The Role of Technical Education in the process of State Building: The case of post-conflict Timor-Leste (East Timor)

Luis A. MARQUES

1. Salesian Polytechnic, 4-6-8 Oyamagaoka, Machida, Tokyo. Japan, marques@salesio-sp.ac.jp

Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays an instrumental role in the technological advancement and economic sustainability of many nations. This study offers an analysis regarding the reality of Technical and Higher Education in Timor-Leste. Education in Timor-Leste has never been high on its list of priorities and specially Technical and Higher Education is even less regarded. The first University was established under Indonesia rule in 1986, however the whole system was brought to its knees during the conflicts in 1999. To respond to this reality UNESCO has created a Timor-Leste UNESCO Country Programming Document (TL-UPCPD). Following this UNESCO Program, the Timor-Leste Government developed a Strategy Development Plan on Education. Higher education in Timor-Leste is divided into Higher Technical Education and University Education. Government data about Higher and Technical Education shows a work in progress. However, this falls short from meeting the demand required for Educational Institutions, teachers, students and quality of education. All of these aspects of education are necessary for the development of Timor-Leste as a Nation. This paper concludes that a comprehensive and dynamic approach to strengthen TVET delivery in Timor-Leste is absolutely essential in order to achieve stability and growth in the economic development of the nation.

Keywords: Technical Education, development, State Building, system, strategy.

1. Technical and Higher Education

In the history of Timor-Leste it is clear that education has never been a priority. There was no university under the Portuguese. The first university was established in 1986 under Indonesia rule (The University Timor Timur – UNTIM). As for Technical Education: There was one Polytechnic and the technical courses were based in Becora and in Hera, close to the University campus. The Polytechnic provided courses in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, Civil Construction and Accountancy. In 1999, during the conflicts the building was destroyed, books were mostly destroyed and some were also looted.

To confront the situation soon after 1999 UNESCO created a Timor-Leste UNESCO Country Programming Document (TL-UPCPD), the program strategies and activities are interrelated with the three areas of cooperation specified by United Nations Development Assistance Framework UNDAF, which are considered critical for UN support:
1-Democratization and social cohesion, including state-building, security and justice.
2-Poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods, with particular attention to vulnerable groups, including youth, women, IDPs and disaster-prone communities.
3-Basic social services encompassing education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and social welfare and social protection.1

A stark reality of education in Timor-Leste is the number of teachers without enough educational training to carry on the teaching at technical schools and universities. In 2011 the National Agency for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NAAAA) furnished the “Summary Statistical Information of all Institutions” a Higher Education Statistical Data.

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A. OVERALL DATA (2011 DATA)

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2. Purpose of the TL-UCPD

In response to increasing requests from its Member States the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is adopting a new country-based approach to strategic programming.

Timor-Leste-UNESCO Country Programming Document (TL-UCPD) sets out the framework for UNESCO’s multi-sector cooperation strategy with Timor-Leste, in alignment with the country’s priorities as stated by UNDAF. This is the first TL-UCPD. Prepared in cooperation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (DRTL), it will serve as the consolidated basis for UNESCO’s support to and cooperation with the country toward the realization of its national goals and its commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in collaboration with the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Timor-Leste. ³ (p14)⁴

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2011 Higher Education Statistical Data “Summary Statistical Information of all Institutions”
National Agency for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NAAAA) Dili, May 2011

www.unesco.org/jakarta

Date from the Office of the Director Nacional do Ensino Tecnico e Superior, Ministry of Education.

2011 Higher Education Statistical Data “Summary Statistical of all Institutions”
National Agency for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NAAAA) Dili, May 2011
3. Higher Education Development Strategy

Timor-Leste Government developed a Strategy Development Plan on Education, which stands for Higher Education as well. Higher education in Timor-Leste is divided into Higher Technical Education and University education, both of which have been funded to ensure maximum access, equity and quality for students. Currently, the higher education sector is dealing with a number of critical issues that require a broad and effective approach, including:

1-The development and implementation of new regulatory frameworks and funding mechanisms for public and private higher education institutions
2-The establishment of a National Qualifications Framework
3-Further development of the National Agency for Academic Assessment and Accreditation, which has responsibility for determining standards and criteria for quality assurance of all higher education institutions
4-The development of an efficient management system to coordinate all government interventions in higher education and set priority targets and budgets
5-The establishment of Polytechnics to offer Technical Higher Education that is specific to Timor-Leste’s development needs

Prior to 2004, 17 higher education institutions were in operation with over 13,000 students. At the start of 2011, only 11 institutions were operating, nine of which have academic accreditation but student enrolment had increased to 27,010 students enrolled. Since 2009, female enrolments in higher education have improved by 70%. In 2002 the Universidade Nacional de Timor-Lorosa’e (UNTL) was established, which is the only public University in Timor-Leste. For this reason a legislative framework has been developed to ensure its autonomy. UNTL serves the national purposes of conducting research and provide knowledge to the community strengthening Timorese culture and democracy.

Now, Higher education is offered by 17 Universities and Polytechnic Schools registered with the Directorate of Higher Education, including the National University, UNTL. However, in 2008, only six universities and eight institutes and academies were functioning. The 2008 higher education data revealed that 10,098 students were enrolled in the six universities and 3,477 in the eight institutes and academies. The GER in higher education was a low 10.2%, with males registering 8.4% and females, 12.4%. Higher education in Timor-Leste suffers from problems of access to the institutions, quality of education and relevance of the importance of education among the people. The low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is caused, among other things, but mostly by poverty. Most parents do not see higher education as relevant or adequate to provide access to employment. Licensure examinations do not exist; thus, students enter the workforce with only a school diploma. The National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation was established only in 2006 to define standards and criteria for academic accreditation and assessment of higher education institutions and their programs.

The national education policy for 2007–2012 includes the creation of two new Polytechnic Schools and the reform of the education management and administration services. This reform includes institutional training on technical, pedagogic, administrative and financial support and control, and the supervision of the education system, including improving the capacities of school inspectors.

There are at present ten private universities in Timor-Leste. At the moment there is the tragic reality of the courses offered by those universities that do not meet the social and economic needs of the country. The priority would be to have more courses directly relevant to the labor market and the improvement of innovative and entrepreneurial skills which there is a great need at the moment for the professional and economical development of the country.

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6 Data from Timor-Leste - Strategic Development Plan 2011 - 2030 pp.23– Palacio do Governo www.tls.searo.who.int/.../Home_NATIONAL_STRATEGIC_...
8 Timor-Leste - Strategic Development Plan 2011 - 2030 – Palacio do Governo
In order to meet those challenges in the future, Timor-Leste Technical and University Education regarding the development plan must focus on achieving the following objectives:

1-Post secondary Technical Education will offer specialized applied courses of one or two years, which will aim to develop practical, problem solving abilities while developing broader educational abilities. Courses will be provided at Polytechnic Institutions or in contracted institutions linked to Polytechnics and lead to diploma level qualifications.

2-University education will focus on investigating and creating knowledge, which provides a broad scientific, technical and cultural preparation of further study and research, or entry to the labor market. Courses will be provided in universities, institutes or academies and lead to baccalaureate, degree, masters and doctoral qualifications.

4. Strategies

In order to achieve these goals the Timor-Leste government will apply the followings strategies:

1-Implement a strong quality assurance regulatory system through the registration of all national qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework and the continuing development of the national quality assurance body, the National Agency for Academic Assessment and Accreditation, with responsibility for determining standards and criteria for quality assurance of all higher education courses

2-Develop an efficient management system to coordinate government interventions in Higher Education and set priority targets and budgets.

3-Establish Polytechnic Institutions, including one for each of the strategic industry sectors. This will include an engineering Polytechnic related to the petroleum industry, to be established in Suai, a service industry Polytechnic to cover tourism and hospitality, to be located in Lospalos and one Polytechnic for agriculture, which will be established on the south coast. As a critical institution that is fundamental for building human capital and contributing to the national development, the UNTL will be adequately funded to allow it to effectively perform its functions. The UNTL will be expanded to consist of seven faculties: Agriculture; Engineering, Science and Technology; Medicine and Health Sciences; Economics and Management; Education, Arts and Humanities; Law; and Social Science. To support the critical area of training in engineering, a modern Faculty of Engineering complex will be built at Hera. The plan is to prepare and continue meeting the commitment to develop a quality Higher Education system that provides services according to internationally recognized quality standards.9

On the occasion of my research visit to Timor-Leste I had the chance to visit the campus of the National Technical School in Hera. I was able to see first-hand the situation of the campus after it was destroyed by the Indonesian Militia in 1999 and how it has been rebuilt with the help of foreign assistance from Japan, Europe, Australia, etc.

The Development Plan and the different projects are ambitious, however the reality is that Technical and Higher Education are midway in their development with many obstacles to be overcome to reach certain standards necessary as an educational system to be effective in the rebuilding of the nation.

With international help a huge effort has been made to reestablish the system, however the situation is still catastrophic. Teachers have almost no training and the facilities lack modern infrastructure. In contrast to private institutions, some of the public institution facilities have been renewed, but the work done was not up to standard and the ceilings of some schools collapsed. Tools and machinery needed for lesson have been stolen or destroyed and teachers and students have to cope with what they have. The total number of Institutions and teachers is far less than the growing demand. This reality is harsh but true.

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9 Timor-Leste - Strategic Development Plan 2011 - 2030 – Palacio do Governo
www.tls.searo.who.int/.../Home_NATIONAL_STRATEGIC_...
5. Recommendations

1-It would be necessary to institute a one-year internship program for graduates of Technical and Vocational Education and Training to acquire further professional skills. The trainees should be assured of paid job placement or support for private establishment and be reimbursed for the cost of their training. The training institutions should also receive sponsorship from the government as it is done in other countries such as its neighbor, Malaysia.

2-There is a need for Timor-Leste people to embrace value orientation in order to improve their perception of goods made in Timor-Leste. Improved services will definitely encourage local production through TVET.

3-The governments should devise a credible and practical means to integrate and strengthen links between non-formal work in art communities with formal TVET programs. In this manner the needs of the immediate environment would be addressed. It would also create and enhance employment opportunities of unskilled and illiterate adults and youths in society.

4-TVET should be separated completely from general education, but still managed by the ministry of education. In this way, TVET would be encouraged and emphasized. Achieving good and adequate budget for TVET programs as a faculty would not pose a threat to the federal and state governments.

Conclusion

In the world of rapid change and globalization trade means that decisions in one country may have an impact on employment opportunities in another country where values and priorities are very different. Opportunities are not uniform from one country to another or in different segments of society within a country. There is now a greater need for Specialized Technical Education and Training. The days of job stability are long gone for many, or in Timor-Leste have never existed, and have been replaced by a situation where flexibility, adaptability, and transferability of skills are essential.

By all indications, many nations around the world have adopted a dual system of education in respect of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). It is a system that entails compulsory skills acquisition training in specific occupational fields in industries or after graduation. In this manner, many other nations have gained relatively stable national economic development; while the labor force remains actively productive in the changing demands of the labor market. Also from literature and research, it is obvious that business enterprise is an integral part of Technical and Vocational Training. Technical skill is seen as a function of TVET programs. It is through TVET that skills are nurtured and developed and about which the individual gains knowledge to approach the work with the necessary skills. TVET programs could have a significant impact in achieving national development, and Timor-Leste needs to reach an 'epoch-making development' in TVET. It is important that more and more attention should be paid to Vocational and Technical Education because of the impact it has on society as a whole and its direct influence in the process of state building.

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Biography

Luis A. MARQUES is Associate Professor at Tokyo Salesian Polytechnic, Department of General Education, Division of International Communication, Salesian Institutions of Higher Education (IUS) Coordinator and International Exchange Coordinator. Education Degree Course in Physical Education, Health Science Faculty, University of Porto Alegre (IPA), Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. International Cooperation Major (Master’s Degree), The Graduate School of Tokyo University, Tokyo, Japan.