

# The role of education in the social, economic and cultural character of the baham...

[Education](#)



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Every country has the obligation to abolish illiteracy among its citizens. The process of education is fundamental to eradicating such illiteracy and sustaining its growth and progress. It is noteworthy that the basic education in The Bahamas includes – but is not limited to – the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic along with the successful completion of grade twelve standard school works. The pursuit of higher education at the College of the Bahamas and abroad, has increased in recent years as thousands of Bahamians aspire to raise their standard of living and success. Sir Lynden's vehement fight to eradicate illiteracy and poverty and move this country to first world status has done much for this country's growth and development. His dream was to empower people through education.

Education, by nature, has the power to impact any human society. It is a must have if we aspire to achieve growth and development and most importantly, sustain ourselves. Education trains the human mind to think and make the right decision. Through education, knowledge and information is received and spread throughout the world. An educated man is likened unto a man who lives in a room with all its windows open toward the outside world, whereas an uneducated man is described as shut off from the outside world. Higher education has long been recognized as critical to the social and economic and cultural development of our nation. . The pursuit of this goal has taken on many different forms.

The establishment of the College of The Bahamas and other educational entities has significantly increased opportunities for higher and continuing education locally. “ A good educational system is the foundation of any country; and more significantly it is an important factor in the development  
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of third world countries. However, this progress requires the cooperation of people with different abilities, different experiences and specialized training, working together to produce a dynamic system which could be improved upon over a period of time.”[1] Getting an education is one of the best things a young person, can do for himself to ensure he leads a better, more fulfilling and prosperous life. Education can significantly improve people’s lives. It benefits people, society, and the world as a whole. Education is at the very cornerstone of this nation and has produced massive economic, social and cultural transformation of The Bahamas.

#### Role of Education in Social Character of The Bahamas

Education has numerous benefits for the individual and the society. “ Higher education has long been recognized as critical to the social development of our nation. This investment in higher education has resulted in the emergence of a cadre of highly skilled professionals, capable of meeting the majority of the manpower needs in the country.”[2] Prior to the establishment of the College of the Bahamas, access to higher education was limited to few people. However, since its establishment, thousands of Bahamians have improved their status in life through attainment of Associate’s, Bachelor’s and even a Master’s Degree from this institute. Persons are empowered to take control of the future of their families and participate in the up building of society.

Socially, education has allowed more people to enjoy life much more fully. Persons make more positive decisions regarding their health, family, children’s well-being; contribute to cleaner environment and absence of

violent crimes. Socrates once said that the more he learned the more he became convinced of his own ignorance. An Educated person has the capacity to live an improved life conforming to the social rules and norms and understanding his civic roles. Persons who are educated can read, reason, communicate and make informed choices - all of which leads to a better society and living conditions for the individual. One's quality of life increases, female vulnerability to ill health, frequent unplanned pregnancy is reduced, and the chance for contracting HIV/AIDS infection is also reduced. Education improves the overall quality of The Bahamas: - the " quality of a nation is easily judged by the number of liberate population living in it". It is safe to conclude that we have come a long way as a nation since our independence and this has been as a direct result of more people obtaining higher education.

When one looks back at the pre-emancipation and early periods in Bahamian history, it is easy to visualize the impact education has on our nation. It was an educated man who championed the cause to assist in liberating his fellow Bahamas from injustices, degradation and an impoverished state of mind. It was a handful of educated men who spoke out on the behalf of freedom, and equality for all and paved the way for this society to rise up and reach its maximum potential. None of this could have occurred if it were not for a potent vision of a people empowered through the achievement of higher education; liberated to maximize their God given potential. Education has played a major role in the progress of the individual's mind and this country. " Ignorance and poverty are major speed breakers in the swift developing country and can be easily overcome through education. An educated person

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has a certain aura around him of dignity and wisdom. An educated person is one who is capable of taking the knowledge he's gained from his schooling and develop his own philosophy of life. He is aware of what's going on in the world and understands the issues and able to take necessary measures.

Educated person is not difficult to find a job he realizes that no job is "low"[3]. But he's able to make calculated adjustment and decision for his good. " Education tames the astray mind and nurtures its capabilities the same way training builds a clever dog".[4] Do you think our country will regress if our people were fully educated, have some income to support their families, are aware of what's happening in the world, and able to contribute to this country's development? If you believe it will regress, you need education. ' When one looks at the social fabric of our society, sometimes we may become alarmed because of the issues of crime... We have the second highest incident of HIV/AIDS in our region; we also have other challenges such as incest, abuse, physical as well as sexual, abandonment of children. Whether we maintain and improve the social fabric of our society depends on the quality of education.'[5] The educational system, more than any other social institution, has the responsibility for the molding of character, and discipline of untamed primitive appetites.

The home environment is vitally important in this regard - but when a child begins schooling-the school and teachers are equally important as the home, as they make up the country's major investment in its health and wealth creation program. A very large percentage of the governments' budget is allocated to operating our educational system. It is said that the health of a

nation is the wealth of the nation. Translations are its wealth. It's essential therefore to cultivate a healthy harvest of youth properly nurtured, educated, socialized and civilized for the positive up building of this nation. When teachers and schools fail to produce this necessary result, everyone pays a frightfully high price for this neglect. There is a direct correlation between school effectiveness and responsible citizenship. When our schools fail society, poorly socialized and sometimes extremely violent predators result.

Statistics reveal that more and more of our youths are being charged with drug related criminal acts, alcoholic consumption, an assortment of beastly crimes, HIV and AIDS infection. These all point to “ multiple failures, multiple delinquencies, and multiple derelictions of duty.”[6] In any society we all get judged by our worst elements: crimes, gangs, attitudes etc...Local businessmen are becoming increasingly concerned about the educational levels of job candidates many of whom are illiterate. A news report quotes J. Barrie Farrington, president of Bahamas Hotel Employees Association as saying; the state of education in the Bahamas is unacceptable and not producing graduates – able to engage in business.

They blamed many of the failures on the policies implemented under Majority Rule, namely, the end of academic elitism – as associated with the Old Government High School where students were selected on basis of entrance exams. It is said they sought the best and brightest students and tried to provide a superior academic education. Many believe the obliteration of this kind of system within the public school system caused education to

suffer. Other policies of Bahamianisation preference for Bahamian teachers in the school system; social promotion of students in grades without passing grades- have all affected the educational system. A story is shared with me of a parent who broke down and begged for her third grade child not to have to repeat third grade; she promised to help! Today, the child is struggling and frustrated not able to keep up with the requirements of fourth grade. This coalition of private sector organizations warned that the country's present education " crisis" would have a serious detrimental impact on the national economy by the year 2020 if immediate steps are not taken to reform education. Notwithstanding, when we look back at the history of education in our society, we note that there are hundreds of Bahamians who have been impacted positively by the public education system.

#### Role of Education in Economic Character of The Bahamas

" The developments that have occurred in the Bahamian education over the thirty years since Independence attest to the varied efforts that have been made to create a national system capable of equipping Bahamians to play meaningful roles in the life of their country."[7] Do you think our country will ever look back if the people are fully educated, have some incomes to support their families, are aware of the happening in the world and contribute to the nation's development? I don't think so! Education is one of the best predictors of success in the labor market. More educated workers earn higher wages, have greater earning growth over their lifetime, experience less unemployment and work longer when we look around in our society today, evidence of this reality abound everywhere. Lawyers,

politicians, bankers, teachers all strive to improve and gain higher education in an effort to improve their earnings. Education helps to rise earning because it enhances workers skills and abilities, thus making employers more productive and more valuable to employees. Educated professionals also adopt a healthier lifestyle and have a higher living standard than the average citizen.

“ Many of what a nation wants from its schooling has nothing to do with money,” surprisingly:- Consider the social and cultural benefits, for instance, making friends, learning social roles and norms and understanding civic roles; But some of the most sought after benefits from education are economic. Specialized knowledge and technical skills often guide youngsters in their course of study as they lead to higher incomes, greater productivity and generation of valuable ideas. These benefits are becoming increasingly vital to our nation’s growth as The Bahamas is already participating in a global economy. The competition among Bahamian and foreigners for the high class paying jobs-is stiff indeed. Today many parents have this gut feeling that education is the way to ensure prosperity for their children; and so they sacrifice to help them achieve this higher learning. It is evident that good quality education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. Investments in education have resulted in many benefits for the individual, society, and the world as a whole. Studies have shown that each year of schooling increases, individual earnings by a worldwide average of about 10%.



“ By the 1980’s however, as better educated Bahamians gained access to the more alluring and lucrative job opportunities resulting from the government’s policy of Bahamianisation, few young people viewed teaching profession as a viable career option, even though it offered extensive opportunities for employment.”[8] It is evident that if the educational system does not attract the ‘ best and brightest minds’, the eventual harvest of returns from the system will be correspondingly low.

“ The Bahamian reality has grave economic consequences for the future of those students who do not reach their potential; but also their collective failure deprives the nation of the skills necessary to fuel sustained economic prosperity. These consequences may not be fully appreciated in the Bahamas; but there is universal agreement among the world’s leading economist in this regard.”[9] Their reasoning is that massive illiteracy leads to massive cognitive skills shortage. These are the basic skills that facilitated all learning and create prosperity in the 21st century. This skill shortage explains why Bahamian businesses, large and small, consistently import foreign labor to fill their legitimate needs. Gary S. Becker, the Nobel Laureate in Economics goes so far to say “ New technological advances clearly are of little value in countries that have very few skilled workers who know how to use them. Economic growth closely depends on the interaction between new knowledge and a country’s ability to learn.

#### Role of Education in Cultural Character of The Bahamas

The cultural benefits of education are harder to identify. Our Educational system facilitated the transmission of certain valued, attitudes, and

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behaviors through critical reflection the educational system is instrumental in preserving and promoting cultural identity and diversity. The study of Bahamian cultural studies began with independence, accelerated throughout the 1970's, 1980s' and culminated in the 1990's. According to Nicolette Bethel, Director of culture; key aspects of Bahamian tradition cultural are under threat and in some cases in danger of disappearing. Former Prime Minister Perry Christies notes that " it is important to the development of our national identity and to the deepening of Bahamian culture that we bring the highest level of government support to the efforts of our artists and artisans." [10] Our educational system needs to be reformed so that the history and literature of the Bahamian people are preserved and without clear commitment to broadly share the common ideals, our common cultural heritage will not survive. There is much difficulty in this area of Bahamians recognizing and embracing its distinctive culture.

Our geographical setting makes it hard for us to " claim distinctiveness of folklore, crafts, architecture, and to preserve its distinctive styles of music and dance or to develop a national literature". [11] In 2002 Prime Minister Christie appointed the National Commission for Cultural Development in The Bahamas. It is hoped that a paradigm for cultural development will be enunciated and executed. Education and especially the establishment of the College of the Bahamas in 1974 played a vital role in the revitalization of Bahamian Arts and Culture. Bahamian students saw the addition of Arts & Crafts to the school's curriculum; opportunities for art and cultural training were provided through annual summer workshops. Today, the rises of art galleries, annual art competition, among students, are just some of the ways

education promotes and preserves our cultural heritage. Many Bahamian artisans now see themselves as “ an integral part of the development of this country, and as the guardians of the national ethos, which is greatly at risk in a world that is determined to create the anonymity of a frontier – less global village where the fluidity of computer language and currency transfer pass all too often for art.”[12]

## Conclusion

Educational reform will be successful only with a sustained commitment of every element of society: stakeholders, political party, teachers and parents pulling together to ensure reform of the Educational system: reform must be at the top of the list of long-term priorities. Are we doing enough to use all of our formal and informal educational resources and processes to bring greater development, improvement and enrichment to all the people of our country so that our personal, social and economic standing in the world may be enhanced?

Our government run educational system, is virtually a monopoly, and is responsible for educating an estimated 85 – 90% of our students.

Unfortunately, the “ system” seems to have failed in its endeavor to educate its citizens. This has resulted in many not maximizing their full potential of becoming “ fully educated”. With failing grades, violence, demoralized students and teachers, is there any hope of our country getting back on track towards a first-class status?

“ Despite the challenges in education, the vast majority of the nation’s young people lead productive, purposive lives. For the most part they are law-abiding and looking forward”.[13] Today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth—or poverty—of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for learning can look forward to lifetimes of unprecedented economic fulfillment. But in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary prospects of lives of quiet desperation. Are we doing enough to use all of our formal and informal educational resources and processes to bring greater development, improvement and enrichment to all the people of our country so that our personal, social and economic standing in the world may be enhanced?

The Nobel peace prize recipient, philosopher, theologian and man of God, the late Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. made this profound statement which can be our guiding light:

WHEN EVIL MEN PLOT, GOOD MEN MUST PLAN.

WHEN EVIL MEN BURN AND BOMB,

GOOD MEN MUST BUILD AND BIND.

WHEN EVIL MEN SHOUT UGLY WORDS OF HATRED,

GOOD MEN MUST COMMIT THEMSELVES TO

THE GLORIES OF LOVE.

WHERE EVIL MEN WOULD SEEK TO  
PERPETUATE AN UNJUST  
STATUS QUO, GOOD MEN MUST SEEK  
TO BRING INTO BEING A REAL ORDER  
OF JUSTICE.

This paper has been instrumental in enlightening and confirming the author's passion and beliefs regarding the importance of education in our society. In it highlights of a few of the social, economic and cultural benefits that education brings to our nation are revealed. These effects are substantial, but nevertheless will be more potent and effective, once our education system is reformed. The author hopes this paper will be instrumental in helping you, the reader, value education.

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