

Education in trinidad and tobago



INTRODUCTION

The Education system in Trinidad and Tobago experience it most radical changes in the 20th century which allows it to exist as it is today. Some of the characteristics were consequential of the system in the 19th century but others were as a result of bold movements and a new economy. These changes took place concurrently with World War I and II, the Independence and Republicanism of Trinidad and Tobago, the Black Power movement and Industrialization.

Characteristics of 20th century education:

ü The duality of the education system continued from 1870 until the days of Eric Williams even though he objected strongly to denominational schools and continues even today. The essence of this system was that there were two competitive type schools: government schools and denominational schools which were financed concurrently by the government. The Moyne Commission and the Missen report of the 1950's confirmed the validity of the dual system and viewed the churches as benefactors.

ü The main points of Harris' scheme of education for ward schools saw the establishment of Boards Of Education, Inspectors of schools, Masters/Mistresses, libraries & secular education were are few things mentioned which were amended with new titles in the 20th century.

ü Primary Education was free to all students in 1901/1902.

ü College Exhibition continued into the 1900's but was eventually replaced by the Common Entrance examination in 1961

ü Curriculum had shifted from being totally ‘bookish’ to the incorporation of craft and agriculture and then trade in education.

ü There was huge growth spurge in the building of schools and the introduction of Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary into the system to ensure equity to all in the 1970’s.

ü This was unlike the previous century where the benefits of education could not be achieved by the majority. The enrollment of students had drastically increased and today we see that there is almost 100% enrollment as compared to 67% enrollment in 1902.

ü The attendance levels have grown significantly since the cultural taboos and the gender bias have almost entirely disappeared.

ü Women had a greater role in education. From education being a luxury in the early 20th century, it is today free at all levels and available to all.

ü We also see within the 20th century the introduction of a tertiary level institute and the onus on the government to encourage build the economy to a nationalized state by awarding greater amounts of scholarships to study locally rather than journeying abroad.

We would look at three significant features in the 20th century that have spurred on the opportunities that exist today. These essential elements include:

ü The contribution of Private Secondary Schools

ü The work of Eric Williams and The PNM government

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ü The development of technical education

Examine the role and contribution of private secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

A private school can be defined as a day school which was neither a government school nor school aided by the Government. It was owned by individual proprietors; members of community and operated as a business to make profits.

In the 19th century, private education consisted of infants, preparatory, intermediate students and was operated by white individuals in order to make a profit. They took in a limited number of students who could afford such privilege thus maintaining the social exclusiveness of education to elites at the highest point in the social structure which consisted of mostly whites(English and English creoles) and the freed coloured (French creoles).

The role and contribution of the private secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago in the 20th century is significantly different from that of the 19th century as evidenced by the changes during the period 1900 – 1920. It is one of the most important phases in the history of Secondary Schools. This change could be attributed to the hundreds of frustrated parents in Port of Spain, who sought educational opportunities for their sons but could not afford the fees at the public schools and were not admitted because of class.

The government grants were given to the non denominational schools at the latter part of the 19th century which was at that time Queen’s Collegiate School (Queen’s Royal College or QRC). The other Roman Catholic schools

which were St. Joseph's Convent, St George's College and St Mary's College (College of the Immaculate Conception or CIC) charged fees which were about \$15 per month. The vision of a few coloureds or blacks students without University Degrees, who were graduates from College of the Immaculate Conception and Queen's Collegiate School, led to the creation of many private schools as a form of business. The cost of attending QRC and CIC was high in comparison to the cost ranging from 60cents to \$5 for a similar period being asked for by Private Secondary Schools in the early 1900's which resulted from a heavy influx of students. The curriculum of these Private Secondary Schools include the basic primary school subjects such as Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, Spelling and dictation as well as Latin, French and sometimes Spanish.

The primary role was to act as a 'FEEDER' to CIC and QRC. They were self-constituted adjuncts (attachments) to QRC and CIC. They allowed the opportunities for those students who did not pass or were not given an opportunity to write the non-Government or Government College Exhibition to attend QRC and especially CIC after successfully completing a period at that Private institution to achieve their Junior Cambridge status.

In the late 1930's they abandoned their role as a 'feeder' and their sole purpose for existence was preparing students for the Cambridge Examinations hence their curriculum was so structured. In 1917, the Junior and Senior Cambridge examinations were superseded by the Oxford and Cambridge Higher School examination.

The Private Secondary Schools during the 20th Century contributed invaluable to lower social strata as opposed to the 19th century. Their contribution can be noted below:

- ü It represented the first period in which descendents of ex-slaves created their own schools.
- ü They provided opportunities for education to a lower social strata which consisted of ex-indentured labourers and ex-slaves who genuinely could not afford the fees of QRC and CIC.
- ü They prepared students for entry into the job market by creating an “educational inflation’ in academics and skills by the establishment of Private Girls’ Commercial Schools teaching Secretarial Skills and Secondary subjects and even the creation of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture(Even though it was never seen as equivalent to other degrees and attractive to Trinidadians)
- ü Private Secondary education ‘ bridged the gap’ in the social divide. It reduced the prejudice against the blacks and lower class people. It was economical hence more available to the lower class.
- ü The private schools acted as a source of employment for the Cambridge certificate holders who were waiting on their future careers.
- ü Later, private schools provided education for the acquisition of Cambridge Certificates maybe shaping the minds of people who would take the country into a nationalized status. It was literally the sole business of Private

Secondary Schools to provide Cambridge Certificates. In one instance in the 1950's over 500 students with certificates left the private institutions.

ü Private institutions acted as proof that academic success was possible without expensive buildings, good furniture, teachers with university degree or even the intervention of the church. (Even though the failure rate and the quality of success in Private Secondary Schools' candidates were high)

There needed to be some regulation of Private Secondary Schools because numerous ' hidden' institutions were being formed so the Private Ordinance of 1935 was passed which sought statistical information on attendance and other school related data and the basic minimum standard of buildings and sanitary conditions.

Critically assess the view that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was primarily concerned with the development of secondary education between 1956 and 1986 and neglected other sectors.

The People's National Movement (PNM) political group from 1956-1986 and the late DR. ERIC WILLIAMS (1956 -1981) will serve as the background for the most successful education policy of the government. This was evident within the first five years of launching the PNM in 1956. The main aim of Dr. Eric Williams, who was then the leader of the PNM and Chief Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was to build a nationalist education system responsive to the will of a sovereign government, and not to that of the churches. He insisted that a national system of education be put in our new nation which would be suited to the political, social and economics needs of the country. He subdued all that would be ' the cradle of the new nationalism'. He hoped <https://assignbuster.com/education-in-trinidad-and-tobago/>

to use education to bring about social integration (by bringing together youths of different races and classes) and economic development (technical/vocational training to aid in industrialization), therefore improving the standard of living and equity within the nation. Most of all, the late Dr. Eric Williams believed all of these improvements could have been achieved by the expansion and reorientation of SECONDARY EDUCATION.

Distinct accomplishments were made by the PNM government that ensured that they were acclaimed with the most impressive education structure in the Commonwealth Caribbean. To achieve the status of the most impressive education structure money was needed and the revenues derived from oil explorations facilitated the expansion. The dramatic increase in the price of oil increased the nation's wealth in the matter of months in 1973. Education was the single largest recurrent expenditure. The lack of money in the education sector was no longer a problem during 1974-1981. The government could afford to subsidize the services offered to students and the physical expansion which would lead to the reorientation of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Eric Williams sought to include technical and vocational training, including specialized crafts into the curriculum. This resulted in a surge of individuals leaving the agriculture sector to forge their wealth in the oil industry, thus creating a domino effect. Agricultural output fell as a result and the food import bill and luxury spending was heightened and so was the prices of goods and services. The Secondary schools had an inadequate number of teachers so it drew recruits from all sectors of the education system. During 1974-1981 Trinidad and Tobago's economy was extremely wealthy and the government choose to

spend on physical expansion without achieving full and complete nationalization of Trinidad and Tobago. The agricultural sector was directly affected by the development of secondary education and technical/vocational skill training.

There was expansion and reorientation of all sectors of education within the 20th century; Primary, Tertiary, Skills training and Teacher training but all were subordinate to the government's involvement in Secondary Education.

Within the Secondary school system, more educational institutions were made available for the expanding number of children coming from primary schools. The promise of expansion was achieved thereby emphasizing the point of "education for all". Drastic increase in the number of Government Secondary Schools (QRC, St. George's College and San Fernando Technical Institute existed alone in 1957) by building of schools in rural areas and Tobago and infrastructural developments of old building structures (for example Bishop's High School which was founded in 1925 was refurbished) and increased school equipment in the nation's schools. The distribution of boys and girls within the Secondary School system was fairer and this benefited the girls by the construction of Co-educational secondary schools as opposed to the churches' tendency to one sex schools. The government made secondary education opportunities available to almost all by building schools in the rural areas, as half of the new secondary schools built during 1958-1970 were in the country side. In the 1960's and 1970's, the expansion in the educational institutions (Junior Sec. & Senior Sec.) provided educational facilities for learning to the Indians and black working class thus movement upwards in social ladder which was inconceivable in 1956. All the

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expansion of education was being facilitated by the large number of University graduates being produced by the UWI in St Augustine. Subsidies being offered towards school uniforms, school bus service, school meals and school medical services. The PNM government urged on the beginning of education planning with a 15 year plan from 1968-1983. The plan defined the two cycle secondary education system of junior secondary schools (ages 11-14) and senior secondary schools (ages 14-18). By 1981, there was an influx of black and Indian Secondary School in 'above working class' jobs. Women, including Indian women were beneficiaries of the upward social and educational mobility. There were aims at 'West Indianizing' the content of the curriculum through the introduction of subjects which focused on the West Indies to assist in making Trinidad and Tobago a nationalized country.

In 1964 up till 1981, there was a remarkable drop in the achievement, not only in public secondary schools but also in prestigious denominational schools and the Senior Comprehensive schools. There was the introduction of Caribbean Proficiency Examination in 1979 at the General and Basic level to cater for the wide range of students' abilities because there were thoughts that the standards GCE was too high. The social revolution brought on by Dr Eric Williams of expansion and reorientation was incomplete as the education system failed to secure equality of participation in various types of schools and never really eliminated all the 'wrongs' of education that existed as a result of colonization, except the under expenditure of education. The education system still moved students to school that matched their social class. Not much progress was made in the elimination of external examinations for the non-technical vocational subjects. The aim

to reorganize the dual system that existed since the 19th century because he believed that the churches were supporters of the white colonial ruling class could have resulted in the values and morals in education. The aim at promoting nationalism by West Indianizing the curriculum was invoked rather than promoted. The mandatory teaching of West Indian History was overrated and anti-colonial purgatory. (Bad talk)

Nursery education, meaning education of children between the ages of 3 and 5 years was in a state of neglect, disorder and government indifference. The Child Welfare League, a voluntary agency, had shown interest in nursery education from the 1930's and it continued that nursery education would remain in the hands of voluntary organizations until the 1970's. In the expansion of education no systematic provision had been made for government nursery schools or government assisted nursery schools. Because of the increase revenue due to the oil boom the government promoted nursery schools in community centres. Hence, by 1978, there were 30 government assisted nursery schools in community centers, staffed by nursery aids.

The most obvious thing about primary education between 1956 and 1986 was its subordination to secondary education. It got less capital funds, less government attention and less public notice than secondary education. Overcrowding was a problem as primary education was offered to all groups and there was a need for additional schools even though the government total of government's primary exceeded the number of R. C. denominational schools during 1957-1967. Many schools were in need of repairs but it was second to the expansion of Secondary education. The government took up <https://assignbuster.com/education-in-trinidad-and-tobago/>

the financial responsibility of repairs of denominational schools and by 1981 40 schools were placed under joint management. In the latter part of the 20th century, the working class was now afforded the opportunity to continue in Secondary Education because of Mr. Williams aspirations of equality in education. In primary education with the introduction of Common entrance examination which replaced the College Exhibition it ensure all children were awarded the privileges of Secondary School Examination. The Missen Report of 1954 provided a clear critique of primary schools before CE which stated that primary schools were failing to produce ' lively, reasonable and thinking child at 12 years of age'. This lead to the introduction of CE in 1961. During 1965- 1981, the drawbacks of Common Entrance Exams were that the teachers focused on the CE subjects rather than the curriculum and the Practice Tests in areas of Arithmetic, English and Intelligence was a substitute for teaching. Little focus was placed on composition skills; therefore students entered Secondary Schools with inadequate writing skills. With the new syllabus in 1975, no time was allotted for Religious knowledge to help in moral development. There were frequent complaints of the stresses created by the CE on the child. The CE allowed for regurgitation of material, hence the curriculum was covered but children were not prepared for introduction into the secondary. The false picture of just passing the exam created individuals who were unable to read and lacked basic numeric skills. Even though more children were being allowed secondary education, they left the primary system illiterate thus reflecting on the examination for placement at the primary level.

The expansion of the curriculum by the introduction of practical, agriculture, technical, vocational, commercial and academic courses and more programmes for trades training which was a direct result of the Black Power movement.

The technical vocational education in the Junior Sec. and Senior Sec. was problematic. The design of the technical/ vocational schools was faulty as there was too much specialization in earlier years at the expense of general knowledge. The supply of teachers in practical, vocational or technical subjects was deficient so further expansion of John Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute was a slowed process. The problem was the faulty implementation as seen by the lack of the pilot scheme or any phase introduction of the courses as a wide assortment was thrown into the school in the first instance. Technical/ vocational training being offered in the Junior and Senior Secondary schools to a large no of illiterates and poor achievers and the maintenance of equipment was a problem. There was a lack of supervisors and trained teachers. Although, its introduction into the secondary schools was necessary, Tech/Voc teachers and education was seen as inferior to the academics.

There was significant emphasis in teacher training, starting with one Government Training College in 1957 and construction of two more within the next six years until 1963(Mausica and Corinth) and the clearing of the backlog of untrained teachers. There was also the inauguration of a one year Emergency Teachers' College in Port of Spain.

Instead of entering the teaching profession with a teachers' provisional certificate mostly acquired by the pupil teacher examination (ended in 1959), candidates desiring of entering the service had to achieve at least 5 O level passes including English.

The government provided more qualified graduates than the denominational board. Raised status of the teacher and level of trained teacher from 64. 3% from below 50% and allowed appropriate training as evident by the establishment of 3 teachers' colleges.

Not enough attention in the Government Training Colleges for teachers was placed on training for Tech/Voc Education even though John Donaldson Technical Institute developed Tec/Voc teacher education in 1979 after the insurgence of numerous Junior and Senior Sec. Schools. There was too much emphasis on increasing knowledge and little on professional training. The training colleges looked like advanced forms of Secondary Schools and there were problems of translating theory into practice because of poor understanding of content due to the academic weakness of students at the entry level.

Tertiary level education was now being offered to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by The University of the West Indies formed in between 1960-1963 which acted as a merging place for blacks and Indians. It comprised of three major sectors: Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Engineering and a College of Arts and Science. The establishment of the College for Arts and Science received students from a wide cross section of Trinidad and Tobago and opened a whole scope of post secondary education opportunities. The first

nationals to gain local degrees rather than crossing the seas were in the period of 1963-1967. The availability of locally obtained degrees was a lever of upward social mobility. The government paid the fees of nationals; that means free education for those who qualified from primary to tertiary. By the 1980's the expansion of faculties and enrollment at tertiary levels had increased significantly with locals taking up nearly 75% enrollment and nationals graduates who took up well paying jobs in the private and public sectors locally. Scholarships were offered to locals to attend the UWI.

Therefore it can be clearly seen even though strides were made across all sectors of education, pre-school and primary education were most neglected and suffered the greatest disadvantages.

Examine the development of technical education in the 20th century.

Technical education refers the training of tradesman to allow knowledge, experience and specialization in industrial techniques. It refers to training and education as tradesman and does not include needlework or agriculture education.

During 1843 - 1939, technical vocational gave way to agricultural education and training of tradesmen. These subjects were absent from school curriculum. During the time of emancipation there were feeble calls for " industrial education". This could simply be understood as education of practical skills. In 1847 British government sent a very elaborate scheme of agricultural education but it was ignored.

To the end of the 19th century more heed was given to agricultural education since the sugar industry was now suffering disasters. By 1913

most elementary schools began introducing agriculture into their curriculum hence the reason that they had gardens. There was an issue however, which was associated with these gardens that is the elites did not understand what was to be accomplished as farming was seen as a job fit for the planter class. In the 1920s craft was added to the curriculum. It consisted of using straw and paper work but Marriott and Cutteridge who were Directors complained that it should not have any vocational intention instead it should help to develop the brain using the hands.

The idea of trades training was, at this time thought of by then Governor Maloney and some members of the upper class. This was the period when the western world was thinking that education for blacks should be more practical preparing them for work. The older tradesmen were rapidly dying out and so acquiring trade skills was an urgent issue. The original idea of Trinidad and Tobago was not to improve trades men for their benefit but for better workmanship within the country. In 1911 part time instructors were recruited to tutor classes which comprised of workshop drawing, arithmetic, carpentry and masonry and tailoring.

In the 1930s practical learning was recommended by the Marriott and Cutteridge report and materialized in the times of Dr. Eric Williams where schooling was not only "bookish". In the period of the oil boom training for jobs in the oil industry seemed vital.

In the early 20th century, the Board for Industrial Training which started trades training outside the schools in specially arranged evening classes, coupled eventually with work in specially arranged evening classes, coupled

eventually with work experience through apprenticeship contracts. By recruiting instructors from government departments and private enterprise, the Board of Industrial Training managed in 1911 to put together classes in: practical workshop drawing and arithmetic, building construction, bookbinding and typography, tailoring, launch and boat building. Boys were apprenticed and soon the engineering trade available became the prestige trades. Wages and career prospects were superior in the oil industry to other firms so applications to serve as engineering apprenticeships were greater than other trades. Just before 1914

(World War I) a link was forged with the City and Guilds of London.

The trades for welding and motor mechanics were spread of the large use of motor vehicles in the 1930's. The trade for electricians was started by the development of the Trinidad and Tobago electricity Company in the north during the same period. However, there was a slow development of apprenticeship in the sugar industry; eventually sugar factory mechanic were proclaimed.

The oil industry required a higher level of technicians. The BIT had functioned at the level of the craftsman but the opening of the Junior Technical School (San Fernando Technical Institute) and the growing industrial activity of the oil companies helped to raise the standard to technician level. The Junior Technical institute in San Fernando, established in 1943 was the first of its kind. The BIT had great cooperation from the oil companies. Trinidad Leasehold Limited, owners of the refinery at Point a Pierre, gave assistance with equipment to the Junior Technical School,

offered the use of workshops, and gave instruction to high level personnel to help in the instruction of evening class at San Fernando.

In World War II, to meet the demand of the British for their war machinery, oil companies expanded production. More apprentices and skilled workers were needed.

After World War II, the south was seen as the Industrial centre of Trinidad and between 1940-1944 continuation classes and evening trade classes were started in San Fernando, Point Fortin, Siparia, Fyzabad and Arima. The number of roistered apprentices had grown to 425 in 1948. In 1949, the British Oilfields of Trinidad began to train O'level graduates in shortened apprenticeship programmes which would allow them to take up supervisory posts. In the 1950's the oil industry began to send selected youths abroad to acquire professional training as engineers.

It was only under the PNM government of 1956 that a serious attempt was made to integrate technical/vocational education into the mainstream of secondary education. Dr Eric Williams during the oil boom try to match the economic progress with technical and vocational training including specialized craft into the education system. The expansion of the curriculum by the introduction of practical, agriculture, technical, vocational, commercial and academic courses and more programmes for trades training which was a direct result of the Black Power movement. The PNM government urged on the beginning of education planning with a 15 year plan from 1968-1983. The plan defined the two cycle secondary education system of junior secondary schools (ages 11-14) and senior secondary

schools (ages14-18). At this point there was the introduction of many technical/ vocational courses in both the Junior Sec. and Senior Sec.

CONCLUSION

There were significant changes in the education system. Mr. Eric Williams during his term in government with the PNM is responsible for the most impressive education system within the Commonwealth Caribbean. He paid a lot of emphasis on all sectors of education and he was well assisted because of the healthy state of the economy. There were significant changes in primary, secondary, tertiary and technical vocational education but no mention was made to the early childhood education. The private secondary education'supsurge in the early 1900's set the stage, allowingmore to afford a luxury which was originally awarded by the social class status. Education has evolved thoroughly during the1900'sbecause of the thrust of Private and Technical/ Vocational schools and the PNM government of 1956-1986. It was made affordable and available to all no matter class, creed or religion because it was what a new economy neededto become independent of theBritish Rule.

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