



## History and implications of Indian education in South Africa in the era before 1994 and after: An educational psychology approach

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**Abstract** – This paper discusses the history of Indian education in South Africa before 1994 and beyond, focusing on the origin, intended purpose, challenges encountered, and its transformation post-1994. It unpacks the administrative objectives of the Apartheid Government education system for the Indian Community and its psychological and social implications on gender, religion, culture, politics, and economics. This analysis will give readers an in-depth understanding of Indian education and its implications. It also explores the role of language, culture, and religion in development and education matters. For example, English, Afrikaans, and other languages were imposed on Indian communities as a medium of instruction in missionary schools. Finally, this paper deliberates on the implications of this education system for the quality of educational output for learners at that time (before 1994) and even today.

**Keywords:** Before 1994 and After, Educational Psychology, Indian Education

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### I. INTRODUCTION

**B**EFORE 1994, the South African government employed a race-based education system favouring a minority white population (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2013). This affected the education sector, which has faced several challenges that hamper equal educational opportunities. Many studies have highlighted that these inequalities stemmed from the horrible past of apartheid, a system of skewed political governance (Taylor, 2008; Mouton, Louw, & Strydom, 2013). Ndimande (2016, p. 160) suggested that providing fair and quality education is only possible if the many factors hamper the process are addressed. According to South African History Online (SAHO) (2019), the first Indians arrived in the Colony of Natal as sugarcane field labourers in 1860. They were oppressed by the government of the day, and their children were deprived of the opportunity to receive proper education (SAHO, 2019). The first batch of Indians arrived in Durban on 17 November 1860; from there onwards, there were regular arrivals of Indians to the Colony.

Although South Africa has made some admirable achievements, challenges, and failures still suggest the need for policy revision. These challenges include social disintegration and poor-quality education systems, for which no short-term solutions exist. Racial issues of apartheid have been carried into new South Africa. The existing studies have discussed the concept and implications of Indian education without effectively examining their experience. Their culture and languages were compromised until now, but English is the language of instruction. According to Soudien (2004), the racialisation of the post-apartheid era forced South Africa's choice to maintain its dominant positions in society in ways other than race, including class differences. As a result, there appears to be a class system division within the South

African schools, with one's wealth determining the school of choice. South Africa has successfully improved "education," but there is room for improvement.

### II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Indian education system was not spared from the infamous apartheid arrangement that completely neglected to provide quality social and educational services to non-white communities. It is essential to note that Indian education began in 1860 during the colonial period. Thereafter, missionaries established most schools when the Indians arrived as sugarcane labourers (Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto, & Wohulter, 2011). Consequently, this education could not provide an education for empowerment, but it aimed to serve the interests of the service providers and the colonial governments. As Mhlauli, Salani, and Mokotedi (2015) noted, education and curriculum were used to dehumanize and marginalize people to perpetuate the legacy of domination and white supremacy.

As a teacher, I have been exposed to some undesirable experiences at schools. For example, some schools enforce Christianity at the expense of other religions, despite the government calling for religious and cultural tolerance across our rainbow nation's social and cultural divide. In 2016, I did my teaching practice in one of the preschools in Ekurhuleni district, in the Gauteng province. I observed a five-year-old Indian girl absconding from devotion or religious education by hiding outside or in other classroom blocks. I later learned that it was an instruction from her parents, who believed in Hinduism, and did not wish for the learner to be subjected to Christianity. Davids and Woluhter (2020) argue that there is a need to decolonize education in the Global South, having realised that colonial curricula were tailor-made to perpetuate a colonial hegemony. Despite many efforts, the government has not managed to reform schools successfully. Therefore, it is alarming to note after

decades of democratic rule, some public schools that served Indian and other communities during the apartheid times are still in a deficit state regarding the quality and quantity of the infrastructure available. Some schools are still unable to accommodate children with special educational needs. Many schools have inadequate learning materials, even in present-day South Africa, especially in the countryside.

History of Indian education in South Africa before 1994 and beyond

It is essential to consider the history of Indian education in South Africa before 1994 and beyond to enhance quality education in South Africa. However, it is essential to note that the topic under investigation has limited recent sources related to the history of Indian education, which was under the House of Delegates from 1984 until after the elections in 1995. This leaves a vacuum regarding the history of Indian education in South Africa since 1860.

#### **Impact of enacted laws**

The education of the Indian people, just like other non-white races, has not been positive, with obstacles that hindered the country's fair and equal treatment of different race groups. The passing of the Indian Education Act of 1965 marked the control of the education of children of Indian origin by the apartheid government. Like Bantu Education, Indian education at the time served the political interests of the governing National Party. The Act forbade Indian teachers from being active in politics of any nature. Dadoo (2014) observed that the Act did not permit Indian people to participate in the formulation and execution of educational policies.

Consequently, such an arrangement perpetuated white supremacy above other races. This situation continued into the 1990s, providing education based on race and region. As a result, pressure was mounting against this education system in the run-up to independence.

#### **State of Indian education during the colonial period**

According to Kuppusami (1946), Indians arrived in South Africa in 1860 as sugarcane farm workers. No provision was made for their children's education for a long time besides that provided by missionaries. Rev Stott of the Wesleyan Mission also shared this view and established a school for Indian Labourers in 1868. Indian education during the early colonial times was closely associated with missionary activities. Only small numbers were enrolled as the progress for the provision of their education was slow. Similarly, Beukes (1995, pp. 56-69) highlighted that before 1994, coloured and Indian populations had separate education systems and language policies.

During the 17th through to the 19th centuries, French, Dutch, English, and German missionaries were the first to open schools and to develop the disciplined study of African languages. Nkomo (1991) indicated that the churches were initially responsible for formal education, which strained them financially, and access to the necessary resources was challenging. This education mainly served the interests of the colonial masters. The religious and educational systems depended on the political policies of the mother country, its foundations, and the status of the colony and its history. History has it that the intention of missionary education for Indians who worked on farms and other institutions was not to "educate" but to extend the language and policies of the colonizer. However, Freire (1998) further explains that education highlights the intersection of power and politics because schools transmit values and ideologies. However, considering their culture and religion, their education had to be planned and accommodated.

According to Booyse et al. (2011), education must be planned and provided through the Indians' unique religion, language, culture, and traditions in separate educational facilities. Furthermore, Prabhakaran (1998) noted that most Indians spoke Telugu and Tamil as their mother tongue. Still, they were forced to learn English and other South African languages they encountered through socioeconomic circumstances. Since preserving their languages and cultures was so important to their children's education, the language shift should have impacted the Indian communities.

Although providing Indian education was not formally the state's

responsibility, white populations felt threatened by them. They felt the Indian community would challenge them in many spheres of life, so they discriminated against them and deprived them of parliamentary participation. The 1965 Indian Education Act was passed to separate and control Indian education, which was placed under the Department of Indian Affairs. Kallaway (1996) argues that whites were schooled to get better management positions in society to gain power and dominate the economic, political, and social space in South Africa. The effects of such an arrangement are still evident in the quality of education provided in some public schools that were not a priority for the previous regime.

Booyse et al. (2011) highlighted that segregation was justified in areas with larger Indian populations, and Indian children were taught in English or Afrikaans as opposed to learning in their language due to the wide range of Indian languages spoken in the country. This sharply contrasted the original drive of keeping their cultures and religion in place, as learning in English and Afrikaans meant adapting to the English language, religion, and culture. To date, there are very few Indian schools that practice the language and culture of Indian children in white schools. Providing equal educational opportunities is the hinge upon which career development for all children is balanced. Ramphele (2008) argued that political power without economic power is slowing the process of bridging the gap between affluent and poor populations, stating that the South African economy marginalises the majority of South Africans who are the poorest, least educated, and least skilled while rewarding those with sought-after skills and those connected to people with power and influence.

#### **State of Indian Education after 1994**

According to Sunday Tribune (Nov 2019), Indian Education was represented by the "House of Delegates" from 1984 to 1994. It ended in 1994 as the new government had to listen to the people's voice in the new democratic South Africa. However, despite the ushering of the new democracy or political dispensation, there are still long-term effects on Indian Education, such as the non-formalization of their language for use in their schools.

It has already been mentioned that during the colonial era, the National Party employed a divisive system of education, apartheid. Indian populations or communities had separate education systems and education-in-language policies (Beukes, 1995, pp. 56-69). The post-apartheid government of 1994 inherited one of the unequal societies in the world, characterised by social, political, and economic discrimination, mainly against black as well as Indian and coloured South Africans. Consequently, after 1994, the ANC government found an urgent need to revamp the education sector to equalise educational opportunities. It came up with Acts and relevant laws to implement the required transformation. The Department of Education (DoE) (2001) declares that everyone has the right to basic education, which should be recognised by everyone.

Extending education support was one of the most grounded driving strengths behind the education changes after 1994. The government is committed to ensuring access to education for all. There was remarkable development in enrolment numbers, especially in the primary and secondary sectors. However, Indian enrolment numbers appeared slightly low, which can be explained by the normal (declining) birth rate and emigration. Education for Indians still seems to relate to different issues of the past.

The major challenge with providing Indian education in South Africa is that the Afrikaans-speaking community has overseen the creation of the terminology of their domestic language so that it can be utilised as a language of instruction on all instruction levels. In contrast, the expansive, more considerable part of the Indian community in South Africa changed their home language to English for the same reason. Hence, the main education frameworks are not effectively adjusted to the open educational needs and real situations within the different communities of our nation. For example, Indian learners are not educated in their diverse home languages at schools; a practice that

dates to the colonial period and even after 1994.

#### **Administrative objectives of the Apartheid Government education system for the Indian Community**

This paper unpacks the administrative objectives of the Apartheid Government for the Indian education system. Exploring how it affected their social, gender, religious, cultural, political, and economic position will assist the reader in gaining a general perspective that underpins this paper and gives an explicit understanding of Indian education and its implications. The paper critically evaluates Indian education in South Africa and the whole education system. It identifies problems encountered before 1994 and suggests possible solutions. The investigation traces the historical origin of South African Indian education and its challenges and objectives, as it is evident that education has a crucial role in society. The preliminary investigation discovered that Indian education in South Africa was not just about coming to school, but apartheid challenges were connected to issues that cannot be all addressed in the scope of this literature review. The radical political changes in South Africa from the colonial period until the present greatly impacted the education system. Through the colonial period, the adjustment of the education system has been an ongoing challenge in the country. It is worth noting that Booysse et al. (2011) shared insightful work on the history and implications of Indian Education in South Africa before 1994 as well as post-independence; in particular, they cite that the challenges that bedevil the current education system have their roots in the past. This offers policy planners and implementers valuable information to fashion a transformed system with equal educational opportunities.

According to Badat and Sayed (2014), inequalities are still evident today despite the desegregation of the South African education system. Indian learners have historically been underrepresented in the education system, so much needs to be done in South Africa to achieve a more equitable and inclusive education.

Therefore, systemic obstacles that limit their quality of education, such as psychological and social implications on gender, religion, culture, politics, and economics, need to be addressed.

Booyse et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of acknowledging and valuing the cultural backgrounds of learners. By doing so, the education system could better support their growth and development, enabling them to reach their full potential. Culture plays a vital role in shaping individuals' identities, and when it is disregarded or politicized, it not only hinders their personal growth but also limits their contribution to society.

#### **Justification of the role of language, culture, and religion in development and education matters**

For example, English, Afrikaans, and other languages were imposed on Indian communities as a medium of instruction in missionary schools. As Indian communities strived to teach their children more about their culture and languages, they were against using English as a medium of instruction in Indian schools. Kuo and Lai (2006) highlight the importance of culture and that it is inherent in our being and identifies human beings in society. Therefore, Indian education in South Africa did not enable them to promote their culture well through education to the same extent as other races. A major challenge for Indian learners in schools was a lack of cultural understanding and tolerance of cultural diversity (Rasool, 1994).

It is possible that their identity was compromised as Christianity was part of their education. Due to Indian families' desire for their children to preserve their culture and religion in every aspect of their lives, the absence of their languages and culture at school has had a significant psychological effect on them.

In the educational psychology context, it had implications for the quality of educational output from those learners at that time and even today. As sugar cane workers, Indian immigrants brought their cultures and religions to South African communities. Their goal was to preserve their original cultures and religions for their children. Most Indian communities believed the school curriculum was irrelevant to Indian

children because it was based on Western values (Rasool, 1994). This hinders learners as they might feel excluded from a multicultural country like South Africa. Indian communities feel like minorities whose indigenous knowledge is not incorporated into schools. Reddy, Beer, and Petersen (2019) highlighted that Indians in South Africa feel their indigenous knowledge has been excluded from the school curriculum, forming a gap in their children's education. Nevertheless, South Africa has policies that ensure everyone has the right to a good education without marginalisation.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

The research proposal is based on the history and implications of Indian education in South Africa before 1994 and after. The scope of the paper includes the arrival and settlement of the Indian communities in South Africa, missionary education, its nature, purpose, and implications, government involvement in the education of Indians, the type of education provided, and how the previously educational imbalances were transferred to the present day. In addition, future research will cover all aspects of research like research aims, questions, methodology, data analysis, research design, population, sampling, and ethical considerations. The history of education contributes to the empowerment of pre-and in-service teachers who have a mission to create a better education system, learn and research to understand the past and the current education system and identify the problems and gaps around the whole education system.

Since there is little information about Indian Education, this paper seeks to fill the gaps and mitigate the lack of information on Indian Education, as there is little information written. This paper contributes to the existing knowledge of the history of education in colonial South Africa. It benefits other researchers interested in Indian Education in South Africa regarding its genesis and development.

Vithal and Jansen (2004) argue that a rationale explains how a researcher develops an interest in a specific area and why the researcher believes the research is feasible. This topic generated interest in me as a subject of investigation primarily because information on the matter is scant. Secondly, education is the epicentre of a society's development; hence, it is vital to understand where we come from as a nation regarding our educational experiences.

The paper reflects and discloses the development of Indian education in Natal and fewer parts of the country from 1860-1995. It again reflects on the contribution made by the missionaries and the impact on Indian educational, social, and economic aspects. It is also anticipated that the findings of this research will add value to the quality of our education system in that its findings will help policy formulators and implementers make informed decisions regarding where and how to allocate resources. No doubt, colonial education adversely impacted the Indian communities, and such effects are still evident today.

If there are also suitable lessons from the past, these will be identified for use or implementation by the current crop of educators. This paper subsequently points to educational program strategies geared at assisting other researchers, educators, and learners to better understand the current aims and methods compared to the previous ones. Eventually, this will help to develop critical thought, positive attitudes, and objectivity.

This paper suggests that today's diverse students could benefit from inclusive education and intervention initiatives, unlike during the segregation era.

Some learners cannot attain or reach their full potential due to the poor quality of education provided in some schools and communities. The rigid curriculum resources and English as a medium of instruction could affect them, as learners are more fluent in their home languages. Hence, this paper helps reflect on issues that require serious consideration within the new education framework.

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