Reform in a Colonial Setting: A Historical Discourse Analysis of George Stark's Advocacy for Technical-Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

Colonial education is often criticized for being conservative, static, oppressive, and irrelevant to the needs and interests of the colonized people. This theoretical paper, however, disrupts the established narrative of condemnation by challenging scholars of curriculum reform to take a fresh look at colonial education policy. This study teases George Stark's policy of technical-vocational education for Africans by employing critical policy historiography as the theoretical framework and historical discourse analysis as its methodology. Two questions drive this theoretical paper: What were the central tenets of George Stark's curriculum reform policy in Rhodesia, and what lessons can be drawn from this policy to inform contemporary education reform in Zimbabwean secondary schools? From the research findings, it cannot be disputed that Stark's reform policy for African education in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was fervently racist and discriminatory, as it was framed within the overarching scope of white hegemony. But his advocacy for a practical technical-vocational curriculum for Africans seems pragmatic, visionary, and prophetic. These findings become more compelling when considering the current clarion call for worldwide technical-vocational education. As if policy planners are scavenging nuggets from Stark's widely condemned colonial script, the Zimbabwe government is currently piloting a reform initiative to transform secondary education from an academic to a practical-oriented curriculum. In light of these findings, it appears there are several lessons to be drawn from Stark's colonial policy for technical-vocational education to inform current curriculum reform and practice in Zimbabwe and globally.

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INTRODUCTION

Colonial education policy in Africa, Asia, and the Americas is often labeled and castigated as racist, oppressive, static, and irrelevant to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the colonized and formerly

colonized people.¹ Colonial administrators intended to ensure that Africans became labourers for the growing colonial economy by offering them practical education in agriculture, building, and carpentry (for boys); and domestic science (cooking and sewing) for girls.² On the other hand, missionaries were eager to spread literacy among Africans, which was instrumental in converting them to the new religion - Christianity. But colonial administrators believed that academic education made Africans arrogant and averse to manual labour.³ Joseph Oldham concluded that Africans were not developing as quickly as they could because their education served colonial political and economic interests.⁴ Missionaries were more interested in academic literacy than technical-vocational education to convert Africans to Christianity.

Consequently, white missionaries were critical of colonial education policy and government control of African schools.⁵ Ruzivo explains that:

Missionaries and colonial authorities differed on this point because the provision of education by missionaries was meant to lure Africans to Christianity... If the government provided African education, that would mean missionaries could no longer use African schools as proselytizing [evangelizing] grounds.⁶

A notable critic of colonial education policy is Donald Fraser (1870 – 1933) of the Free Church of Scotland and an official of the International Missionary Council.⁷ He observed that colonial governments in Africa would continue to pursue the policy of practical education for Africans to deny the colonized an academic education that would attract them to Christianity.

While it is true that colonial education served white interests, it is prudent for scholars of curriculum reform to cast a historical and critical eye on colonial education policy in search of traces that may positively inform contemporary educational change. The current paper asks: Are there any lessons to draw from colonial advocacy for technical-vocational education, considering that contemporary curricula in the former colonies face a crisis of utility and redundancy?

At the beginning of 2023, the Zimbabwe government established pilot technical high schools in each of the ten provinces to impart learners with innovative practical and technical skills. The Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Tumisang Thabela, explained the rationale behind the new policy: “The technical high schools will endeavor to help pupils acquire innovative industrial skills that will either fit them well into the industry or enable them to be job creators as opposed to being job seekers.”⁸

¹ Mariana Achugar, “Critical Discourse Analysis and History,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (Routledge, 2017), 298–311; Raymond Chipfakacha, “The Role of Technical and Vocational Training in Developing Countries,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3454429>; Dickson A Mungazi, “To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 58, no. 4 (1989): 468–77; Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Mursed Alam, “Ngugi Wa Thiongo: Globalectics and The Postcolonial Intellectual,” in *Kairos: A Journal of Critical Symposium*, vol. 1, 2016; Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 29, 2000): 215–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>.

² Mungazi, “To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe.”

³ Chengetai J. M. Zvobgo, *A History of Zimbabwe, 1890-2000 and Postscript, Zimbabwe, 2001-2008* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

⁴ Josef Houldsworth Oldham, “White and Black in Africa: A Critical Examination of Hte Rhodes Lectures of General Smuts,” 1930.

⁵ Nicholas George Gideon Makura, *The Historical Development of African Education in Rhodesia: Administration of African Education from 1928 To 1973*. (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1978); Mungazi, “To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe”; Zvobgo, *A History of Zimbabwe, 1890-2000 and Postscript, Zimbabwe, 2001-2008*.

⁶ Munetsi Ruzivo, “Ecumenical Initiatives in Southern Rhodesia: A History of The Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference 1903-1945,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 43, no. 1 (July 13, 2017): 149–65, <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/1000>.

⁷ Donald Fraser, *The Future of Africa* (Baptist Missionary Society, 1911).

⁸ Africa Press. “Government names technical high schools in Zimbabwe.” Africa Press, January 18, 2023. Accessed March 31, 2023.

But is this not what Stark advocated when he argued that academic education alone does not serve African interests? He proposed that practical technical-vocational education would prepare Africans for urban industry employment or self-employment in a self-sustaining rural economy.⁹

But who is George Stark? Stark was the Director of Native Education in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from 1934 to 1954. Instead of focusing primarily on reading, writing, and arithmetic, as advocated for by missionaries, he urged for curriculum reform for African education.¹⁰ Kanyongo remarks, “The colonial administrators were critical of the type of education that the missionaries provided the Africans. They felt the Africans had to be given an education which was practical in nature; that is, related to agriculture and industry to prepare them as labourers, but not to the extent where they could compete with Europeans.”¹¹ As one of the colonial administrators, Stark was convinced that academic education per sé did not serve African interests and national development.

Although the intentions underpinning Stark’s reform policy were sinister and racist, because Africans were to be prepared for technical jobs under white supervision in industry or self-sustaining rurality, the pragmatic value of technical-vocational education cannot be doubted and debated much. It is interesting, if not ironic, that the practical-technical subjects Stark advocated for (and have earned him severe criticism) are the same subjects that the Zimbabwe government is fervently promoting as a reform.

It appears curriculum policy and politics are inseparable. Gale argues that “policy is concerned with outcomes whereas politics is concerned with process.”¹² A curriculum policy document, therefore, is a product of a political process, making curriculum reform a “contested terrain.”¹³ Critical policy historiography examines how curriculum documents (policy statements, syllabuses, and textbooks, for instance) serve “a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict.”¹⁴ The current study, therefore, unpacks Stark’s policy in a colonial landscape and juxtaposes it with post-colonial curriculum reform in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The aim is to decipher any valuable lessons that can be drawn from colonial policies and contribute to the debate on how the past can inform contemporary post-colonial curriculum reform. As such, the research questions driving this historical discourse analysis are:

- i. What were the central tenets of Stark’s curriculum reform policy in Rhodesia?
- ii. What lessons can be drawn (if any) from Stark’s policy to inform contemporary technical education reform in Zimbabwean secondary schools?

Subsequent sections in this paper unfold as follows: theoretical framework, then methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical policy historiography is the lens used to analyze literature available in the public domain on Stark’s policy on African education in colonial Rhodesia and the current curriculum reforms for technical education in Zimbabwe.¹⁵ This theoretical framework searches for possible relationships

⁹ Mungazi, “To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe.”

¹⁰ Makura, *The Historical Development of African Education in Rhodesia: Administration of African Education From 1928 to 1973*.

¹¹ Gibbs Y. Kanyongo, “Zimbabwe’s Public Education System Reforms: Successes and Challenges,” *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 65–74.

¹² Trevor Gale, “Critical Policy Sociology: Historiography, Archaeology and Genealogy as Methods of Policy Analysis,” *Journal of Education Policy* 16, no. 5 (October 2001): 379–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930110071002>.

¹³ Kapil Dev Regmi, “Critical Policy Sociology: Key Underlying Assumptions and Their Implications for Educational Policy Research,” *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42, no. 1 (January 31, 2019): 59–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1398228>.

¹⁴ Sandra Taylor, “Critical Policy Analysis: Exploring Contexts, Texts and Consequences,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 18, no. 1 (April 6, 1997): 23–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180102>.

¹⁵ Gale, “Critical Policy Sociology: Historiography, Archaeology and Genealogy as Methods of Policy Analysis”; Jim Gleeson, Valentina Klenowski, and Anne Looney, “Curriculum Change in Australia and Ireland: A Comparative Study

between the socio-educational past and the present by tracing curriculum change processes over time and space. Critical policy historiography gleans insights into how past education systems functioned and how previous education policies influence and shape the current curriculum.¹⁶ Gale points out that:

Policy historiography allows the researcher to represent policies as temporary settlements rather than consensual outcomes of progress; and explains this phenomenon in terms of a moving discursive frame where a particular historical and geographical moment defines the specifics of policy production.¹⁷

Stark's policy was framed within the broader context of colonial policy (a particular historical and geographical moment), which aimed at giving blacks practical skills that would make them useful in the colonial labor market or self-reliant in a rural economy while checking them out as potential competitors to white school leavers. Thus, critical policy historiography was selected to illuminate the current research because it grapples with the complexities and contradictions inherent in Stark's reform policy for African education. This theoretical framework also weaves a thread of continuity between Stark's advocacy for practical instruction and the Zimbabwe government's 2023 reform initiative to establish technical secondary schools. These technical schools offer agriculture, wood technology, metal technology, building technology, food sciences, textile technology, etc., subjects that are a reincarnation of the gardening, carpentry, metalwork, building, cooking, and sewing offered in the colonial curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative theoretical paper adopts historical discourse analysis as its research methodology. Historical discourse analysis examines how political power is used to amplify official government policy while marginalizing and/or silencing dissenting voices.¹⁸ This research methodology aims at "making visible hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives that form part of larger power struggles."¹⁹ Using this approach, the current study analyses Stark's colonial curriculum reform policy and traces its influence on contemporary educational change in independent Zimbabwe. Historical discourse analysis allows researchers of the current paper to decipher how 'white' power championed Stark's policy of practical education for Africans while silencing dissenting voices. Conversely, in post-colonial Zimbabwe, 'black' power uses overt and subtle mechanisms to silence alternative voices (mainly teacher trade unions) critical of poorly planned government-initiated curriculum reforms.

Popkewitz used the concept of 'history of the present' to study historical practices and epistemological changes that shape contemporary policy.²⁰ History of the present traces ideas backward and forward to understand the intersection of past and current policy conjunctures making historical discourse analysis an appropriate methodology for studying how contemporary policy reformers in Zimbabwe are (consciously or unconsciously) usurping Stark's ideas on the practical curriculum for Africans to push for technically oriented school reforms.

The most popular sources in historical discourse analysis are archived published documents, mainly commissioned government reports, official policy statements, historical papers, and empirical studies.²¹ The current study relied on texts from the public domain (the Internet and Google Scholar)

of Recent Reforms," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 52, no. 4 (July 3, 2020): 478–97,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1704064>; Nicole Mockler, "Early Career Teachers in Australia: A Critical Policy Historiography," *Journal of Education Policy* 33, no. 2 (2018): 262–78.

¹⁶ Gleeson et al., "Curriculum change in Australia and Ireland."

¹⁷ Gale, "Critical Policy Sociology: Historiography, Archaeology and Genealogy as Methods of Policy Analysis," 386.

¹⁸ Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, "The Politics of Historical Discourse Analysis: A Qualitative Research Method?,"

Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 31, no. 2 (May 2010): 251–64,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596301003679768>.

¹⁹ Achugar, "Critical Discourse Analysis and History."

²⁰ Thomas S. Popkewitz, *Cosmopolitanism and the Age of School Reform: Science, Education, and Making Society by Making the Child* (Routledge, 2012).

²¹ Jamie Kellar et al., "A Historical Discourse Analysis of Pharmacist Identity in Pharmacy Education," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 84, no. 9 (September 2020): ajpe7864, <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7864>.

published from 1978 to 2023 on Stark's policy and curriculum reform in Zimbabwe. Documentary evidence enables researchers to glean insights into the reasons behind past and present policy enactment and practice. Although some empirical studies are reviewed, research on the Zimbabwe government's current reform drive for technical high schools relies heavily on newspaper articles because the dissemination of this reform is still in its infancy, and the controversy surrounding this abrupt policy change is generating media attention due to conflicting stakeholder interests. Jóhannesson remarks that "newspaper articles often reveal the contradictions in the social and political struggles about the practices and policies at stake."²² This makes newspapers an invaluable source of information on the Zimbabwe government's current initiative for a practical-technical-oriented curriculum. The leading online newspapers used in this study are Africa Press and The Chronicle.²³

The iterative analytical approach was used to analyze evidence extracted from the selected published texts.²⁴ Selected texts were combed for narratives on Stark's reform policy for African education in colonial Rhodesia. The second stage in the iterative analytical analysis involved re-reading the texts searching for discussions and inferences on how this controversial reform impinges on post-colonial curriculum change in Zimbabwe. The third stage involved forward and backward movement to pick common concepts and decipher patterns and themes in Stark's policy viz-a-viz Zimbabwe's post-colonial curriculum reform for practical-technical oriented curriculum. From this data analysis, the following themes emerged: (i) Main tenets of Stark's policy, (ii) Searching for common ground, (iii) The pursuit of a practical-vocational curriculum, (iv) Attitudes towards practical vocational education, and (v) The promise of a practical-oriented curriculum. These five themes anchor the presentation of findings in the following section.

FINDINGS

The policy and practice of technical-vocational education in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe have always been controversial because of the racial connotations and stigmatization of inferiority attached. This section presents findings emerging from reviewed literature on how missionaries perceived Stark's policy and how the post-colonial government in Zimbabwe (consciously and/or unconsciously) seems to borrow a leaf from a colonial policy they used to criticize. Five themes guide the presentation of findings, followed by a discussion.

Theme 1: Main tenets of George Stark's policy

Stark was critical of missionary education which focused on promoting the 3Rs – reading, writing, and arithmetic in African schools. As Director of Native Education (1934-1954), he initiated curriculum reform from Substandard A to Standard VI to ensure that practical training covered the eight years of primary education. According to Stark, the purpose of African education was "to train Natives to live under tribal conditions as well as to enable them to work in European-controlled industries."²⁵ He encouraged African students to enroll at Domboshawa and Tjolutjo industrial training schools after completing Standard 6. The students took a three-year course in technical-practical training specializing in agriculture, bricklaying, building, roadmaking, carpentry, ironwork, and domestic work (needlework and cooking). Consequently, enrolment at the two schools rapidly increased between 1933 and 1952. But the practical training in African primary schools and at Domboshawa and Tjolutjo was inferior to that given to Europeans, so Africans would not compete in the labour market. Stark emphasized this disparity when he remarked, "No claim can, therefore, be made by this Department that any Native trained at Domboshawa or Tjolutjo is as efficient as a European artisan."²⁶

²² Jóhannesson, "The Politics of Historical Discourse Analysis: A Qualitative Research Method?"

²³ Africa Press, "Government names technical high schools in Zimbabwe." Africa Press, January 18, 2023. Accessed March 31, 2023; The Chronicle, "Government starts technical schools roll out," *The Chronicle*, Feb 9, 2023.

²⁴ Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier, "Analysing Discourses and Dispositives: A Foucauldian Approach to Theory and Methodology," *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* 3 (2016): 109–36.

²⁵ George Stark, Southern Rhodesia: The Annual Report of the Director of Native Education, 1940, 18.

²⁶ Stark, Southern Rhodesia, 3.

Unsurprisingly, African students were bitter about his reform policy. Mungazi interviewed a product of Domboshava industrial school who complained that:

On the one hand, the practical training which I received at Domboshawa did not prepare me to function as a qualified artisan. On the other hand, Mr. Stark did not believe in academic education for Africans. His philosophy and policy placed us at a social crossroads because we were miseducated.²⁷

After 1953, enrolment at the two vocational schools began to nosedive as Africans became increasingly critical of a practical-oriented curriculum.²⁸ Industrial training schools at Domboshawa and Tjolotjo were finally closed in 1955.

White missionaries were also critical of Stark's policy as they preferred an academic education for Africans in their quest to evangelize and win more souls for their churches. They argued, "Provision for academic education should be made in the interest of the advancement of the Africans and the country itself."²⁹ In his annual report of 1951, Stark, as the Director of Native Education, complained that "The policy of practical training [did] not appear to receive in all schools for Natives the place it should have in the curriculum."³⁰ Despite African resistance to practical education, Stark (like most colonial administrators before and after him) argued that academic education was not for every African student. Only the academically gifted, who happened to be the minority (due to the 'bottleneck education' practiced in colonial schools), were to pursue an academic curriculum. Most African students were to be offered vocational-technical education, preparing them for life in the reserves (rural areas) or employment as skilled labourers (under white supervision) in industry.

Theme 2: Searching for a common ground

As was the case in most of colonial Africa, the colonial government and the missionaries in Rhodesia had contradicting interests in the nature and content of African education.³¹ The government preferred practical-vocational education for Africans so that they would provide skilled and semi-skilled labour to the burgeoning colonial economy. Missionaries favoured an academic curriculum that promoted literacy and numeracy to facilitate the conversion of Africans to Christianity. Despite these differences, education policy in Rhodesia had to accommodate white settler interests (as represented by the government) and missionary demands.³² Thus, although Stark's curriculum reform for Africans was anchored on the provision of practical education, the academic component to promote literacy could not be excluded. Stark's primary argument was that practical education (centred on agriculture and related subjects like building, carpentry, and domestic sciences) maintained a link between village life and the educated African, thereby "binding ties between the school and tribal life."³³ According to Stark and other colonial administrators, this tie between Africans and their rural homes needed to be maintained because an emerging urban colonial economy could not provide jobs for all Africans.

Stark argued that a purely academic curriculum would 'detritalize' the Africans, persuade them to shun rural life, and accelerate the rural-urban drift.³⁴ To create a balance between practical education (advocated by the government) and academic education (advocated by missionaries who owned most village schools), cooperation between the two stakeholders became inevitable and desirable. "An

²⁷ Mungazi, "To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe," 473.

²⁸ Mungazi, "To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe," 473.

²⁹ The Methodist Church. *The Waddilove Manifesto: The educational policy of the Methodist Church*. Old Mutare Methodist Archives, 1946.

³⁰ George, Stark. Southern Rhodesia: The Annual Report of the Director of Native Education, 1951, 24

³¹ Fraser, *The Future of Africa; Zvobgo, A History of Zimbabwe, 1890-2000 and Postscript, Zimbabwe, 2001-2008*.

³² Makura, *The Historical Development Of African Education In Rhodesia: Administration Of African Education From 1928 To 1973*.

³³ Dickson A. Mungazi, To bind ties between the school and tribal life, 468; Mungazi, "To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe," 468.

³⁴ Stark. Southern Rhodesia: The Annual Report of the Director of Native Education, 1940.

effective way of securing the cooperation of the missions was through government loans and grants”, notes Makura.³⁵ Thus, the colonial government offered financial support to rural mission schools provided they offered academic literacy and practical-vocational education that would link school knowledge and a rural life of self-sufficiency. The intention was to prepare mission school leavers for a sustainable life in rural areas without craving rural-urban migration and the search for employment in the urban ‘white’ economy.

Theme 3: The pursuit of a practical-vocational curriculum

Stark’s tenure as Director of Native Education ended in 1954 but pursuing a practical-oriented curriculum for Africans in Rhodesia continued. With the colonial government’s financial and technical support, the Judges Education Commission of 1962 recommended the establishment of an “ecological curriculum”, meaning the setting up of two streams of education at the secondary school level for African students.³⁶ The F1 stream offered a purely academic secondary school curriculum to African students who were high performers in Grade 7 summative examinations. F1 education prepared school leavers for white-collar jobs in colonial administration and education.

The F2 stream offered practical education that prepared African school leavers for self-sufficiency and self-employment in rural communal ecologies, reducing the urge for rural-urban migration. Some F2 graduates would be absorbed as semi-skilled labour and technicians (under white supervision) in colonial urban industries, mines, and towns. This practical curriculum was for primary school leavers considered less academically gifted. As a result, practical vocational education in colonial Rhodesia “suffered from the negative stigma attached to the craft-based technical subject.”³⁷ In the same thread, Mahuyu and Makochekanwa observe that “the system was not received by people because it was rather discriminatory as F2 schools were only for the blacks.”³⁸ Thus, although a vocational-oriented curriculum had potential benefits for African students (like practical skills, self-sufficiency, and self-employment), the F2 secondary school curriculum was stigmatized as discriminatory, inferior, and for the less gifted learners. Consequently, African parents, teachers, and students in colonial Rhodesia had negative attitudes toward a practical-vocational-oriented school curriculum.

Theme 4: Attitudes towards practical vocational education

Negative dispositions towards practical-vocational education persist in post-colonial societies. In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Mahuyu and Makochekanwa established that parents consider technical-vocational education “a last resort.” There was consensus among parents in their study sample that technical-vocational education is for students who fail or produce mediocre results in Ordinary or Advanced Levels. Because they cannot secure a place at university, these school leavers can opt for technical-vocational training. The parents saw it as futile for their children to pursue a technical-vocational career in Zimbabwe because there are no industries for attachment (during training) and no jobs (after completion of training). The other complaint was that technical-vocational jobs are low paying and institutions offering them have poor infrastructure.³⁹ Pillay also established a

³⁵ Makura, *The Historical Development Of African Education In Rhodesia: Administration Of African Education From 1928 To 1973*, 98.

³⁶ Joburg Mahuyu and Albert Makochekanwa, “Perspectives of Parents towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe,” *Advances in Politics and Economics* 3, no. 4 (September 8, 2020): p1, <https://doi.org/10.22158/ape.v3n4p1>.

³⁷ Davison M. Mupinga, Michael F Burnett, and Donna H Redmann, “Examining the Purpose of Technical Education in Zimbabwe’s High Schools,” *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 75–83.

³⁸ Mahuyu and Makochekanwa, “Perspectives of Parents towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe.”

³⁹ Mahuyu and Makochekanwa, “Perspectives of Parents towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe,” 9.

strong belief among parents and students that academic education provides better jobs and income, fueling a prevalent negative disposition towards technical-vocational education.⁴⁰

Students also have negative dispositions towards technical-vocational subjects.⁴¹ Given a choice, most students in Zimbabwe opt for the academic rather than practical-vocational route, despite advice to the contrary from teachers. When students are pressured to take a practical subject(s), most will not register them for Ordinary Level Examinations. Parents and guardians also discouraged their students from taking examinations in practical subjects. By offering technical vocational subjects to the less academically gifted students, governments in developing countries in general (and Zimbabwe in particular) create the impression that these subjects are meant to reduce school dropout rates.⁴² This salient message exacerbates stakeholder negativity towards practical subjects.

However, Mhlanga et al. found out that, despite the myriad of challenges teachers face in implementing technical-vocational education in Zimbabwean schools, “most teachers had a positive attitude towards the TVET [Technical-Vocational Education Training] programme.”⁴³ This is mainly because the teachers realize the potential benefits of practical training to students who are faced with the prospect of unemployment when they complete school. The unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is pegged at 95%.⁴⁴ Given this sad scenario, school leavers with practical skills learned from school can utilize them to make a living, engage in income-generating projects, and create self-employment (and possibly employment for others) in the informal sector.

Theme 5: The promise of a practical-oriented curriculum

Despite the promise and potential embedded in a practical-oriented curriculum, schools offering technical-vocational education in Zimbabwe face a myriad of challenges. Mhlanga et al. remark, “Both theoretical and empirical data converge on the fact that most Zimbabwean secondary schools are struggling to implement the technical and vocational education and training policy.”⁴⁵ Most practical and technical teachers were not specifically trained to teach these subjects and lacked prerequisite qualifications. The schools were also ill-equipped to teach technical-vocational subjects as they lacked specialist rooms like laboratories and the consumables needed to implement this reform policy effectively. Budgetary constraints, which most secondary schools in Zimbabwe face, negatively affect the procurement of equipment like sewing machines and the fabrics needed in textiles and design. There were also challenges in securing places for industrial attachment for the learners, as many industries have closed in Zimbabwe, implying that there is more “policy talk” than “policy action” on the implementation of the technical-vocational education policy in Zimbabwe.⁴⁶

DISCUSSION

This historical discourse analysis explored the central tenets of Stark’s curriculum reform policy in colonial Rhodesia, intending to decipher any lessons that can inform contemporary technical-vocational education policy in Zimbabwe. In historical discourse analysis, old and new ideas compete

⁴⁰ G. F. Pillay, “Technical & Vocational Education (TVET) Systems of Selected East Asian Countries: Malaysia,” *Washington, DC: The World Bank*, 2005.

⁴¹ Michael Mhlanga, John Tenha, and Francis Ndlovu, “Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: Teachers’ Views,” *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education* 8, no. 7 (2021): 111–18, <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0807013>.

⁴² E. Zendera, “Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy Implementation in Secondary Schools” (Harare: Zimbabwe Open University, 2013).

⁴³ Mhlanga, Tenha, and Ndlovu, “Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: Teachers’ Views,” 111.

⁴⁴ Mahuyu and Makochekanwa, “Perspectives of Parents towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe,” 5.

⁴⁵ Mhlanga, Tenha, and Ndlovu, “Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: Teachers’ Views,” 116.

⁴⁶ David B Tyack, and Cuban, L. *Tinkering toward Utopia: A century of public school reform*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 40.

for legitimacy.⁴⁷ The suggestion proffered in the current study that Stark's views may help inform Zimbabwe's recent curriculum reform initiative is a silenced reality. Current government officials and politicians in Zimbabwe may be uncomfortable hearing and accepting that lessons can be drawn from colonial education policy to inform contemporary curriculum reform. When one argues that there is substance in the lessons from colonial education policies, one may be labelled a sell-out or traitor because politicians balkanize ideas into incorrigible silos. Jóhannesson observes that scholars are often mindful of "what is appropriate or safe to say at certain moments or in a certain place", and this precaution determines "what can be said and what is silenced in the discourse."⁴⁸ Often, scholars in Africa label colonial curriculum policy as evil, oppressive, and irrelevant to African needs and aspirations - all meant to please the ruling African elite - even when there may be some valuable insights from it. Academics interested in post-colonial curriculum reform are sometimes forced to engage in self-censorship to appease the ruling political elite.

Conversely, post-colonial reform policies are legitimized as revolutionary, even when they may have components borrowed from colonial policy. Post-colonial policymakers are often credited for originality when, in fact, they are simply recycling and repackaging reforms initiated under colonialism. Where ideas are siphoned from colonial policy, this is often not acknowledged for fear of giving credit to a discredited system. In the post-colonial dispensation, colonial ideas are repackaged and rebranded as new and revolutionary in a disturbing trend Purakayastha and Mursed typify as "post-colonial colonialism."⁴⁹ Zimbabwe's current pursuit of a practical curriculum, which African nationalists vehemently criticized during the struggle for liberation and early years after independence, falls neatly into Purakayastha and Mursed's typology. Historical discourse analysis demands that scholars take a fresh look at Stark's reform policy for practical education and decipher patterns of continuity and discontinuity in Zimbabwe's current call for an applicable-oriented curriculum.

Close to a century ago, Diffendorfer warned that, by looking at practical education with disdain and Western education as an intrusion into their traditional way of life, Africans could deny themselves opportunities for individual growth and national development.⁵⁰ Despite the racist connotations attached to it, practical education gave invaluable skills to Africans. It could make them self-reliant and improve their living standards, especially in rural areas. Mupinga et al. observe that "The technically-oriented school curriculum, considered to discriminate against blacks from whites, became unpopular with the blacks, and the schools were subsequently abolished."⁵¹ Africans were against practical education because they believed it was meant to make them labourers in the colonial economy.⁵² While this may have been true to some extent, it cannot be denied that practical education empowered Africans with knowledge and skills to improve their own livelihoods without being employed in the colonial economy.

It is only in the 21st century that most African politicians and curriculum reformers are now consciously and unconsciously borrowing ideas from the colonial script of a practical-oriented curriculum. They are embracing practical education (which they used to criticize during the anti-colonial struggle) as a panacea to the problems of an irrelevant academic curriculum. This follows the realization that an academic curriculum churns out graduates without practical skills to fend for themselves (or create new jobs) in the face of severe youth unemployment. Zimbabwe's current reform policy is piloting the concept of technical high schools, which Stark advocated for as far back as 1934 when he was the Director of Native Education.⁵³

⁴⁷ Achugar, "Critical Discourse Analysis and History."

⁴⁸ Jóhannesson, "The Politics of Historical Discourse Analysis: A Qualitative Research Method?"

⁴⁹ Purakayastha and Alam, "Ngugi Wa Thiongo: Globalectics and The Postcolonial Intellectual."

⁵⁰ Ralph Eugene Diffendorfer, Paul Hutchinson, and William F McDermott, *The World Service of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 50 (Methodist Episcopal church, Council of Boards of benevolence, Committee on ..., 1923).

⁵¹ Mupinga, Burnett, and Redmann, "Examining the Purpose of Technical Education in Zimbabwe's High Schools."

⁵² Mungazi, "To Bind Ties between the School and Tribal Life: Educational Policy for Africans under George Stark in Zimbabwe."

⁵³ The Chronicle, Government starts technical schools roll out.

Although meant to appease the African majority in the early years of independence, the phasing out of the F2 schools after 1980 appears to be a monumental mistake made by the Zimbabwe government. Mahuyu and Makochekeka claim that “After realizing that the phasing out of F2 schools which imparted skills to youth was a shot in the foot, the Government of Zimbabwe established the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999.”⁵⁴ This observation appears to be accurate because the recommendations made by the Nziramasanga Commission are a replay of Stark’s policy of a practical-centred curriculum and a reincarnation of the F2 education system, which was abandoned after independence. The commission advised that the Zimbabwe school curriculum must place technical-vocational subjects which develop learners’ psychomotor skills at the centre stage by ensuring that each learner takes two practical subjects at secondary school.⁵⁵ Schools were to offer a range of practical subjects, including agriculture, building, woodwork, metalwork, food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics, creative art, and ICT. These subjects are a re-listing of the same subjects offered to African students under Stark’s policy, except for some semantic differences in subject names.

CONCLUSION

One unique contribution of the current paper to the existing literature on post-colonial curriculum reform is that it generates positive insights from Stark’s policy which has been heavily criticized and discredited by most researchers as racist, discriminatory, and oppressive to African students. Despite the racial connotations attached to it, Stark’s policy for a practical-oriented curriculum had a lot of substance in it. It sought to empower school leavers with practical knowledge and skills. These technical-vocational skills can make school leavers self-reliant, given the unemployment crisis currently hovering around 95% in Zimbabwe. Many other developing countries face a similar scourge of youth unemployment, albeit at different intensity levels. Considering the insights generated from Stark’s colonial reform policy, is Oldham’s conclusion that “Whites have done nothing to further native education” not too harsh a judgement?⁵⁶

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⁵⁴ Mahuyu and Makochekeka, “Perspectives of Parents towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe,” 3.

⁵⁵ C. T. Nziramasanga, “Curriculum Review Process in the Context of ZIMASSET: Possible Linkages with the CIET Provisions,” *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* 30, no. 1 (2018): 36–45.

⁵⁶ Oldham, “White and Black in Africa: A Critical Examination of Hte Rhodes Lectures of General Smuts,” 11.

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