

## Introduction

Hennie Steyn, Deon Vos & Louw de Beer

### Education in Modern Society

#### **Abstract**

The paper substantiates the position that education and modern society, a ‘society’ in change because of present day developments in all the different sectors at local as well as national and international levels, are mutually dependent on each other. A modern national society expects its education system to provide in its differentiated education needs for their members to function effectively both in society and the international world. To effect this, society should, through the synchronizing participation of the coordinator, guide their education system according to the basic philosophy of education and should also formulate and prioritize their education needs. In addition, society should provide sufficient funding for providing for their education needs. The education system should apply its professional competencies to organize and strengthen the components and elements of that system in such a manner that the education needs can be provided for. Education should support the well-being of the community, but should not be regarded as the cure for every wrong.

Keywords: education, education system, modern society

#### **Introduction**

Everyone (or almost everyone) accepts and appreciates the fact that education is an instrument of incontestable importance to support the solid and creative development of any safe, organized, attainable and sustainable society in the world. However, to serve this supporting and empowering role in modern society, education should be correctly understood and implemented. It should also, at the same time, be recognized that education is not the cure for every wrong in society. The topic of this paper refers intrinsically to the question of the relation between ‘education’ and ‘modern society’ as well as to the powerful supporting role of education in order to enable a safe and sustainable community.

When one tries to answer the question about the relation between education and modern society, it will depend on the underlying philosophical point of departure. The points of departure can be the individualistic perspective or the socialist perspective or the perspective of mutual dependency. This paper bases its premise on the third option, namely that there is a mutual dependency between education or the education system and the community; that both have the responsibility to support the attainable and sustainable development of each other; and that each will gain from the well-being of the other.

Thus, the aim and contribution of this paper is to explain the reciprocal relation between education and modern society, in its different spheres of realization. Therefore, firstly the use of the concept ‘modern society’ and its expectations of education will be explained; secondly the theoretical basis of the relationship between education and society will be discussed; and thirdly some guidelines for the realization of this relationship will be provided. Therefore, the aim of this paper is not to identify and analyze the characteristics of individual modern societies. The individual modern societies, which are affected in unique ways by the wide-ranging new challenges, differ too much between, for example, those of Europe, the North- and South Americas, the East and Africa, to make really useful findings in the context of this paper. In the same way, the responses of education and education systems to these diverse challenges are too many and too localized to identify useable best practices. Thus, this paper rather tries to provide the instrumentation, in the format of markers, that a particular modern society can apply in order to provide unique localized and contextual education provision in order to confront the ever-changing challenges that modern societies are experiencing.

## **Modern society’s challenge to education**

### *Modern society*

On the question “*What is a modern society?*” the best answer is probably that ‘modern society’ is a ‘society’ confronted, effected and shaped by present-day developments in all the different sectors of human existence at local, national and international levels. Thus, in *essence a ‘modern society’ is any existing society-in-change*. These present-day developments refer, for example, to trends in the demography, the economy, the politics, language and communication, science and technology and philosophies that have a determining influence on a particular community – small or large. The *trends* are known over many years, but they are realized uniquely in different ‘modern societies’. For example, Wolhuter (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2008, pp. 12-34) provided a conjecture of *probable societal trends or tendencies* that will be manifested in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He referred, for example, to the intensifying influence of population explosion, particular in Third World countries; the changing age-pyramid; urbanization, migration patterns, including the internal and external mobility of people; the ecological crisis, scientific and technological progress; transformation in agricultural methods; biotechnology; communication; information and knowledge revolution; robotics and automation; emergence of multiculturalism and minority interests; economic liberalization and privatization; unemployment and poverty, especially in the Third World environment; self-employment and decentralization of workplaces; decentralization in general; individualization; democratization, regionalism and internationalism as well as the values revolution. The real content of these trends will change from one ‘modern society’ to the next ‘modern society’.

Thus, a modern society can be explained, similar to previous definitions, as an organized group of people associated for some specific purpose and on account of a common interest, generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and developing a sense of communal identity and activities, usually in a particular geographic area within the context of present-day societal trends. A national society

is a 'large' group of people involved in persistent social interaction, sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations (Collins, 2001; Oxford Dictionary, 2018; Weyers, 2011, p. 54). This structured group of individuals and organizations should provide a safe, sound and healthy environment to individuals and organizations to enable them to function effectively in an integrated manner within society's unique characteristics. A first step is to provide the safe environment in the realm of the similarities and uniqueness amongst individuals and organizations of that society. Similarities and differences in society have been realized simultaneously in aspects such as, for example, gender, economical activities, occupations, ideals, cultures, interests, capacities and abilities. These similarities and differences should strengthen mutual backing up and support amongst the members of a society, each with a unique contribution. The similarities and differences lead in one way or the other to a sense of interdependence and belonging – the glue of a safe society. Interdependence usually results in cooperation that avoids mutual destructiveness and leads to common purposes, striving towards a happy and comfortable life. Members of any society must co-exist in that society and should manage conflict. Modern national societies are presently organized in some type of democracy consisting of individuals and different organizations, for example state organs, the organizations relating to career and commerce and industry, community organizations (with the purpose to enrich and strengthen society) and family structures recognizing the principle of unity and diversity. Finally, the mere *nature of any 'modern' society is that it is in a dynamic, constant change, because of unique external and internal tendencies, and that every modern society is characterized by the need that its members should adapt* to the general as well as specialized internal and external challenges that occur (Anon, 2017; Editorial, 2017; Macionis, 2009).

### *Education needs of individuals and organizations in a national society*

A national society will expect education to provide the individual learners with differentiated educational opportunities to treasure and develop the present features of the particular community within the context of the conjecture of *probable societal trends at local, national and international levels*. Through these educational opportunities learners will acquire the essential competencies to support and maintain the welfare of a safe and healthy society.

In this context, the state will expect learners to contribute to the welfare of the country and not living off the welfare of the country. Families will expect learners to contribute to the well-being and development of individual families and the family as an institution. Commerce and industry will expect learners to acquire such competencies as will enable them to enter commerce and industry as productive employees and employers. Societal organizations (such as religious organizations, sport bodies, organizations to preserve nature) expect their future members to share the required competencies to become supporting members. Lastly the learners, as self-actualizing individuals, will expect education to provide sufficient differentiated education opportunities to enable each learner to empower themselves for a gratifying life, integrated and coordinated with the rest of individuals and organizations at national and international levels (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2014, pp. 98-

100). Another challenge for education systems is the fact that the fabric of societies is changing at a fast pace. Thus, societies expect of education systems to keep abreast with this fast pace of change and to keep providing for the accompanying changing education needs. Because the various local, national and international trends realize uniquely in each country, each of these trends should be analyzed for application in each situation.

## Responses by education systems to these challenges

### *Introduction*

Education and the education system should have a vision to provide for the education needs of the particular society that it is assigned to. To achieve such effective education provision to support the sustainable development of a modern society that is characterized by continuous rapid change, the following **seven simplified markers** are important for consideration (not necessarily in the specific order), namely (1) a suitable definition of education should be used; (2) the structure and functioning of the education system should be understood; (3) the different types of education systems should be identified; (4) the external and internal contextual tendencies should be correctly processed; (5) the education needs of the various groups interested in education should be organized; (6) the required infrastructure to provide for these education needs should be well-thought-out; and (7) the necessity to provide additional education programs and projects should be decided on. It is *of little use to provide general education responses* to the changes in particular modern societies, because the responses in a particular society should be unique to the context of the particular society – each situation needs unique analysis and responses.

### *Defining the concept 'education'*

The **first marker** for consideration in developing a sound relation between education and modern society, is to use a conceptualization of education that inherently recognizes and provides for the interaction between education and society. To fulfil this proviso, education can be defined as the planned teaching activities by the teacher to support the individual learners to acquire the mutually agreed-upon competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes/values) in order to perform their different roles in life. The '*planned teaching activities*' include, for example, the typical elements of teaching such as the teaching aims, the teaching strategies and methods, the content, the assessment and the applicable qualifications that can be acquired. It is emphasized that the teacher should '*support*' the learners to learn or to acquire the agreed-upon competencies themselves. The '*mutually agreed-upon competencies*' include the integrated combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which include communicative, numerical, social, economic-financial, scientific, technological, physical, environmental and philosophical competencies. These competencies are mutually agreed-upon, *by all parties involved*, as acceptable, valued and achievable outcomes of education. The learners should be able to apply these competencies in order to perform their different roles in life. These *roles* can be divided into the following categories, namely that the learners should function as *self-actualizing individuals*, as *members of families*, in their

*occupational involvement, as active citizens and members of community organizations that contribute to the welfare of the community* (Steyn, Wolhuter, Vos & De Beer, 2017, pp. 11-12).

### *The education system*

The **second marker** to include in order to ensure a sustainable relation between education and society, is that an easy and understandable definition of the education system should be used. In this context, the education system can be defined as the *framework* for effective education opportunities to provide for the *education needs* of the members and organizations in the *target group* or society (De Beer, 2017, p. 12). The *framework* of the education system consists of four components, namely the education system policy, education system administration and education support services, that function in an integrated manner to provide for the diverse and unique education needs of the target group or national society. A *reciprocal relation* exists between the target group and the education system. The *target group* of a national education system consists of the national community of a particular country. The *main purpose* of the education system is to meet the *education needs* of the target group. The *success* of that education system is determined by the level to which that education system manages to change its services in order to meet the ever-changing education needs of the target group (Steyn, Wolhuter, Vos & De Beer, 2017, pp. 18-22). The education system as an integrated structure of components and elements should provide for changes such as technological and scientific changes, as well as changes in numbers of the community.

### *The type of education system*

The **third marker** for consideration is to determine the *type* of the education system being either a dependent or an independent education system. The *nature of the relationship* between the education system and its target group determines the type of the education system concerned. In the case of the *dependent education system*, that education system is established by a particular society, especially to provide in their education needs. In this case, the education system concerned is obliged to apply its professional capacity to analyze and integrate the ever-changing education needs and put together the required infrastructure to meet these needs. All national education systems fall in this category. In the case of the *independent or private education systems*, those systems choose their individual target groups themselves and provide for all or part of the education needs of the identified target groups (Wolhuter, Jacobs & Steyn, 2015, p. 37). Dependent and independent education systems can, for example, be used to cater for multilingualism and multiculturalism in modern society.

### *The external and internal contextual tendencies that influence the structure and functioning of an education system*

To further ensure a positive relationship between modern society and the education system, the **fourth marker** is to determine whether the related education system is *structured and functional within and according* to the sphere of the respective *external and internal contextual tendencies* of that education system, and thus ensures an education system within the ambit of society. The external

*contextual tendencies* refer to those influences from outside a particular education system that co-determine its structure and functioning. The external influences include the following: the demography; the climate and geography; the physical and psychological characteristics of the target group; science and technology involvement of the target group; language(s) used; socio-economic status of the community; political/institutional structures of the target group and the major philosophical tendencies. The influences of the external contextual tendencies are realized within the sphere of the *internal contextual tendencies* whether it be of educative, historic or reciprocal nature (Wolhuter, Jacobs & Steyn, 2017, pp. 48-51).

Regarding the national education system, the external contextual tendencies relate to the actual living environment of national society and co-determine the different aspects of society and, thus, the education needs of national society. For example, the demography of national society determines the numbers that should be served by the education system and where the education institutions will be situated; the level of science and technology involvement of the society will co-determine the curriculum of the education system; and the socio-economic tendencies will, to a large extent, co-determine the availability of finances to improve the sophistication of the particular education system. Thus, each of the external contextual tendencies should co-determine the structure and functioning of the related education system (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2014, pp. 137-148).

#### *Structures of educational interest: organizing their education needs*

The **fifth marker** refers to whether the educationally interested structures are organized in such a manner that the relationship between the education system and modern society benefits. Society as the target group, in its relation with the education system, can be divided into *two main groups*, namely the *structures of education interest and the coordinator*. The *education interest groups* consists of individuals and organizations, such as the state, parents, religious organizations, companies in commerce and industry, political parties, sports bodies and environmental conservational organizations. All these individuals and organizations *have typical education needs* that are characterized by its peculiar similarities and differences. The interest groups themselves should formulate these education needs *in order of priority*, for the education system to provide education accordingly. The *coordinator acts as a link* between the education interest groups and the education system and has the responsibility to bring together the representatives of the target group in order to collectively define, organize, integrate and prioritize their education needs (which are often of opposing nature such as differing political or religious views), to determine the underlying philosophy of education and to provide the required funding to afford the purposeful functioning of the education system. In the case of the national education system, the state-in-its-education-organs acts as coordinator and realizes its responsibility through the respective education departments. Usually, an advisory body is constituted to represent the education structures in their deliberations with the coordinator. Functionaries of the particular education system cannot and should not themselves identify and prioritize these education needs or determine the underlying education philosophy – it is not their place to prescribe or dictate to the community – but the functionaries can assist the

community, via the coordinator, to identify and prioritize their education needs (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2014, pp. 113-120).

### *Efficient infrastructure*

The **sixth marker** represents the required actions to establish the required education system *infrastructure*, within the domain of its components and elements, in order to provide for the identified education needs of society. To provide for the education needs, the functionaries in the education system administration should set all the components and elements of the education system in action. The functionaries in the management structures should develop an appropriate system education policy and collect the required funding from the specific interest groups in order to provide and maintain a suitable, attainable and sustainable structure for teaching, by completing the various elements, such as the education levels, education institutions, curricula and physical facilities. The applicable elements of the support services, such as the services to the learners and the educators and teaching activities should be provided. An important challenge for the education system is to provide curricula that are repeated every year, in order to achieve nationally accepted qualifications, but at the same time to keep up and abreast with the continuous changes and developments that occur in modern societies. The officials of the education system should, for example, establish the required *education institutions*, apply the curriculum cycle in order to facilitate the development of purposeful *curricula and qualification structures*, make provision for successful *teacher training*, establish sufficient *entrance requirements* for learners, decide on the *language(s) of teaching and learning*, construct the *required teaching facilities*, as well as the inclusion of modern digital communication and teaching opportunities (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2014, pp. 83-98; Van Wyk & Steyn, 2016, pp. 290-292). Applicable *education support services* should also be provided for the learners, the teaching personnel and the teaching activities. All of these should efficiently support the learners in preparing themselves for their different roles in life by achieving the required levels of knowledge, skills and attitudes/values (Steyn, Wolhuter, Vos & De Beer, 2017, pp. 161-182). This process also highlights the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the target group and the particular education system.

### *Additional education projects*

A **seventh marker** is to determine whether a positive relation between society and the education system is strengthened by the provisioning of specific *goal-directed education programs and education projects*, additional to the recurring curricula and qualifications, for example, such as the provisioning of:

- *Vocational education*: Vocational education can be distinguished, but not separated from, general formative education on the premise that it provides education and training that are, to a greater extent, more directed to the competencies required by a particular vocational field (Kalimullin & Masalimova, 2016).
- *Road safety education*: The improvement and/or maintenance of traffic safety is a priority in many countries. To support the increase of traffic safety, the provisioning of traffic safety education and training is a common project in

many countries, for example, the project of driver education and training in Canada (Mayhew & Simpson, 2002).

- *Education to prevent health problems such as Aids prevention*: Education to prevent the consequences of AIDS and to promote safe sex is and was a subject of intense debate in South Africa. The debate focuses on the school phase where this education project should be introduced, what the curriculum contents should be and what kind of training should be provided to the teachers. The general finding in South Africa is that such an education project has particular benefits as well as critical challenges (Thaver, 2012).
- *Non-formal education*: The contribution of non-formal education, those learning opportunities outside the school system, to quality education should always be realized (Steyn, Wolhuter, Vos & De Beer, 2017, p. 16).

## Conclusion

The final conclusion is that education and modern society are mutually dependent. National societies expect their respective education systems to provide education that will support the maintenance and development of societies' unique and valued characteristics and to provide their members with applicable education opportunities to function effectively in society and in the international world. Society should, through the synchronizing participation of the coordinator, guide their education system on the basic philosophy of education. Society, in turn, should formulate and prioritize their education needs. Society should also provide sufficient funding for meeting their education needs.

The education system should apply its professional competencies to organize and strengthen the components and elements of that system in such a manner that the education needs can be provided for continuously, while the ever-changing tendencies and short-term changes are also effectively cared for. Education should support the wellbeing of the community, but should not be regarded as the cure for every wrong. Education and the education system are not the 'recovery box' that should take care of all wrongs in society. However, they can serve as important instruments to assist society to correct all the relevant societal ills.

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Prof. Dr. Hennie Steyn, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa,  
Hennie.steyn@nwu.ac.za

Dr. Deon Vos, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, Deon.vos@nwu.ac.za

Dr. Louw de Beer, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa,  
Louw.debeer@nwu.ac.za