Tracing educational changes through world history

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Introduction

This paper presents a broad overview of education through history, focusing on understanding key moments of change. The purpose of exploring educational changes through history is to identify the drivers of large-scale educational change and reflect on what implications this might have for promoting similar types of systemic educational change today.

We begin by introducing an analytical approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness between major societal shifts and changes in the educational landscape. Thereafter, societal changes and associated educational impacts are discussed according to six major historical periods in the timeline: early societies and antiquity, postclassical society, early modern period, the 19th century, the contemporary period, and recent events. Throughout history and across regions and countries, many educational changes have occurred. This paper does not document every change; instead, it highlights key transformations that enable analysis of how change unfolds.

In documenting major historical educational changes, *Education in World History* by Johnston & Steams (2023) provided a valuable exploration of how education has evolved across different historical contexts and regions. The book spans from antiquity to the present day, tracing educational developments globally whilst pointing to the interaction between societal shifts and educational practices across time. It served as the primary resource in the process of crafting the history of education which was cross-referenced with other resources as indicated throughout the paper.

For a non-US perspective, particularly for readers interested in Asia, consult UNICEF at: https://www.unicef.org/eap/what-we-do/education. The article specifically addresses the rights of all children to an education.

A wealth of relevant material specific to China is available at Scholaro: https://www.scholaro.com/db/countries/china/education-system.

Adopting an historical perspective

The evolution of education is a product of history. Education has been shaped by social transformations and steered by various societal factors.

Social change and social institutions are fundamentally linked to educational changes. Taking a historical perspective requires us to analyse systems of education and social institutions in an integrated way.

Our present situation in which compulsory schooling appears to many to be natural has an historical context; the forces at work and reasons why we spend so much of our lives in school can only be adequately explained from a perspective that looks at schooling historically in terms of the means employed and the ends desired. It also examines where these institutional designs leave the individual caught up in school and how these institutions are hinged upon keeping this individual — you, for all practical purposes — compliant.

Changes in education are fundamental to world history, reflecting regional cultures and political patterns. Reflecting on the history of education illuminates past human experiences and provides a reflexive tool to better understand our current context. This paper offers a perspective on the Western world, but also incorporates other regions.

Early societies, antiquity, and early classical period

The transition from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural societies demonstrates the first major change in people's way of life and the structure of their daily activities. These changes also affected children and how their time was spent. Playfulness, games, and humour were included in daily activities for both adults and children. In hunter-gatherer societies, there was no distinction between daily life and time for learning. Information was passed through oral traditions; storytelling was part of this culture.[1]

The rise of agriculture (10,000 years ago) marks a major change towards more complex societies. There was a distinct movement from the skill-intensive and knowledge-intensive hunter-gatherer societies to labour-intensive agricultural societies.[2] The transition towards more complex societies meant that more formal mechanisms were needed to share culture. More complex agricultural tasks needed specialized skills, such as seeding, irrigation, and animal farming. Children were included in manual farm work, caring for siblings and household chores.

Writing was introduced in Mesopotamia (beginning in 3,500 BCE). The cuneiform writing system included 1,000 characters and took 12 years to learn![3] Scribes were highly educated, and these positions were reserved for sons of upper class and nobility. Scribes were trained in basic literacy and then in various fields including law, business, mathematics and religion. Training focused on drills and rote memorization, lecturing, and severe discipline. Writing was used for storing knowledge, long distance communication and facilitating business and government functions.

The principles of Western education began in Ancient and Classical Greece. The Phoenicians introduced the first alphabet of 22 letters in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, leading to a loosening and expansion of literary and intellectual life. The alphabet spread with the regional travel of merchants and played a central role in shaping subsequent writing systems. Initially education focused on producing noble warriors but later shifted towards producing scribes. These scribes were the first 'specialists' to serve the interests of power as writing evolved to track monetary transactions and the size of armies.

During this time, philosophers had a great impact on theories of truth and the value of debate (Socrates, Plato). People actively pursued innovations and showed interest in astronomy, navigation and cosmology, as well as a search for physical, non-mythical explanations of nature and the human body. Pythagoras (580/70–500 BCE) pioneered mathematical understandings of the physical world, influencing further questions about the nature of reality, knowledge and natural science. During the Hellenistic period (323 BCE-30 BCE), Aristotle influenced theories of education, and a curriculum focused on the seven liberal arts; arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, physics, logic and grammar, philosophy.[4]

These innovations were shaped by deep cross-cultural currents and dialogue. Specialized intellectual environments stimulated growth in mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, and religion. Education across these traditions was reserved for elite young men, while training focused on technical literacy, but also included morality and ethics. Classical traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism also emerged in the major centres of development. Each reflected its own distinctive cultures and political patterns, but shared characteristics related to self-discipline, virtue, and purity.

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[1] Gray, P. (2009). Play as a foundation for hunter-gatherer social existence. *American Journal of Play*, 1(4), 476–522.

[2] Gray, P. (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today.* Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education.

[3] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[4] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

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Christianity experienced a rapid explosion and demonstrated enormous educational capacity given the fast pace of spreading messages of universality and inclusion. These messages were easily disseminated and did not require institutionalized schools or formalized instruction. More institutionalized and formalized Christian education began in the second century CE.

Hinduism defined the purpose of education as situating individuals within their station of life and illuminating the path to self-realization for those willing to explore deeper spiritual paths. Buddhism, which is defined more as a social and educational movement than a religion, was inspired by compassion and interconnection that supported spiritual fulfilment for anyone regardless of caste or gender. In China, the role of religion was influenced by Confucian beliefs which praised strict discipline and adherence to the code of moral conduct. Each of these religions or movements placed high value on social order.

Armstrong (2006) argues that the emergence of the world's major religious and ethical traditions across different regions of the civilized world was not coincidental. During this period, major influential figures including Buddha (India), Socrates (Greece), Confucius (China), and Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Israel) emerged. Each of these figures responded to the violence and turmoil of their era. Despite cultural variations, they shared common perspectives, emphasizing compassion, advocating for personal responsibility, and providing practical solutions to tackle fear, despair, and violence.

> All of these systems – Confucianism in China, popular Hinduism and Buddhism in India, monotheism in Israel, and philosophical rationalism in Greece – wrestled in their own ways with how one must live in society, and how to establish new ethical codes. These movements are significant in their impact on expanding educational opportunities, stimulating thought about educational philosophies and development of educational institutions.[5]

These great traditions arose due to intersecting social factors, violence, and cross-cultural influences which stimulated new thought, ethical contemplation and challenges to established norms.

Key themes

The character of education during antiquity and the early classical period was multifaceted and evolved from new aspects of thought, discovery, and philosophical development. New ideas and cross-cultural influences shaped the intellectual landscape, leading to significant advancements. Social changes in the early societies presented the stimulus for education opportunities. Key themes include:[6]

- Religious and social movements were very influential. Universal teachings gained momentum and spread widely across regions.
- Educational opportunities primarily centred around religious and political fields.
- Most of the population remained distant from formal education due to financial constraints or lack of interest. Access to education was restricted, with only a minority of men benefiting from formal learning.
- Education initially focussed on producing noble warriors but shifted from military skills to training scribes in literacy. Both sectors were male focused, and both were vital to increasingly complex societies.

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[5] Armstrong, K. (2006). *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
[6] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

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In reviewing the history of early human societies, the origins of formal education began to take shape. The following elements emerged which shaped the pattern of educational development in coming ages:
• Social change and the development of more complex societies provided stimulus for education.
• Early conceptions of learning and instruction were based on rote memorization and reproduction.
• A two-tiered system of education emerged.
• Education was based on rigid caste systems or stratified social hierarchies.
• The focus was directed towards patriarchal values and education of young men.
• Religion was the primary driver of educational influence.

Prior to the early civilizations, societies used traditions of training that relied on oral communication and storytelling. With the rise of more complex societies and the introduction of writing, new practices emerged. During these times, the nature of learning the alphabet, coupled with the scarcity of writing materials, leaned heavily on repetition, rote memorization, and strict discipline.[7] Societies were heavily stratified and only a few had access to education opportunities. Education activities were profoundly influenced by religious principles and to a lesser degree by commercial and state interests.

Postclassical societies

During the Middle Ages in Europe, significant social, cultural, and political changes unfolded. These included the rise of feudalism and increasingly hierarchical societies, coupled with the expansion of commercial activity and trade. As industry flourished and a new bourgeoisie class emerged, feudalism gradually declined, making way for new commercial demands. Business owners who prioritized profit, sought to extract as much work from labourers as they could with as little compensation as possible. People, including young children, worked long hours in poor conditions.

> In sum, for several thousand years after the advent of agriculture, the education of children was, to a considerable degree, a matter of squashing their wilfulness in order to make them good laborers. A good child was an obedient child, who suppressed his or her urge to play and explore and dutifully carried out the orders of adult masters. ...the philosophy of education throughout that period, to the degree that it could be articulated, was the opposite of the philosophy that hunter-gatherers had held for hundreds of thousands of years earlier.[8]

While most societies remained agricultural, commercial activity gained momentum and rising interregional trade spurred new educational needs. Improvements in political stability and economic well-being spurred renewed interest in European education. During the 12th century 'renaissance', as trade and commercial activity grew, there was a growing need for workers with literacy and numerical skills. Schooling was linked to societal development as societies became more complex, and governments depended more on literate officials.[9]

The church retained authority on teaching as new educational institutions emerged, including parish or village schools, monastic and cathedral schools, and the *studia generalia* or proto-universities. These institutions all began with the study of grammar, classical authors, and Christian religious teachings. Education continued to be reserved for the elite, with many using private tutors.[10]

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[7] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[8] Gray, P (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

[9] Moran, J. (2018). The R/renaissance(s), humanists and classics. *Journal of Classics Teaching, 19*(38), 96-98. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631018000259

[10] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

The earliest universities emerged in the 11th and 12th centuries. By the 1400s, the university model, which was standardized around grammar, classical authors, and Christian teachings, spread to regions across Europe. The university became the essential provider of advanced education and training for growing numbers of state and religious administrators. Monasteries served as educational centres, preserving the arts of copying, editing and translation.

Organized religion, including Islam and Christianity, also had a substantial influence on basic education. Religious ideas had cross-regional influence, contributing to the spread of ideas to new regions through major missionary expansions. For example, the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Europe) was marked by massive missionary efforts to spread Orthodox Christianity. This influence combined classical Greek and Roman intellectual and educational traditions, which spread to Western Europe and fused with Christianity. This period emphasized the value of reading, writing, and basic sciences generating an increase in churches and school for priests to teach.[11]

Islam (Middle East and North Africa) was a major influence through reinforcement of the value of education in the search for knowledge. Islamic leaders encouraged children's knowledge of the Qur'an, while elites competed for placements in academies to support their commitment of faith. By the end of the postclassical period, education and literacy were more widespread in the Islamic region than in any other region in the world. Islamic support for education, and promotion of the educational progress constituted an important educational development in the postclassical period.[12]

Key themes

Educational developments during the postclassical centuries were defined by a mix of continuity and change. Some significant changes include:[13]
- Accelerating commercial activity and rising interregional trade created new educational needs, including mathematical and literacy skills.
- More complex societies spread to new regions.
- Schooling emerged as a vital part of societal development.
- Religion played an enormous role in the development of advanced educational institutions. For example:
  - Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism expanded and affected education in their associated regions. Organized religion in schooling expanded to include a growing demand for priests and growing numbers of students.
  - 'Religions of the book' included the three faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Emphasis on a holy book generated new needs for educated scholars. Religious enterprises established training for priests or imams, who would provide leadership at various levels.
  - Across both Islamic and Christian regions, education reflected and influenced changes in economic life and political structure.
  - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam sponsored several educational innovations, including support for higher education and travel of students to further their education.
  - Education remained closely associated with social hierarchy, so wealthy families had huge advantages in all the educational systems. Education was disproportionately focused on men.

[11] Gray, P. (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education
[12] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[13] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

Early modern period

The Early Modern Period was marked by persistence of old ideas and exposure to new thought. This period is viewed as being on the edge of major transformations.[14]

Between the 16th and 19th century, attitudes about education began to change. Two huge cultural changes – the Renaissance and then the Reformation – highlight periods of significant religious and economic change. Education gained popularity despite the significant divide between rural and urban centres. People began spreading the idea that childhood should be a time of learning, leading to a greater general interest in education and schooling for children.[15]

Continued growth of the European expansion meant a growing middle class had greater access to reading materials and upward stimulus towards education. Expanding commercial and urban growth presented more opportunities for religious and government roles, while the growth of printed materials further stimulated new motivations for learning.

The invention of the printing press had a profound impact on education during the early modern period. It made books more affordable and widely available, allowing a broader segment of the population access to educational materials. The availability of printed materials motivated people from various social classes to learn to read and write. Printed books ensured consistency, resulting in uniform circulation of standardized knowledge across regions. Educational institutions could rely on standardized texts, which improved the quality of teaching.[16] Public schooling slowly developed, and different interest groups (religious, employers, state) expressed various opinions regarding the most important components of education.

The European Renaissance transformed classical learning, emphasizing humanism-focused techniques. The transformation critiqued religion-bound learning and encouraged discussions of civic responsibility. Harsh discipline was replaced by a more human-centred focus. This period also witnessed a growing friction between drills and rote memorization versus creative thinking. Despite attempts to expand the reach of education, though, it remained elitist. Renaissance traditions continued to generate an educational and social elite through private tutors and academies. Labourers and peasants could not afford a formal education.

The friction between Renaissance culture and the Reformation stirred educational changes amongst religious movements. While the Renaissance had an elitist tone, The reformation actively drove mass conversions and mass education. It emphasized the importance of reading the Bible, which necessitated literacy among the general population. The Protestant drive for universal education inspired the Catholic Church to expand its attention to ordinary believers as well. By the 17th century, the impact of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response, combined with Renaissance humanism, generated new educational ideas, debates, and theories. Ideas emerged about universal knowledge and learning, as well as the transformative nature of education. Major religious movements during the Reformation included: Lutheranism, which emphasized education as crucial for spreading the faith, leaving significant impacts in Germany and Scandinavia; the rise of Calvinism in Scotland, which advocated for schools in every parish; and Catholic Jesuits who prioritized

[14] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[15] Gray, P (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

[16] Mark, J. (2022). *The printing press & the Protestant Reformation. World History Encyclopedia.* https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2039/the-printing-press--the-protestant-reformation/

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education, using it to identify and nurture ambitious students who would become future religious leaders.[17]

Changes in the 18th century accelerated trends from the previous two centuries. Protestantism continued to spread basic literacy education and promote advanced training for priests and state functionaries. Catholic missionaries expanded their educational missions to include basic skills and introduced elite training (Jesuits demonstrated major missionary influence). As European commercial activity expanded, and technological change impacted manufacturing and shipping, people expressed greater motivation to acquire literacy or schooling.

The Enlightenment (late 17th century to the late 18th century) marked major intellectual shifts spurred on by philosophers, scientists, and thinkers in Europe and America. The Enlightenment emphasized the scientific method and reductionism. It increasingly questioned religious orthodoxy.[18] Enlightenment thinkers believed that reason and rationality could lead humanity toward progress and wanted to empower people with knowledge and emancipate their minds. Education was no longer about memorizing facts; it was about questioning and debating. Key Enlightenment themes include:[19]

- Flourishing scientific curiosity. Positive empiricism led to breakthroughs in understandings of gravity, gases, and human biology.
- Technological advancements, including microscopes and telescopes, which deepened understandings of physics and astronomy, combined with the development of more advanced technical and specialized skills.
- Surging literacy, making education accessible across social classes. As printed materials became more readily available, the desire for education spread across social classes.
- Expansion of universities, which increasingly valued independent thought and scholarly publishing.
- Enlightenment thinkers championing education for progress and the pursuit of truth.
- Impediments to the speed of change because of the strong religious influence on education. Nonetheless, old ideas gradually changed and paved the way for a broader state-led educational system.

As education became more accessible, different interest groups voiced opinions about what education should include. For example, religious movements valued reading the scriptures and understanding the call to God. Employers valued schooling for instilling punctuality and tolerance for long hours of menial tasks. The state and national leaders strove to use education to create loyal citizenry and future soldiers. In general, education was deemed valuable in creating a homogenous and obedient society.[20] While everyone participating in the establishment and support of schools held different views on what lessons children should learn, they unanimously agreed that children should not be left to their own devices:

> All of them saw schooling as inculcation, the implanting of certain truths and ways of thinking into children's minds. The only known method of inculcation, then as well as now, is forced repetition and testing for memory of what was repeated. [21]

Lessons included monotonous repetition and memorization. Children did not adapt naturally to these techniques, leading to the assumption that their wilfulness should be weakened for effective learning. Punishments were a part of the educational process, while playtime or playful activities were limited.

[17] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[18] Boto, C. (2021). *The Age of Enlightenment and Education*. Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education.
[19] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[20] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf
[21] Gray, P. (2008). *A Brief History of Education*. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

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> In recent times, the methods of schooling have become less harsh, but basic assumptions have not changed. Learning continues to be defined as children's work, and power assertive means are used to make children do that work.[22]

Foucault scrutinized the practice of 'rank' being applied in the newly emerging Enlightenment school system. The mechanism of 'ranking' in the classroom was used to order students into physical groups and into hierarchies, for testing and measuring achievement and for structuring the delivery of content. This ranking system was applied to spatial distribution of individuals (such as rows of pupils in a classroom) and the control of time (school bell and keeping schedules). Foucault described these hierarchical arrangements of individuals and their roles within institutions as serving and maintaining power structures.[23]

> In the eighteenth century, 'rank' begins to define the great form of distribution of individuals in the educational order: rows or ranks of pupils in the class, corridors, courtyards, rank attributed to each pupil at the end of each task and each examination; the rank he obtains from week to week, month to month, year to year; an alignment of age groups, one after another; a succession of subjects taught and questions treated, according to an order of increasing difficulty. The individual was more and more enmeshed in a psychogeography shaped according to the interests of power. Such is the shape of the new schooling being forged during the Enlightenment, soon to be systematically applied by the nation-state.[24]

In summary, despite the variety of educational trends, this period stands out for the influence of different interest groups and their educational objectives. School was deemed necessary to instil information in children and learning was defined as children's work.

> With the rise of schooling, people began to think of learning as children's work. The same power-assertive methods that had been used to make children work in fields and factories were quite naturally transferred to the classroom.[25]

Key themes

In Western Europe, innovative developments laid the groundwork for subsequent transformations in the 19th century. The Enlightenment's intellectual shifts had great impact on educational thought and practice. However, these developments had not yet spread to other regions or reached the global stage, so there existed diversity across regions. To summarize:[26]

- Huge divisions remained between societies that depended on family-based skills training and those that were beginning to extend formal schooling and literacy into a wider population.
- Societies that framed education around Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism had little incentive to adopt European practices. These societies were managing their own societal changes and progress within their current systems.
- Traders and merchants prioritized slave trade and goods over education. In these regions, education stagnated.
- Christian missionaries continued to play a vital role in education across world regions.
- Education was valued by leaders for its potential to benefit prosperity and promote loyalty to region and to ruling regimes. Governments increasingly began to direct aspects of the educational system.

[22] Gray, P. (2008). *A Brief History of Education.* To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

[23] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf

[24] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf

[25] Gray, P. (2008). *A Brief History of Education*. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

[26] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

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- Families identified basic education (literacy and numeracy) as important for future success due to growing commercial activity.

The 19th century

The 19th century refers to a historical period that encompassed significant political, social, and cultural changes that occurred from just before the French Revolution in 1789 to the outbreak of World War One in 1914. Revolutions and wars for independence, such as the American uprising (1775) and the massive French Revolution, both impacted Western Europe. The anti-colonial slave rebellion in Saint Domingue (1790s) also left its mark. This period was characterized by shifting political structures as new forms of constitutional governments emerged, and nationalism found expression through anthems, flags, and school curricula.

In the wake of political revolutions, educational transformations surfaced. Both prompted discussion about the state's role and the necessity of education to cultivate informed and responsible citizens. The revolutionary era also introduced radical ideas, such as recognizing the rights of formerly enslaved individuals and women. Political shifts started to value education's role in shaping 'informed subjects' or 'citizens,' with women gradually included. Nationalism influenced school curricula through its emphasis on fostering national unity and independence.

Britain's industrial revolution during the 1770s brought about significant changes. Industrialization transformed production, transportation, and communication processes. The rapid migration of people to cities also gave rise to new social challenges, including slums and tensions associated with factory work.

Many historians define the Industrial Revolution as the most important transformation in human society since the shift from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to agrarian societies. Ideals about the relationship of literacy to economic progress for the nation and social mobility for the individual became tightly intertwined with industrial growth and political stability.[27] These circumstances set educational changes in motion. Key developments include:[28]
- The growth of factories increased the need for workers with basic literacy, numeracy, and punctuality skills. Schools became important, supplementary institutions to the factory, teaching orderliness and compliance. For example, Carnegie (an industrialist who played a pivotal role in the expansion of the steel industry) and Rockefeller (who played a major role in expanding the oil industry), were great supporters of education, spending more money on education initiatives than the state during that period.[29]
- Education evolved to serve industrial functions, including technical skills (engineers, architects) and responsible citizenship. White-collar workers were in demand, as business expansion drove demand for administrators, clerks, and managers.
- Universities expanded their teaching to include expert training programmes.
- A consensus was formed that basic education should be universally accessible, so industrializing societies extended education to both boys and girls.
- As industrialization advanced, schools instilled values like productivity, punctuality, and cleanliness, traits vital for an efficient workforce and supportive citizens:

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[27] Barr, R., Kamil, M.L., Mosenthal, P.B., & Pearson, P.D. (Eds.). (1996). *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume II (1st ed.).* Routledge.

[28] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

[29] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf

Concepts such as industriousness, punctuality, cleanliness, and supervision became interwoven into notions of social organization, where citizens were integral to the state and actively supported the industrial environment.[30]

Key themes

During the 19th century, education was increasingly valued. It was held in high esteem, recognized for its dual purpose of personal advancement and social progress. Despite variations between Europe and the United States, several common trends emerged across these regions, including:[31]

- Education grew faster than at any previous time. This happened especially at the primary level, although secondary and tertiary institutions also expanded rapidly. In the latter half of the 19th century, the United States, France, and England introduced public education systems with compulsory attendance.[32]
- Governments increasingly funded and regulated the entire education process.
- Conflicts arose between traditional educational purposes (serving elites) and commitment to mass education.
- Concerns about hygiene standards gained importance.
- Schools emphasized punctuality and standardized education, leading to age-based learning.
- School curricula increasingly focused on national history and literature to instil national pride.
- Corporal punishment declined.
- Girls were included, at first only at primary school level, but then increasingly at secondary level. Subjects like home-economics were introduced.

The magnitude of Western imperialism also began initiating change in other regions. Educational changes were central, with a keen interest in understanding and adopting Western innovations and models. By 1900, nearly every society was considering issues related to modern or 'industrial' education and questioning how to elevate educational standards for a larger population.[33]

Contemporary period: 20th century changes

Significant events during the 20th century had massive implications for education, including both World Wars, the Great Depression, the ensuing effects of decolonization, and the process of globalization. Educational responses varied across regions, reflecting regional complexities based on political motivations, availability of resources, cultural traditions, and historical inequity.

World War One (1914–1918) and World War Two (1939–1945) were the first major events. The aftermath of World War One was compounded by the Great Depression in the 1930s, resulting in economic displacement and weakened empires. Simultaneously, fascist movements rose. At the conclusion of World War Two, the United States emerged as a dominant global power. The subsequent Cold War era focused on military matters, leading major Western European nations to establish greater coordination processes that led to the formation of the European Union.

Within this historical context, some educational responses can be identified. During World War One, schools in some countries played a crucial role in mobilizing wartime populations. They integrated

[30] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf
[31] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[32] Matthews, J. (2004). Toward the Destruction of Schooling. *The Anarchist Library*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf
[33] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

war-related subjects into their curricula to foster patriotism and a sense of duty among young people. War-related subjects included lessons on national history in support of the war effort, basic military training, physical fitness, and the use of propaganda to support public morale.[34] Students participated in voluntary activities supporting the war effort, such as community events, fundraising, growing vegetable gardens and rationing. Schools were used as hubs for disseminating propaganda and promoting nationalist sentiment in support of the war.[35]

In the newly formed Soviet Union, the communist regime viewed educational transformation as central to its vision of a new society. After World War Two, a widespread commitment to universal education emerged. In industrial societies, the relationship between literacy, economic progress, and individual social mobility became intertwined with industrial growth and political stability.[36] Schooling gained high social value, strict curricula with national textbooks became prevalent, and graded schooling and standardized testing were widely adopted.[37]

Decolonization exerted significant influence on educational change. From the 1920s, and particularly in the postwar era since the 1940s, waves of decolonization swept the globe. In response, newly formed nations faced having to navigate between the legacies of colonialism and the priorities of nation-building.[38] As former colonies developed new educational systems, they wrestled with tensions of increasing industrial activities and worker production (following the example of industrialized nations) versus building the nation's independence and national identity.[39] During these decolonization movements, transnational dialogues fuelled discussions about racial equality and alternative forms of education, aiming to break free from neocolonial influences.

In response to the trauma of World War Two, genocide, and the economic depression of the 1930s, all countries recognized the need for a global framework to prevent the atrocities of war and economic collapse. The United Nations was established in 1945, followed, in 1948, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which covered all human rights: civil, political, economic, social, and cultural. The UDHR marked the first time in history that education was recognized as a fundamental right for everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, class, or disability. The declaration defined education as a core element of human development, a position that has shaped policies and practices for the past 70 years.[40]

Societal changes during the advent of globalization included political revolutions, industrialization, rapid urbanization, and growing urban working and middle classes. Global industrialization and economic coordination accelerated after World War Two. New types of international interests, including multinational corporations, as well as the establishment of global human rights organizations, emerged.[41]

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[34] Salha, S., Tlili, A., Shehata, B., Zhang, X., Endris, A., Arar, K., Mishra, S., & Jemni, M. (2024). How to maintain education during wars? An integrative approach to ensure the right to education. Open Praxis, 16(2), 160–179.

[35] Donson A. (2014). *Schools and universities*. Retrieved from Schools and Universities (1914-1918-online.net)

[36] Barr, R., Kamil, M.L., Mosenthal, P.B., & Pearson, P.D. (Eds.). (1996). *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume II (1st ed.).* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315206349

[37] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[38] Abraham, G.Y. (2020). A postcolonial perspective on African education systems. African Journal of Education and Practice, 6(5), 40-54.

[39] Barr, R., Kamil, M.L., Mosenthal, P.B., & Pearson, P.D. (Eds.). (1996). *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume II (1st ed.).* Routledge.

[40] United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*. Accessed via the web on 16 July. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

[41] United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*. Accessed via the web on 16 July. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

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During this period, a significant shift occurred in social inequality, from traditional markers like inheritance and caste privilege to income and education levels.[42] Globalization facilitated new forms of collaboration in education, including international mobility of scholars and educational partnerships including exchange programmes, joint research ventures, and sharing of resources. Global interconnectedness stimulated discussion about balancing global and national curriculum content. Simultaneously, as the world economy integrated more closely, educational policies increasingly reflected a paradigm of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberalism in education treated students as consumers, privatized schools, and relied on outcomes-based assessments and standardized tests. These tests were designed for improved efficiency, though critics argue that such testing practices exacerbate social inequalities.[43]

Schooling during the 19th and 20th centuries evolved to what we recognize today as conventional schooling. As knowledge expanded, the curriculum and list of subjects expanded, and the number of compulsory school hours increased. Systems of public education were fully institutionalized. Children's lives and identities became increasingly determined by the school curriculum.

> Over time, children's lives have become increasingly defined and structured by the school curriculum. Children now are almost universally identified by their grade in school, much as adults are identified by their job or career.[44]

Assumptions about the nature of education identified learning as hard work, that children must be forced to learn, their lessons must be determined by an authority, and play is a reward for hard work.

> *Schools today are much less harsh than they were, but certain premises about the nature of learning remain unchanged: Learning is hard work; it is something that children must be forced to do, not something that will happen naturally through children's self-chosen activities. The specific lessons that children must learn are determined by professional educators, not by children, so education today is still, as much as ever, a matter of inculcation...*

That, perhaps, is the leading lesson of our method of schooling. If children learn nothing else in school, they learn the difference between work and play. Learning is work, not play. [45]

The adoption of business values in educational administration was established by the 1930s when administrators saw themselves as business managers or school executives. Managing schools as businesses emphasized accounting, finance, and public relations. Classroom management was concerned with the most efficient operation of the school. School boards were increasingly represented by businessmen. A more utilitarian, career-focused education materialized.[46]

For example, the development of 'scientific management' in the United States revolutionized industrial practices in the early 20th century, affecting education in the following ways:[47]

- The emphasis on efficiency and rationality led to optimized teaching methods, curriculum design, and resource allocation.
- Standardized processes like grading, assessment, and administrative procedures functioned to enhance efficiency.

[42] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[43] Drew, C. Online article. May 29, 2024. *Neoliberalism In Education (Definition, Pros, Cons).* Neoliberalism in Education (Definition, Pros, Cons) (2024) (helpfulprofessor.com)
[44] Gray, P (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today.* https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education
[45] Gray, P (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education
[46] Matthews, J (2004). *Toward the Destruction of Schooling*. The Anarchist Library. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://teias.org/tal/en/a/at/anonymous-toward-the-destruction-of-schooling.pdf
[47] Taksa, L. 'Scientific Management', in Adrian Wilkinson, Steven J. Armstrong, and Michael Lounsbury (eds). (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Management*, Oxford Handbooks.

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- Systematic design applied to schools allowed arrangements and schedules that maximized efficiency and student engagement.
- The introduction of performance metrics aligned with assessing student progress, evaluated teachers, and ensured accountability.

  > No efficient teacher would think of giving a class of students an indefinite lesson to learn. Each day a definite, clear-cut task is set by the teacher before each scholar, stating that he must learn just so much of the subject; and it is only by this means that proper, systematic progress can be made by the students. The average boy would go very slowly if, instead of being given a task, he were told to do as much as he could.[48]

As an illustration, the Gary Plan implemented in Indiana in 1907, was an educational system influenced by scientific management. Its core principles included efficient space utilization, departmentalization of school subjects, and a 'platoon system' for grouping children and maximizing efficiency by using various school facilities simultaneously.[49]

Twentieth century educational variations across regions

The 20th century had the most widespread drive for increased access to education compared to any other time in history. Access to education improved in every country not marked by war.[50] Most societies were engaged in a new commitment to universal education, but historical events and country contexts influenced differences in approach, methods, and content across regions. Below are examples that illustrate this.

North America

Educational changes in North America after World War Two included dramatic expansion of new public schools and formal teacher education. Urban schools increasingly used tests, and coeducation became more common at all school levels. For the first time, 'life adjustment education' was introduced as a subject.[51]

The increasing shift of the labour force from manufacturing to service and professional jobs made education more important for individual careers. From the 1950s, school demands expanded as large cohorts completed high school and moved into colleges.

Debates about race and 'native schooling' surfaced. In 1954, a significant shift occurred as the US Supreme Court ruled state laws establishing racially segregated schools unconstitutional. In the 1960s, the first US federal government intervention into educational funding and social justice was instituted (Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965).[52]

Russia

Cold War Communist authorities banned all private and religious education; the state asserted its authority over secular schooling. The Soviet regime promoted a massive adult literacy programme, and the nationalist school curriculum asserted language and culture using standardized textbooks and rote memorization. The spirit of Russian Soviet nationalism aimed to preserve Indigenous language and culture. Soviet education in the 1930s became increasingly dogmatic and dominated by

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[48]Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. Harper & Brothers. As quoted by Matthews, J. (2004). *Toward the destruction of schooling*.

[49] Thiede, R. H. (2018). *Gary Plan*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gary-Plan

[50] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[51] Gray, P (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education

[52] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

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rigid orthodoxies and driven by administrative interests, with little space for professional autonomy or innovation.

Reform efforts in Soviet education from the 1950s to the 1980s encouraged broader curricular and instructional practices. By the 1970s, like the US at the same time, the Soviet system had achieved universal literacy and nearly universal secondary education. The education system continued to be defined by the suppression of individual and professional freedom, creativity, and adaptability.[53]

Europe

European education systems in the beginning of the 20th century generally continued established practices of commitment to mass education and use of examination systems to identify candidates for an elite track. At the start of the century, tensions emerged between new thinkers. Some identified the value of child-centred education (for example, the Montessori method in 1907 and Piaget's understanding of child development in the 1930s), which was in opposition to Fascist ideas that disregarded ideas of education being liberating. Fascist education programmes focused on loyalty to the state and used propaganda to promote racist and nationalist messages (for example, in Italy and Germany).

Despite the challenges posed by Fascist movements, education in industrial societies has consistently expanded over the past century. Curriculum changes shifted toward more contemporary subjects; educational achievement became important for nations and individuals.[54]

In line with trends in America, postwar European schools aimed to tackle inequality and emphasized secondary and university education. Since the 1950s, global immigration to Western Europe and growing population diversity led to further educational changes. Educational practices expanded with secondary schools including more technical specialties. New technical universities and business schools emerged, serving the needs of modern economies and providing training for careers, including for working-class and lower-middle-class students.

The establishment of the European Union promoted European integration. Educational exchange programmes allowed students and teachers freedom of movement between countries, and also marked further intensification of the globalization of the 1990s. European educational systems in the later 20th century were characterized by greater social equity and access, even as some structural segmentation and differentiation persisted.[55] By the 21st century, some countries began to consider their nations' historic role in imperialism and the slave trade, prompting calls to revise the teaching of history to recognize past injustice and foster true decolonization.[56]

Decolonization and transformation of national educational systems

Postcolonial societies displayed significant regional differences in education due to historical inequities, varying degrees of government commitment to education, resource availability, resistance to change stemming from established traditions and cultures, and persistent gender inequities.[57] Despite regional differences, most countries engaged with tensions around adopting Western practices versus incorporating regional or local practices. The increasingly universal expansion of

[53] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[54] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[55] Kushnir, I. (2021). The Role of the European Education Area in European Union Integration in Times of Crises. *European Review,* 30(3), 301-321.
[56] Gray, P. (2008). A Brief History of Education. To understand schools, we must view them in historical perspective. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education
[57] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

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primary education and basic skills brought most of the world's population into literacy for the first time in world history.[58] However even as surface-level improvements expanded access, historical inequities persisted.

Some common experiences across postcolonial regions include:
- Accelerated educational development influenced by transnational movements and dialogue.
- Expanding primary school education and huge improvements in access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as expanding technical training.
- Creative new ideas resulting from efforts at revolutionary change or national liberation.

Breaking from Western ideals and the emergence of new educational ideas

During the early and middle 20th century, many new educational ideas surfaced, driven by the motivation to improve education. These ideas revolved around expanding access to education and seeking alternatives to Western educational norms and practices. Education held a central position in transnational debates between the West and other regions of the world. It encompassed discussions that critiqued colonialism, racial inequality, labour politics, and how to achieve real social change without economic dependence on the West. Some influential new thinkers made significant contributions to education.

For example, Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the admired Indian leader and advocate of nonviolent resistance, left a deep impact on education. Gandhi's educational philosophy steered away from the colonial education system prevalent in India during his time. He believed that education should be a holistic journey toward self-awareness and societal improvement. Gandhi emphasized 'learning by doing' and included mother-tongue instruction and training in agriculture and traditional artisanal skills. Sustainable action and community contribution were core lessons. Truth, non-violence, and self-discipline were considered essential components of Ghandi's holistic education and sought to break down caste barriers and promote social harmony.[59] Gandhi believed that education should be contextually relevant, adapting to the needs and realities of the environment. Education should be about holistic development of the individual.[60]

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), the influential Brazilian educator, believed that true learning transcends dialogue; it involves ethical action and reflection. According to Freire, people must critically engage with their social reality and reflect on their experiences to transform both themselves and their environment. Like Ghandi, he viewed Western education as a trap, focussed on indifference, rather than stimulating creative growth. Freire supported a collaborative process of teaching, in which learners should be co-creators of knowledge. He advocated 'problem-posing' and active participation in education and believed that popular education should give students the tools to fight oppression, to shape their own ideas and regain their lost humanity.[61] Freire believed that a truly democratic society could only emerge from a democratic school that fostered sustained and transformational dialogue.[62]

Another important anti-colonialism voice was that of African leader, Julius Nyerere (1922–1999).[63] Nyerere was the first prime minister, under British rule, and later the first president of independent

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[58] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[59] Agrawal, A.R., Bishnoi, N.K. (2022). Mahatma Gandhi's Views on Education and the Indian Education System—Some Insights. In: Mittal, R., Singh, K.K. (eds) *Relevance of Duties in the Contemporary World*. Springer, Singapore.

[60] Tandon, S. (n.d.). *Gandhis Educational Thoughts*. mkgandhi.org

[61] Freire Institute. *Concepts used by Freire*. https://freire.org/concepts-used-by-paulo-freire. Accessed via the internet on 22 July 2024.

[62] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[63] See article about Nyerere at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Nyerere

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Tanganyika. Influenced by Gandhi. He shaped his political and educational ideas around cooperative economics and self-sufficiency, deliberately breaking away from neocolonialism.[64]

Nyerere's educational initiatives were directly influenced by the context of Tanzania at the time. When gaining independence, the country had three separate systems of education: one for Europeans, one for Asians and one for Africans. Funding was allocated separately, with the bulk going to European schools, while African schools received the smallest portion. There were too few African primary and secondary schools to adequately serve the population; higher education was poorly supported. Nyerere's policy of 'Education for Self-Reliance; was a landmark in the history of education in Tanzania and a contribution to global education. It poses a critical analysis of what the goals and purposes of any education system should serve in the society. [65]

Nyerere's educational legacy revolves around self-reliance, lifelong learning, and education as a force for liberation and equality. He believed in democratising knowledge and ensuring equal access. He initiated programmes to support the peasant majority and advocated for adult education as crucial for community empowerment.[66]

While colonial educational policy is recognized to have used schooling as a form of social control in the colonial environment[67], there remains the need for a nuanced understanding of the various processes and actors involved. Various actors and groups were involved in shaping educational policy including missionary agencies, colonial governments, humanitarian organizations, and scientific experts. There was continuing tension between providing a Western-style education (European curriculum) and preserving cultural identity. Colonial education was also marked by paradoxes. For example, while it was a powerful instrument of social control and racial segregation, many African independence leaders were trained in colonial schools where they gained knowledge and skills that would later empower them in their quest for independence.[68]

The role of new global organizations and continued influence from the West

The newly independent countries were also influenced by the establishment of bilateral aid initiatives after World War Two. These aid organizations fostered educational exchanges and prompted competition for educational aid and assistance programs. For example, the United Nations (1945) provided a global platform for dialogue and collective action, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasized the fundamental principles of human dignity, equality, and justice. Within this context, UNESCO provided for international collaboration in education and culture.[69] The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which emerged in 1961, channelled substantial resources into educational activities for traditionally underserved populations by increasing access to education, which improved the overall quality of education through enhancing teaching methods, curriculum design, and learning materials. Although bilateral aid organizations intended to support development, Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) have led to mixed outcomes and in some cases reinforced dependency.

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[64] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.
[65] Kuhanga N. (n.d.) *Nyere's influence on Education*. nyerere_lifetime_legacy_nicholas_kuhanga.pdf (juliusnyerere.org)
[66] Nyerere J.K. (1967). *Education for Self-Reliance*. Dar es Salaam. Government Press.
[67] Abraham, G.Y. (2020). A postcolonial perspective on African education systems. African Journal of Education and Practice, 6(5), 40-54.
[68] Kuhanga N. (n.d.) *Nyere's influence on Education*. nyerere_lifetime_legacy_nicholas_kuhanga.pdf (juliusnyerere.org)
[69] UNESCO recognized the pivotal role of higher education institutions and research in transforming the teaching and learning of Africa's history. For example, to counter the skewed perspectives on how African history is taught and how Africa is perceived, in 1964 UNESCO launched the General History of Africa (GHA) project, reconstructing Africa's history, freeing it from racial prejudices ensuing from the transatlantic slave trade and colonization.

European nations also sought to develop educational ties with their former colonies. Their approach involved aid provision, collaborative university partnerships, and the formation of testing systems. Other multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, offered significant funding for education and technical training. While these organizations had many implications for educational systems in decolonized societies, most of them were directed towards spreading Western-style or formal education in the spirit of 'modernization' and the goal of economic development.[70] Many aid programmes have been criticized for fostering dependency instead of developing sustainable local education systems. In many cases, these programmes were misaligned with the recipient countries' priorities, and some aid was provided with conditions that prioritized the interests of the donors.[71]

New national systems of education amongst newly independent countries

As a growing number of countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia gained independence from colonial rule, the new national governments established education ministries committed to the expansion of schooling at all levels. For most, achieving the objectives of new (non-Western) models and breaking free from inherited colonial systems were difficult to accomplish.[72] Many institutions continued to rely on colonial languages (English and French), and some former private and missionary practices were adopted into the new public systems. In several African countries, educational systems continued to depend on British or French publishers and examination systems. University accreditation and assessments often remained dependant on the metropolitan centres.[73]

New national systems of education were characterized by a strong commitment to expanding literacy and numeracy and advancing technical and professional training in the pursuit of economic advancement and social mobility. New national education systems often included some traditional education content to infuse a sense of national history and identity. For example, some new African systems fostered a traditional sense of collective solidarity (Ubuntu); in 1986 the Indian government mandated inclusion of yoga training and other traditional cultural content in the secondary school curriculum. State schools in many Muslim countries included mandatory courses on Islam.[74]

Despite enormous advances in education for newly independent nations since the mid-20th century, many challenges were encountered. These nations faced systemic inadequacies in attempting to accommodate the growing demand for education. Classrooms faced overcrowding and resource shortages, high teacher absenteeism, poorly trained teachers and the continued use of harsh corporal punishment.

Investigating the educational landscapes of postcolonial societies reflects a variety of complex responses across regions. These variations arise from numerous factors, including political imperatives, resource availability, cultural legacies, and historical inequities. The particularities of three postcolonial regions are compared below.

India

After gaining independence in 1947, the Indian education system underwent significant shifts from colonial foundations to post-independence experimentation. In defining its new education system, India wrestled with elements of the colonial period, coupled with the need to foster education in village schools, and to revitalize Hindu, Muslim and Gandhian educational practices. Managing

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[70] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

[71] Maglen, L. R. (1990). The Impact of Bilateral Aid on Educational Development: The Case of Australia and the South Pacific. *Comparative Education*, 26(1), 83–93.

[72] Abraham, G.Y. (2020). A postcolonial perspective on African education systems. African Journal of Education and Practice, 6(5), 40-54.

[73] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

[74] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

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scarce resources,[75] engaging with language debates, curriculum reforms, and the pursuit for national identity all played a role in shaping India's educational journey.[76] The new government was committed to providing basic education and made substantial strides in literacy improvements.

Despite advances, India continues to grapple with historical challenges including debates about using English (reflecting imperial past and neoliberal influences) versus the importance of local languages entangled with persistent caste and religious discrimination. Education in early postcolonial India emphasized the interaction between expansion, experimentation, and managing deep inequalities along with inadequate resources. Ideas about modernization and forming a national identity are inseparable from the consequences of its colonial history and the impacts on culture and education.[77]

Africa

At the start of the 20th century Africa was still reeling from the effects of colonialism. When colonialism was defeated and most colonial powers left the continent, they left behind their educational legacies.[78] Early colonial education systems were often limited in scope and resources. They primarily served the elite and focused on basic literacy and vocational skills. In the 1930s, Africa was economically dependent on Europe, and as a result heavily affected by the world wars and the Great Depression. This impact prompted a shift in focus with colonial administrators beginning to acknowledge the economic and social impact of education. Education was no longer solely about imparting knowledge; it became a tool for development.[79] During the 1960s a wave of independence swept across Africa, and by the 1970s most African states had gained independence. As these newly independent states sought to redefine education, their goals were shaped by political aspirations, colonial inequalities, and the desire to build self-reliant nations. Education was no longer solely about literacy; it became a means to assert identity, foster economic growth, and empower citizens.[80]

The educational landscape of early 20th century Africa was complex. Variations across countries were shaped by colonial legacies and evolving priorities as Africans navigated independence.

Another critical factor in understanding the evolving nature of education in Africa was the effect of internationally imposed budget restrictions during the 1970s–1980s. Many African countries faced externally imposed budget constraints due to debt crises. Structural adjustment programmes, enforced by Western donors and organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), compelled these nations to reduce public education funding and teachers' salaries. These programs often introduced tuition fees, encouraged privatization, and opened domestic educational markets to international providers. Africa's educational landscape remained complex, shaped by systemic inequality, poverty and dependency.[81]

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[75] Sherman (2018) traces the approach of self-help in communities. Due to resource shortages, the Indian government relied on 'socialism of scarcity' which determined that the government did not immediately monopolize control of education, rather encouraged self-help in communities to build educational institutions. This system unfortunately further entrenched existing inequalities.

[76] Sherman, T. C. (2018). Education in early postcolonial India: Expansion, experimentation and planned self-help. *History of Education, 47*(4), 504-520.

[77] Poddar, P. (2006). The power of mantras: Postcoloniality, education and development. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 14*(2), 189-220.

[78] Abraham, G.Y. (2020). A postcolonial perspective on African education systems. African Journal of Education and Practice, 6(5), 40-54.

[79] Trnovec S. (2019) *The Conquest of the African Mind. History, Colonial Racism, and Education in Senegal and French West Africa, 1910–1945.* Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press.

[80] Kallaway P. (2020) *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa. Education, Science and Development*. Abingdon-New York: Routledge.

[81] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History.* London: Routledge.

Despite advancement in access to education, there remain deep racial, economic, social, gender, and educational inequalities in many Africa countries. Debates about decolonization, Africanization, and the indigenization of knowledge remain current.[82]

Latin America

At the beginning of the 19th century, education in the newly independent republics of Latin American offered limited education, reproducing existing European practices.

Latin America's educational landscape during the 20th century was multifaceted, marked by expansion, student activism,[83] and evolving priorities. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the region suffered heavily because of its dependence on imports from the United States. As a result, Latin American leaders moved towards economic self-sufficiency and made changes to use state-supported education to industrialize their countries to lessen their neocolonial dependence, especially on the United States. Latin America also participated directly in the new transnational dialogues about progressive methods and developed their own distinctive regional and national educational innovations.[84] Primary education (including rural education) rapidly expanded. Although enrolment numbers were impressive, this expansion did not correspond to an improvement in education quality.[85]

The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) impacted the Latin American region and spurred an intensive new commitment to mass or 'popular' education. There was a demand for rural empowerment, land reform. and a radical expansion of education. Indigenous rights and culture were highlighted, and there were efforts to incorporate more popular and Indigenous elements into Mexican national identity.[86] By the later 20th century, compulsory education in Mexico was extended to age 15 and Indigenous rights and language were increasingly valued. By the 1990s, reforms tackled access for students with disabilities and offered specialist teacher support. By the 21st century in Mexico, at least 95 percent of all relevant-age students were attending primary school.[87]

Brazil entered the 20th century with a less advanced educational system and a lower literacy rate than that of Mexico. Brazil's education system has evolved through several educational reforms, each responding to the different political circumstances of the time.[88] During the authoritarian regime of the military dictatorship (1964–1985), the focus was on industrialization and technical education, with resources directed towards expanding expertise among the elite. Despite aspirations for 'education for liberation', Brazil was constrained by directives from above. With the coming of a more social-democratic regime in the 1980s, educational change in Brazil advanced. The 1988 Constitution motivated for educational advancements that improved literacy rates, reintroduced previously

[82] Matasci D. (2022) Decolonizing Education: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges. *African Studies Review.* 2022;65(3):761-770.

[83] Student movements in Latin America played an important role in education reforms and resistance to the various sociopolitical and economic inequalities that historically have characterized the region. See Donoso, Sofía, 'Student Movements in Latin America: Pushing the Education Agenda and Beyond', in Federico M. Rossi (ed.), (2023). *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American Social Movements*. Oxford Academic Online. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190870362.013.19

[84] The Córdoba Reform Movement of 1918 holds immense significance in Latin American higher education history. The movement demanded significant reforms, including university autonomy, academic freedom, and a break from conservative traditions.

[85] Frankema, E. (2009). The expansion of mass education in 20th century Latin America: A global comparative perspective. *Revista de Historia Económica / Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History, 27*(3), 359-395.

[86] Johnston, M.S., & Steams, P.N. (2023). *Education in World History*. London: Routledge.

[87] Frankema, E. (2009). The expansion of mass education in 20th century Latin America: A global comparative perspective. *Revista de Historia Económica / Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History, 27*(3), 359-395.

[88] Weller, W., & Horta Neto, J. L. (2021). The education system of Brazil: An overview of history and politics. In S. Jornitz & M. Parreira do Amaral (Eds.), *The education systems of the Americas*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41651-5_3

banned subjects and improved teacher training. Brazil continues to navigate high demand for university attendance, which continues to favour the elite.[89]

During the 20th century, regional differences persisted across postcolonial societies. These differences stem from varying political contexts, resource availability, and the impact of historical legacies that shaped systemic social change. Educational improvements include improved literacy rates, primary school attendance, and broader access to secondary and tertiary levels. Although some historic inequalities have been reduced, postcolonial societies continued to grapple with historic imbalances, resources shortages and social divisions in their efforts to design and implement new forms of education.

Key themes

Major global events in the 20th century caused significant educational shifts, which differed across regions and were influenced by political agendas, access to resources and historical disparities.

While the 20th century is marked as having significantly increased access to education with more countries and more children able to acquire formal learning than ever before,[90] these surface-level changes continued to be shaped by historical legacies that hindered genuine transformation. Key drivers of educational changes which characterize the 20th century include:

- Decolonization prompted educational change; however inherited colonial practices created deep structural divides that were difficult to break free from.
- Despite their aspirations for alternative education systems, new governments faced challenges of historical imbalances, resource shortages, and social divisions as they attempted to design and implement new educational forms.
- Postcolonial education was entangled in difficult debates about how to proceed in addressing the relics of colonialism while prioritizing nation building.
- Global economic expansion entangled educational system changes into prioritizing industrial activities.
- As global industrialization and economic coordination gained momentum, new international actors emerged, such as multinational corporations, global human rights organizations and global aid programs. Each of these actors exerted some influence over education.
- Globalization presented new forms of educational collaboration, including increased international mobility for scholars, educational partnerships and resource sharing.
- Simultaneously, as the world economy integrated more closely, educational policies increasingly reflected a model of neoliberal globalization and business values were adopted in educational practices.

The 20th century educational landscape reflects a tension between continuity and the need for change. Despite substantial social and technological shifts during the 20th century, educational systems have remained relatively unchanged in form and structure. While superficial improvements expanded access to education, historical inequities remained embedded in educational systems presenting persistent challenges. Educational responses were intertwined with the drive for industrialization and its associated economic operations.[91]

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Recent events

By the start of the 21ˢᵗ century, most nations adopted similar educational practices on how schools and universities were expected to be organized and operate. Societies' perception of the value of education continued to expand across the globe and most nations shared a similar vision of education.

The term 'grammar of schooling' was coined to describe the long-ongoing and unchanging core elements of schooling.[92] These elements include the use of regular structures, rules, and standardized organizational practices that shape how schools and universities function. For instance, it includes practices like classifying and organizing students into age-based cohorts and structuring knowledge into subjects relayed by a teacher in a self-contained classroom. The teacher controls the learning process, maintains discipline and assigns grades based on performance. Student ability is tracked, and achievement of a minimum grade grants a pass to the next grade level.[93]

Although its key elements originated in Western practices and European colonialism, this consistent 'grammar of schooling' prevails worldwide.[94] These globalized educational patterns have a long history of development and spread through imposition, imitation and voluntary implementation. The increased adoption of these practices was fuelled by increased global mobility among scholars and professionals, alongside the ongoing impact of bilateral aid and international assistance programs.[95]Despite presenting alternative forms of learning and schooling (for example child-centred, blended learning, community schools), these alternatives struggle to gain traction in the face of steadfast practices.[96] These long-established practices are embedded in the educational structure and are assumed to be fundamental to education.

> The grammar of schooling operates at such a deep level that its rules become invisible, just part of the way things are.[97]

Educational narratives within the global consensus pay lip-service to new educational approaches such as promoting personalized learning or child-centred schooling. These aspirations, however, seldom translate into successful application. While these ideas sound promising, it is essential to recognize the complexities and limitations of achieving change in the face of profoundly change resistant educational systems.

Other transformative ideals aim to achieve equity and inclusion by ensuring access to education for all social groups.[98] Despite these aspirations, challenges persist in translating these principles into effective practice worldwide and remain far from being realized. Achieving this global consensus is a complex undertaking, which must recognize the influence of entrenched historical inequalities, and the challenges of dismantling systemic barriers.

At the start of the 21ˢᵗ century, the educational landscape in economically developed regions and less developed regions reflects different circumstances. A broad comparison of the educational scenarios across regions continues to reflect different educational priorities. While developed regions consider how to better prepare students for the technical workforce, less developed regions lag in terms of

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basic provision. For example, many societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America face substantial challenges due to widespread poverty and as a result face limited educational opportunities. Similarly, there exist educational divisions between urban and rural areas. Urban areas generally have better educational infrastructure, including schools, libraries, and internet access, while rural regions lag due to limited resources. In many developing countries, livelihoods are tied to agriculture, and children from farming families are included in seasonal work demands, affecting their school attendance. Poverty forces some families into informal labour markets. Children in such families often miss out on education due to work obligations or household and childcare obligations.[99]

Access to higher education also varies significantly across regions. Developed countries have well-established universities, while many developing nations struggle to provide tertiary education opportunities. Universities are predominantly located in urban centres, disadvantaging rural students.

In addition to the challenges of providing access to education in less developed regions, other challenges include overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers, and outdated materials. Effective education is hindered by a lack of infrastructure such as schools, libraries and access to learning resources. Gender gaps persist, especially in rural areas where levelling the playing field for girls' education was identified as a global goal.[100]

The drive to improve access to education and ensure education as a fundamental human right promotes the narrative that education is a tool for empowerment. In this narrative, the right to education is valued in promoting healthier lifestyles, creating spaces for personal growth and presenting greater opportunities to particate in formal labour markets and subsequently improve livelihoods. This storyline overlooks the inherent connection between education and economic imperatives.

The continued interplay between education and economic priorities

This historical reflection demonstrates that education and social changes are inherently linked. Education in the 21st century remains vulnerable to the pressures of economic influence, social upheaval and political tensions.

One major development of the current era includes the extension of education to cover a broader span of childhood and even early adulthood. Schools now offer education to younger children, preparing them for their future careers and providing an opportunity for economically disadvantaged families to give their children a head start. The debate over early formal education often centres on its potential to overshadow the importance of informal and playful learning during early childhood. However, for children from impoverished and sometimes unsafe environments, early school enrolment can offer essential care and access to nutritious meals.

As education continues to be highly regarded, more individuals seek further education after completing secondary schooling, and families actively encourage their children to achieve higher levels of education than their parents.[101]

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> For a growing number of people, completing secondary education no longer sufficed, meaning that more and more people were spending a quarter of their lives in school.[102]

The expanding demand and range of education has implications for cost, including a rising need for trained teachers and growing competition for entry into elite institutions. Accelerated changes in the economy and workplace have placed additional demands on the education system.[103]

Neoliberalism was posed as a solution to address tensions about the costs of educational expansion and to address previous failures in achieving educational equality and inclusion.[104] These principles dominated international organizations and aid organizations, which demonstrated influence in the educational sphere (World Bank, IMF).

The neoliberal approach in education emphasized competition, individualism and measurable outcomes.[105] The principles of achievement were reinforced with precise curricula, testing systems and test-based accountability.[106] Methods devised for accountability and evaluation were extended to measure the competence of schools and teachers too, leading to reduced teacher agency. The neoliberal narrative frames schooling as a good economic and social investment, which is necessary to provide skills needed for the future of world of work.[107] These practices emphasize skills for productivity that prioritize measurable outcomes over holistic development. The focus leads to teaching to the test, narrowing curricula, and neglects critical thinking and creativity. Other educational challenges associated with neoliberal alignment include overcrowding in classrooms due to efficiency goals. These impact on individual attention and teaching quality. Standardized testing further stifles creativity and diversity in learning, thus increasing economic gaps resulting from privileged students benefitting more from market-oriented practices and prioritizing economic imperatives over holistic practices.[108] Neoliberalism in education was designed to reinforce economic advances through generating labour and human capital. Its plan for educational expansion serves to protect the elite and promote their interests.[109]

The 21st century has become synonymous with globalization and the interconnectivity of countries, people and places. Globalization however is not a distinct event or linear process but rather a set of processes which operate unevenly in time and space. As a result of these uneven forces the degree of interconnection between various parts of the world is in continuous flux. Few parts of the world are unaffected by these processes however the impact thereof remains uneven. Core role-players of this interconnected world are transnational corporations who exert considerable influence over national governments and their economies.[110]

Global change is also synonymous with 'space-shrinking' technologies of transportation and most importantly communication. With the development of digital technologies, there has been some

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excited debate about the value of digital literacy and the incorporation of technology in teaching practices. In terms of curriculum, advances in technology in highly industrialized societies caused a revision of the methods and content of education.[111] For example computer literacy was offered as a subject and high-technology societies focussed on technical subjects: STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). In high-technology societies, STEM subjects take priority over humanities subjects like literature, history and languages which are less favoured and, in some instances, discouraged.[112]

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is generating considerable excitement in education, with promises of personalized learning, automated administrative tasks, and real-time feedback. AI and emerging interactive learning experiences, use of online platforms, hybrid learning, and interactive videos have emerged as new avenues for education which propose the need for what has been coined '21st century skills'. The concept of 21st century skills refers to a set of competencies deemed necessary for success in the modern interconnected and globalized world, which include communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy.[113] Under the guise of enabling individual success in the modern world, these necessities once again reflect new economic needs of increasingly complex societies. For example, competency-based education is another 21st century trend, which shifts the focus from timeframes and content coverage to mastery of specific competencies or skills. Progress is assessed according to proficiency rather than timeframes.[114] This approach is critiqued for its neoliberal alignment and focus on the economic imperatives of preparing students for the workforce.[115]

Notwithstanding the introduction of new technologies and new forms of communicating, the current educational landscape remains surprisingly resistant to transformation. Despite the hype generated by AI, it is unlikely to resolve the educational challenges faced by most of the world's students, especially those in impoverished countries. Access to education remains unequal and digital learning resources and classroom technology are accessible only by a privileged few. For the vast majority, public education continues to grapple with systemic issues including overcrowded classes, and socioeconomic disparities. Public schooling remains plagued by low quality instruction, with teachers who are poorly qualified and compensated.

Key themes

Despite the emergence of new debates and changes at the turn of the century, the fundamental features of modern education remain similar across most regions. Key components of education which characterize the 21st century include:
- Public, state-supported, and state-supervised systems dominate, with a persistent commitment to mass education.[116] The period of childhood remains dedicated primarily to formal education.
- The 'grammar of schooling' persists, and tests and grades remain crucial for determining educational progress. Despite emerging alternatives, the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to education remains inflexible and resistant to change.

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- Neoliberal alignment in education is criticized for prioritizing market-driven approaches, efficiency, and competition. Economic imperatives drive decisions related to curriculum choices, standardized testing, and accountability measures which prioritize skills directly applicable to the labour market. This narrow focus neglects broader aspects of human development, creativity, critical thinking, and citizenship.
- Access to education remains unequal across regions and within countries. Many countries lack financial resources to meet the objectives of free primary education; low-quality teaching is a significant global problem.[117]
- Global challenges include a shortage of well-trained teachers, and due to financial constraints, teaching professions are not sufficiently resourced.
- Continuous developments in technology are driving a wedge between low and high-income countries. The adoption of technology is slower in low-income countries due to resource constraints, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to education and training. These countries struggle to keep the pace of technological advancements.[118]

Despite numerous ideas about change, there is no evidence of them impacting public education on a large scale. Traditional education systems remain largely unchanged; they are increasingly misaligned with the needs of students. Alongside these constants, new debates and concerns about the future of education are ongoing. This presents an opportunity to reflect on lessons from previous eras about what may drive education systems to transformation.

Educational themes across historical periods

In reviewing the six historical periods some common themes are identified. Each theme can be contextualized within its historical backdrop reflecting the prevailing characteristics of that time. Remarkably though, despite major historical developments these themes persist across the analysed historical periods. The enduring presence of these themes across diverse historical eras points to deep-seated educational concerns. The themes include:
- Regional disparities in education highlight inequalities rooted in historical periods.
- Debates about who should have access to education have long centred on patterns of exclusion.
- Gender-based disparities in education have persisted throughout history, with patriarchal views from early agricultural civilizations only becoming more balanced in recent decades.
- Cross-cultural influences have introduced new alternatives and educational considerations.
- The increasing economic value of education has led to its subsequent management and commodification.
- The time devoted to education has steadily increased, with most of childhood now dedicated to learning, extending well into adulthood.
- There is an ongoing contrast between Western education and regional educational varieties.

Throughout history, educational themes have adapted to meet societal and economic demands rather than undergoing fundamental transformation. Educational systems are moulded by external pressures and continue to serve these influences. They often resist change due to the strong economic forces driving them. Although education is often heralded as a means of liberation and progress, its primary role remains to equip individuals to fulfil the evolving needs of society.

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Drivers of educational change

This historical analysis demonstrates that educational change does not happen in isolation. In reflecting on the history of education, each change reflects a response to 1) the impact of new religious and social movements, or 2) new pressures of complex societies, the needs of the state and economic demands (agricultural revolution, industrial revolution, military events, globalization and technology).[120] Educational practices, content and principles echo the societies they serve. In this analysis of major educational shifts, the following circumstances are identified as central factors for driving change:

Educational changes are driven by increasing societal complexity. As societies become more complex and their functions require more skilled tasks, education adapts to meet evolving needs. Major shifts in societal complexity like the transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies and the industrial revolution provoked major educational responses. Modern society's increasing complexity is driven by globalization, digital technology, rapid information flow, and interconnectedness. These new complexities pose challenges for the current educational landscape.

Educational inequalities often mirror historical dependencies. Regions that were once centres of power or economic influence tend to maintain advantages and lead educational change. Historically marginalized or exploited areas face greater challenges and are deemed to require support in achieving global educational standards. These regions often model Western practices, which emphasize standardized curricula, testing and economic outcomes. In contrast, regional or local approaches may prioritize cultural information, community values, and context-specific content. While Western education provides a global framework, regional varieties ensure relevance and cultural continuity. This ongoing tension reflects the complex interplay between local educational philosophies and the need to perform according to global agendas.

New educational thought is stimulated by cross-cultural interaction. The tension and opportunities presented when cultural and traditional practices interact is a valuable stimulus for new thought and exposure to alternative educational practices. Education has consistently been central to discussions, generating new ideas and debates in response to perceived societal challenges. Although innovative thinking often occurs on the fringes and the adoption of alternatives is slow to gain traction, the emergence of new ideas inspires critical analysis and encourages the exploration of new educational solutions.

Education represents a valuable commodity intertwined with economic significance. Education is increasingly valued and consequently increasingly managed. The role of education is not only to impart knowledge but is also influenced by the requirements of societal progress and economic drivers. Educational changes are driven by economic imperatives, which require increasing management approaches designed to maximize learning outcomes while minimizing resources. These include standardized curricula, teacher training and streamlined processes. Education systems continue to prioritize enrichment and empowerment of those in power, rather than emancipation and freedom for all.

Interested parties increasingly adapt and expand their influence over education. Religious institutions, state actors and commercial entities play significant roles in shaping education. Their involvement is driven by strategic interests, whether religious, political, or economic. Interested parties recognize that education yields outcomes, both for individuals and society. They value education for its usefulness, understanding that an educated populace contributes to its own goals and agendas. Educational policies often reflect the priorities and interests of the relevant stakeholders.

Identifying drivers of educational change provides valuable insights when reflecting on the evolution of education systems, the assumed benefits of current practices, and opportunities for meaningful transformation.

Thinking about educational transformation into the future

To support large-scale transformation, it is essential to reflect on historical cycles of change in understanding contemporary challenges. Education as an integral part of life is closely linked to societal development and has the potential to disseminate valuable human principles. It is crucial to critique and understand the influences on educational methods and policy outcomes that tend towards economic principles of productivity, efficiency and achievement.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the commodification of education often serves the interests of those in power. Education is increasingly perceived as a marketable product, shaped by economic demands. These processes, which cater to economic and societal needs, are misleadingly presented as individual advancement. It is falsely believed that current practices are adopted because they are the most beneficial in supporting individuals towards liberation. These widely accepted narratives need to be critiqued to reveal their dehumanizing effects, including the exacerbation of social inequality and the overemphasis on narrowly defined standards of achievement. Historically, alternative educational practices that integrate humanistic principles have struggled to gain widespread acceptance because they do not serve the interests of those in power. It must be recognised that educational practices are driven by mechanisms that do not prioritize true individual support and freedom.

The globally entrenched belief that compulsory schooling is natural must be unpacked from a historical perspective that analyses educational methods and desired outcomes. Schools need to be understood in the context of the institutions they serve and support.[119] While many alternatives to dominant educational styles have been proposed, these innovative practices are seldom taken up because they are misaligned with the needs of the state and/or economic interests.[120] Education systems prioritize values that support capitalist progress and productivity, reinforcing hierarchies and preparing students for compliance. This emphasis on conformity, rather than curiosity and critical thinking, hinders intellectual growth. Knowledge is treated as an external commodity, most effective when aligned with existing authority structures.[121]

Moreover, education systems still grapple with issues of privilege, access, and the delivery of quality services. Regional disparities in education persist, with some countries benefiting from advanced educational practices while others are under-resourced. This gap underscores the necessity for equitable distribution of resources and support. However, simply expanding access to existing education will not address the deep-seated flaws within these systems.

The hype around technology and digital developments, is often praised as a catalyst for major change. However, contrary to popular belief, technological advancements alone are not transformative in education. Applying new trends to old practices will not lead to deeper educational changes. True transformation requires an overhaul of current systems, including the recognition of those interests being served, and a departure from the belief that traditional methods value individual interests.

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It is crucial to carefully examine educational practices and reevaluate longstanding methods in light of the social and historical purposes they serve. This approach is essential for stimulating thinking about achieving deeper educational change and moving beyond the flawed systems that have governed education throughout history.

Conclusion

A review of education through history, focusing on key moments of change, acknowledges the interconnectedness between major societal shifts and changes in the educational landscape. Societal changes and their associated educational impacts were discussed across six major historical periods: early societies and antiquity, postclassical society, the early modern period, the 19th century, the contemporary period, and recent events.

The journey of educational change through these historical periods illuminated the development of educational practices, revealing many dated practices that continue to be used today. When scrutinized, educational systems emerge as being less about individual liberation and more about catering to the needs of society and the economy. As society develops in complexity, education has been utilized to serve these changes.

Current trends and new proposals for transformative educational practices present promising new ideas, but in reality these new ideas are unlikely to produce change for the majority of the population. Reflecting on the history of education illuminates past human experiences and provides a reflexive tool to better understand our current context and how we might proceed towards transformation in the future.

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