Bantu Education: Destructive intervention or part reform?

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Abstract

The introduction of public education for blacks in 1953 and the withdrawal of state subsidies from mission schools were among the most controversial measures that the National Party (NP) government took. In introducing Bantu Education the NP government was within the broad parameters of white interests and thinking at the time. There was no strong support in either the NP or United Party (UP) for large scale state spending on black education, no real demand from employers for well-educated black workers and a general concern among whites that educated blacks would become politicised if they were unable to find appropriate work. The state's priority in introducing Bantu education was to reduce widespread black illiteracy. While Minister of Native Affairs Hendrik Verwoerd spelled out in crude and offensive terms that blacks would not be able to perform high-level jobs in "white South Africa", it is wrong to assume that this was based on the assumption of black intellectual inferiority. Bantu education always lagged far behind white education with respect to per capita spending and the ratio of teacher to pupils in the class room. After 1994, ANC (African National Congress) leaders criticised the introduction of Bantu education in ever more strident terms, suggesting that it should be considered as a destructive intervention. The article argues that, viewed against the state of education that existed before 1953, it can be considered as part-reform in that it brought primary education to a far greater number of black children than was the case before 1953. The extensive use of mother tongue education was contentious, but several comparative studies show that the use of such a system in at least the first seven or eight years of the child's education is superior to other systems. The school-leaving pass rate of 83.7% for black students in 1976 is the highest pass rate to date.

Keywords: Apartheid; Black education; Teacher training; South Africa; Mother tongue education; National Party; Soweto uprising; Black resistance.

Introduction

In 1954, under National Party (NP) rule, the state took over most of the coloured and black schools that had been under the control of missions and churches. It created a special state department to control black education. Among commentators strongly opposed to apartheid there were two different responses to what became known as Bantu education. On the one hand there were those who regarded it as a policy conceived in bad faith. They believed that it should be considered as a destructive form of intervention, leaving the education of blacks in a worse state than before. They asserted that Hendrik Verwoerd, its political architect, deliberately starved black education of funds to make certain that black children remained poorly educated. In 1962, Albert Luthuli, President of the African National Congress (ANC), described Bantu education as "a huge deceit". IB Tabata, leader of the Non-European Unity Movement, called the policy "education for barbarism".[1] Although it is conceded that under Bantu education there was a strong increase of black pupils, these commentators considered the policy as a destructive form of intervention.

Opposed are those who point out that while spending on Bantu education was highly unequal to that on white education, the policy's effects were not universally negative, and that some aspects could be considered as part-reform. They stress that the previous system of education, provided by churches and missions, was close to collapse by the early 1950s. The black labour force in the cities was unsettled, lacking housing, transport and proper wages, and youths were seen to be uncontrollable. As Jonathan Hyslop notes, Bantu education succeeded in drawing the youth into a mass system of primary education that provided a better quality labour force. It was, he emphasises, "grossly inegalitarian and racist", but "parents supported it and the attempts to boycott it failed for nearly two decades."[2] This article's point of departure is similar to that of Hyslop in highlighting the need for appropriately trained labour as a major consideration of governments, like the South African one, which introduced mass education at a time of rapid industrialisation.[3]

1 A Luthuli, *Let my people go* (London, Fount Paperbacks, 1962), pp. 176-177.

2 J Hyslop, "'A destruction coming in': Bantu education as a response to social crisis"; P Bonner et al. (eds.) *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1993), pp. 393-410. See also his *The Class Room Struggle* cited further on.

3 This article builds on a previous contribution by me: "A note on Bantu Education", *South African Journal of Economics*, 77(1), pp. 190-198.

Senior officials in Department of Bantu Education found conditions in the pre-1954 system shocking. Some of the churches and missionary societies insisted on baptising children before admitting them to their school. Some used this as a device to boost their membership. There was very little parental involvement. A Bantu language was only rarely used as a medium of instruction. Illiteracy was rife. The Department considered wiping this out as its priority. Given what a director-general of the department called "overwhelming black numbers", it was impossible to introduce compulsory school attendance. Instead, the Department asked parents to commit themselves to enrol their children for at least four years.[4]

Different perspectives

In the treatment of the policy there is a significant difference between those writing in the first ten years after it had been introduced and those who published their work after 1994. In the former instance, scholars generally did not suggest that the issue of racial inferiority was an important concept in Verwoerd's line of argument. Eric Walker, for instance, quotes him as stating that the government wanted education to meet two demands: Its roots had to be in "the spirit and being of Bantu society", and the system had to take into account the fact that for blacks there was "no place in the European community above certain forms of labour."

Walker notes Verwoerd's statement that while there was no limit to the educational heights that the pick of black pupils might attain, teachers should not teach the rank and file as if they were all destined to go as far as Standard VI.[5] Verwoerd, in other words, did not say that blacks generally were intellectually inferior, but that they could not expect to perform skilled, clerical or professional jobs outside the homelands. Gwendolen Carter, a well-regarded Africanist, wrote: "There was much that made sense in the Nationalist arguments. It is obvious that the lack of opportunities in the South African context for Africans with advanced training makes them frustrated and bitter. Moreover, it is hard to deny the importance of basing education on the culture of the particular group".[6] She refers without criticism to Verwoerd's

4 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe-onderwys", WJ Verwoerd (compiler), *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom* (Pretoria, Protea, 2001), p. 175.
5 E Walker, *A history of Southern Africa* (London, Longmans Green, 1975), p. 900.
6 G Carter, *The politics of inequality: South Africa since 1948* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1958), pp. 104-105.

vision of the homelands as areas where job opportunities would arise to which blacks could not aspire elsewhere.[7] But Carter, an American scholar, was not affected by the bitter political rivalries between the two white communities and between whites and blacks during the 1950s.

Fifty years later the situation had changed dramatically. In 2000 the fifth edition of the most widely read general history of South Africa of Thompson and Wilson was published. Here it is argued that both the Eiselen report, on which the policy was based, and Act 47 of 1953, which introduced Bantu education, operated on the "assumption of an inferior potential in African minds" and were "explicitly designed to prepare blacks for an inferior place in society".[8] In a previous edition (published in 1987) there is no reference to such assumptions or designs. The 2000 edition is a reflection of the fact that a new government preoccupied with white racism had come to power. Apartheid was no longer seen only as a wrong or misguided policy, but as evil. This view is absent in most of the writings of the 1950s and 1960s.[9]

By 2012, with an ANC government completing its second decade in power, it was no longer possible to deny the crisis in black education. Instead of examining the systemic faults dispassionately, the tendency in the ranks of ANC politicians and black commentators has been to seek the roots of the failure in the system of Bantu education introduced fifty or sixty years earlier. Addressing the education department's failure to deliver textbooks to some schools in Limpopo, President Jacob Zuma said:

> What is happening today is what Verwoerd did, where the black majority were historically not given education. We are dealing with a system that had put black people back for centuries.

According to Zuma, Verwoerd was responsible for the textbook crisis in Limpopo.[10]

Redi Tlhabi, who interviewed Zuma on Talk Radio 702, expressed outrage over the president's remark that he did not know who was to blame for the textbook scandal, but she agreed with him about Verwoerd.

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7 G Carter, *The politics of inequality*, pp. 102-103.

8 TRH Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: A modern history* (London, Macmillan, 2000), p. 674. Compare TRH Davenport, *South Africa: A modern history* (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1987), p. 375.

9 See, for instance, M Wilson, "The growth of peasant communities", LM Thompson and M Wilson (eds), *Oxford history of South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969), 1, pp. 78-79.

10 *The Citizen*, 23 July 2012.

> The president was right in that Verwoerd worked to create a system that was intent on stifling the black child and making sure that she or he did not thrive …Today, in 2012, I did not expect that the "liberation party [the ANC] would want to further Verwoerd's goals: to keep the black child poor, uneducated and deprived.[11]

President Zuma's comments attracted a retort from Mamphela Ramphele, a product of Bantu education and a former University of Cape Town Vice-Chancellor. Speaking at an education conference she commented on the current state of black education: "The monumental failure in South Africa was not Hendrik Verwoerd's fault but that of the current government". She continued:[12]

> Children under apartheid's 'gutter education' were better educated than children are today.

In the course of 2012 other leading black politicians also blamed Verwoerd and Bantu education for failures in black education. An interviewer pointed out to Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, that while the education system in South Africa has a budget that is higher than most African counties, its results were poorer. She responded that this was due to the "massive backlog that we inherited going back to 1948."[13] Senzo Mchunu, MEC for Education in KwaZulu-Natal, declared:[14]

> One of the points we found was a problem in Maths and Science. It was Verwoerd who made the subjects difficult because he thought blacks would be a threat to him.

In Parliament, ANC deputy chief whip Mmamoloko Kunbayi stated that "proper education has been withheld from blacks since 1948. It is the fault of apartheid that our education system is now so poor."[15] It is true that education for blacks remained inferior to that of whites until 1994, with a huge gap in per capita spending that only started to narrow after 1970, but to suggest that blacks were denied any education under NP rule represents a travesty of the truth.

Outside the ranks of politicians, the views of Bantu education is more nuanced. A recent study drew on interviews of a sample of retired teachers who

11 *Sunday Times*, 29 July 2012.
12 *SA Time*, 25 July 2012.
13 *Sunday Times*, 9 December 2012, "So many Questions by Chris Barron."
14 *X Press*, 25 July 2012.
15 *Die Burger*, 17 November 2012, p. 13.

were employed in the Bantu education system. They stress the discrimination and inequities, but also mention positive aspects. The teaching principles were sound, their training appropriately equipped teachers to teach, and teachers were respected and were good role models.[16]

This article does not attempt a comprehensive investigation of Bantu education but seeks to examine the main charges against the policy made by those who regard the policy as a destructive form of intervention. They are:

- Verwoerd closed down a functioning system of black education that included some good mission schools such as Lovedale and Healdtown.
- He stunted black development by insisting on mother-tongue education.
- His policy was based on "the assumption of an inferior potential of African minds" and was "explicitly designed to prepare blacks for a subordinate place in society".[17]
- He discouraged the teaching of Mathematics and Science.
- The policy deliberately starved black education of funds.
- The system did not train enough black teachers, giving rise to large classes, which negatively affected the quality of teaching.

It is important to go back to the founding years of the Bantu Education system to establish whether these charges are true. Put in quote marks, they are discussed in the following subsections.

Bantu Education: "Based on racist assumptions"

Those who charge Verwoerd with implementing a policy with racist assumptions usually base it on a reading of his speech in Parliament in 1953, when he introduced the policy. He attacked the existing policy, which, in his words, showed the black man "the green pastures of the European but still did not allow him to graze there." He said:

> Education should have its roots entirely in the Native areas and in the Native environment and the Native community… The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his

16 CS le Roux, Post-graduate education students oral history research: A Review of retired teachers, experiences and perspectives of the Bantu education system", *Yesterday&Today*, 8, December 2012.

17 R Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: A modern history*, p. 674.

> own community, however, all doors are open.

This comment is often distorted by quoting only the first part – "There is no place for him in the European community above certain forms of labour" – and by omitting the qualifier that Verwoerd added: "Within his own community, however, all doors are open."[18] The first part of the quote sounds very harsh, but it was not out of line with the policy that the UP government followed up to 1948. A study states:[19]

> "The overwhelming demand among urban employers was for workers with basic literacy, who could be employed as unskilled labour. In most cases 'tribal labour' was preferred."

There was little demand for black workers who had completed the more advanced standards. Unlike the 1970s, there was no rush among employers to break down the colour bar in industry. The *Financial Mail* reported that "non-white" workers took over only 36 000 "white" jobs during the 1950s.[20]

The previous United Party (UP) government had also seen little need for the training of large numbers of black artisans for employment in the common area. The policy emphasised the training of whites for skilled labour in the so-called "white areas". Blacks could only expect to do skilled work in the reserves. In terms very similar to those Verwoerd would use later, the secretary of the Department of Native Affairs told the De Villiers Commission on Technical and Vocational Training in 1947 that "the unfolding of extensive government development schemes" in the reserves would produce a large number of skilled posts.[21] Verwoerd's formulation in 1953 affirmed what was already the situation on the ground. Blacks had always been excluded from skilled or other advanced jobs in the private sector and in the central state bureaucracy. What was new was the creation of new opportunities for blacks in the homelands and what was called "serving their own people".[22]

It is ironic that Verwoerd is today branded as a racist when he is on record explicitly rejecting biological racism. In his lecture notes at Stellenbosch University he dismissed the idea of biological differences among the big races, adding that because there were no differences, "this was not really a

18 AN Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd speaks* (Johannesburg, APB, 1968), p. 83.
19 D Posel, *The making of apartheid* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 186.
20 *Financial Mail,* 14 July 1967, Supplement, p. 43.
21 J Hyslop, *The class room struggle: Policy and resistance in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, UN Press, 1993), pp. 4-5.
22 G Carter, *The politics of inequality*, pp. 102-103.

factor in the development of a higher civilization by the Caucasian race." He also rejected the notion of different innate abilities. He observed that what appeared to be differences in skills in the case of Europeans and Africans were simply differences in culture as a result of historical experience.[23] In the first few weeks of his term as Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd made an astounding proposal, which historians have surprisingly ignored. It shows that he initially did not intend to limit opportunities for blacks to do advanced jobs to the homelands. On 5 December 1950, six weeks after he had become a minister, a meeting took place at his request with the members of the Native Representative Council (NRC). Among whom there were several leading ANC figures. Stating that he expected large numbers of blacks to remain in the big cities for many years, Verwoerd announced that the government planned to give blacks "the greatest possible measure of self-government" in these urban areas. All the work in these townships would have to be done by their own people, enabling blacks to pursue "a full life of work and service." Blacks had to be educated to be sufficiently competent in many spheres, the only qualification being that they would have to place their knowledge exclusively at the service of black people.

Verwoerd invited the NRC members to meet him after the session for a "comprehensive interview" about these matters and to put forward proposals, offering a prompt reply from government to their representations.[24] The NRC did not take up the offer and it is easy to see why. The urban black elite demanded representation on all levels of government in common with whites. Verwoerd's proposal fell far short of that. It was made in the context of complete segregation and Verwoerd spoke as a representative of a government that they viewed with grave suspicion. This moment signalled a fateful turning point in South African politics. A new field for black politics could have been opened up if Verwoerd's offer had been accepted, particularly if it set in motion a political process that led to talks between the government and the urban black leadership on the election of black urban councils, the formula for the allocation of revenue, the staffing of the local councils' bureaucracy, property ownership and opportunities for black business. It would have opened up a whole new area for the development of black managerial and administrative capacity, something that the country would sorely lack when whites handed

23 R Millar, "Science and society in the early career of HF Verwoerd", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 4, 1993, pp. 636-646.

24 AN Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd speaks*, pp. 28-30.

over power in 1994.[25] After his meeting with the NRC members Verwoerd embarked on his policy that singled out the homelands as the only places where blacks could fulfil their political and professional aspirations. He tied the education system closely to the political system. Black high schools would not be built in urban areas, and the training of black teachers should preferably take place in the homelands.[26]

Bantu Education "closing down a functioning system"

Missionary societies dominated the provision of black and coloured education before the National Party came to power in 1948. In 1939 the Minister of Education in the United Party government admitted that two thirds of black children were without any school experience whatsoever.[27] During the war years the government improved the provision of education to blacks considerably, but by 1950 less than half of black children between the ages of 7 and 16 were attending school, and only 2.6% of black pupils were enrolled in post-primary standards. The average black child spent only four years in school.

Among the mission schools there were a few well-performing high schools but, as Hyslop commented, the renowned reputation of these schools "should not obscure the fact that most mission schools were poor primary schools with large dropout rates" and that the "mission system was breaking down at all levels."[28] With the demand for education growing rapidly, schools had to take in far more children than they could teach effectively. The state helped by providing salaries for approved teaching posts, but overall state aid was insufficient to modernise the entire system. School buildings were dilapidated and classes overcrowded. Most schools were understaffed and there was a severe shortage of competent teachers.

After the Second World War, both the United Party government and the NRC, the main body for articulating black opinion, sensed that the system of black education was in need of drastic overhaul. But there were some important sticking points. Most important was the question of funding. ZK Matthews, the leading black authority on education and a prominent member of the

25 H Giliomee and B Mbenga (eds.), *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town,Tafelberg, 2007), pp. 420-432.
26 A Paton, *Apartheid and the archbishop* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1973), p. 232.
27 *Cape Times*, 18 May 1939.
28 J Hyslop, *The class room struggle,* pp. 8-11.

ANC, pleaded for a programme of modernisation in terms that, implicitly at least, meant apportioning resources for equal educational opportunities. But whites baulked at the expense. RFA Hoernlé, a leading liberal, observed that while a large number of the white voters did not mind "native education" as such, it would be suicide in most constituencies for a Member of Parliament "to advocate, let alone vote for, the proposal that whites should be taxed in order that natives could be educated."[29]

Apart from opposing an increased tax burden, there was a general sense that white supremacy was clearly incompatible with a better educated black labour force steadily moving up to strategic levels of the economy. Recognising this, JG Strijdom, Transvaal NP leader, warned NP leader DF Malan in 1946 that it would be impossible to maintain racial discrimination if the level of black education was steadily improved. "Our church ministers," he added, "were far too eager to compete with other missionary societies in trying to provide the most education to blacks." It would lead to demands for equal rights from educated people, which, if refused, would lead to "bloody clashes and revolutions."[30]

To put it in non-racist terms, by modernising the provision of education to subordinates, however incompletely, the apartheid state ran the risk of sowing the seeds of its own destruction. An opinion survey conducted years later in 1981 (See Image 1) showed that black children's rejection of segregation steadily increased with higher education levels. About half of the children with only 4 years of schooling said whites could keep their own housing areas and schools, against only a third of those in Standards 7 to 9 (Grades 9-11), and only one tenth of those in Std. 10 (Grade 12) and higher.[31]

29 RFA Hoernlé, *South African native policy and the liberal spirit* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1939), p. 18.

30 HB Thom, *DF Malan* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980), p. 279.

31 H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to nation-building* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 119.

Image 1: Black political responses (%) according to education (1981 survey)

Level of Education				
	Std. 2 or below [Grades 4 and below]	Std. 3 to 6 [Grades 5-8]	Std. 7 to 9 [Grades 9-11]	Std. 10 [Grade 12]
Whites can have their own				
Laws against mixed marriages	70	65	45	18
Own housing areas	62	52	32	15
Own schools	53	34	26	13
Farmlands	47	38	29	11
Recreation facilities	41	26	18	2
Transport and buses	36	26	18	2

Note: Only percentages accepting segregation are given.

Source: H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to nation-building,* p. 119.

Yet, for the Afrikaner nationalists to deny subordinates a proper education would undermine their self-conception as people committed to the uplift of the subordinate population. Verwoerd expanded black education greatly, with the provision that well qualified blacks had to seek advanced jobs in the homelands.

Verwoerd did not abruptly end the state subsidy to mission schools, but phased it out over a period of four years.[32] The governing bodies had a choice: They could become state schools or they could remain private schools. The phasing out of subsidies of those schools that did not fully privatize, together with the new emphasis on instruction in the mother tongue, was a bitter blow to members of the urbanised black elite, intensifying its resolve to reject Bantu education outright.

Verwoerd did not consider well-educated blacks a threat as long as the political and the educational system directed their aspirations to their respective "homelands" and to serving the different black "communities". He severely limited black or coloured access to the liberal white universities and established five university colleges for blacks and coloured people. Questioned

32 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe onderwys", WJ Verwoerd (samesteller),*Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom* (Pretoria, Praag, 2001), p. 172.

about the wisdom of establishing university colleges for blacks, he replied:[33]

> We shall have to negotiate frequently with [blacks] in the future over many issues, including education and politics. It would be better to negotiate with people who are well informed and educated.

Despite its flaws, Bantu education signalled the introduction of a modern system of mass primary education for blacks, albeit one that was heavily skewed racially. For twenty years after its introduction the new system encountered little black opposition, with black parents failing to heed the calls for school boycotts. This opposition only surfaced in the mid-1970s after the policy had been adapted to enable large numbers of black children to advance to much higher standards than was possible in the preceding decades.[34]

"Deliberately starving Bantu education of funds"

Strong criticism has been directed at the insufficient and discriminatory funding of black education. The common assumption is that the blame lies squarely with the policy as announced by Verwoerd. He stated in 1953 that the state's allocation to black education would be pegged at R13 million and that any additional money had to come from direct taxes that blacks paid (R2 million). As a result, the gap in the ratio of white to black per capita spending widened from 7 to 1 in 1953 to 18 to 1 in 1969.

But pegging funding for black education was not implemented as announced by Verwoerd. From the table below it can be inferred that the policy was adhered to only between 1957 and 1962, when there was an increase of only 2% on spending. In the next five years, between 1962 to1967, spending increased by nearly 50%. The government had accepted that the great increases in the enrolment of black pupils had made the policy quite unrealistic. According to Joubert Rousseau, later a Director General of Bantu Education, Verwoerd secured approval for the amount allocated to black education to be supplement from the loan account. The loans were never paid back.[35]

Spending on school buildings for blacks, along with other capital spending, was not brought onto the budget of the education department, as was the

33 G van de Wall, "Verwoerd, die hervormer", WJ Verwoerd (compiler), *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom*, p. 166.
34 Hyslop, "A destruction coming in", pp. 393-410.
35 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe-Onderwys", WJ Verwoerd (samesteller), *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom* (Pretorria, Praag, 2001), p. 172.

case in white education, but on that of the Department of Public Works. Especially during the first fifteen to twenty years of Bantu education, a large part of state spending consisted of expenses related to the construction of school buildings.[36] Without taking this into account, no proper comparison of per capita spending on white and black education can be made. The increases in spending are given in Image 2 below:

Image 2: State spending on education 1952 to 1987 in real 1987 rands ('000s)*

Year	White	% change	Coloured	% change	Indian	% change	Black	% change
1952	874 582	n/a	99 706	n/a	27 319	n/a	144 385	n/a
1957	969 553	10.9%	122 561	22.9%	38 213	39.9%	165 776	14.8%
1962	1 280 105	32.0%	146 742	19.7%	49 960	30.7%	169 532	2.3%
1967	1 747 764	36.5%	289 399	97.2%	97 031	94.2%	254 344	50.0%
1972	2 719 104	55.6%	357 346	23.5%	152 092	56.7%	476 671	87.4%
1977	3 181 656	17.0%	523 088	46.4%	220 598	45.0%	640 922	34.5%
1982	4 098 822	28.8%	807 884	54.4%	390 698	77.1%	1 959 922	205.8%
1987	3 320 700	-19.0%	1 007 569	24.7%	404 647	3.6%	3 400 250	73.5%

Note: Black figures include TBVC states.

Source: H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to nation-building*, p. 106. *Researched and compiled by Monica Bot.

What should also be taken into account was the major increase in the number of black pupils. The number of blacks in schools increased from 800 000 in 1953 to 2, 750 000 in 1970. This drastically affected the per capita spending on blacks.

Narrowing the large gap in the per capita spending on white and black education proved to be exceptionally difficult. There was firstly a large demographic disparity between whites and blacks. In the 1950s and 1960s the average childbearing black woman had 6,3 children compared to 3,3 in

36 Interview by author of Dirk Meiring, Director-general of Education and Training during the early 1990s, 16 December 2012.

the case of white woman.[37] Secondly, white teachers received much higher salaries not only because of racial discrimination but also because they were generally much better qualified.[38]

Black Education "providing insufficient teachers"

A serious problem affecting the implementation of the policy was the inability to attract a sufficient number of black teachers to meet the growing demand for education. A recent study passes this judgement on the system:[39]

> The experience of black schooling during the 1950-70 period was one of partial modernization, generating a higher enrolment of black pupils, without providing additional teaching resources at a comparable rate.

The study found that with respect to the latter issue, "white educational opportunity … was consistently and considerably better than black educational opportunity."

Other major problems were very large classes and a very unfavourable pupil teacher ratio. The pupil teacher ratio in white government schools never rose above the mid-20 level; by contrast, the pupil teacher ratio in black schools remained in the range 50:1 to 70:1 for a protracted period from 1957 to 1993.[40] White teachers were consistently better qualified than their black counterparts. An interesting finding is that black matric pass rates did not respond positively to higher teacher qualifications.[41]

Black Education "discouraging the teaching of mathematics and science"

In his 1953 speech Verwoerd also remarked that it made little sense to teach mathematics to a black child if he or she could not use it in a career. Probably taking its cue from these words, a recent study alleges that as a result, mathematics was no longer taught as "a core subject in black schools".[42] In

37 Communication to author by Prof Flip Smit, ex- Vice Chancellor, University of Pretoria, and demographer), 25 June 2012.
38 See discussion in the next section in which source references utilised confirm this observation.
39 JW Fedderke, R de Kadt and J Lutz "Uneducating South Africa: The failure to address the need for human capital", *International Review of Education*, 46, 3, 2000, pp. 257-258.
40 JW Fedderke et al., "Uneducating South Africa…", *International Review of Education* , 46, 3, 2000, p. 259.
41 JW Fedderke et al, "Uneducating South Africa", *International Review of Education*, 46, 3, 2000, p. 262.
42 F Wilson, *Dinosaurs, diamonds and democracy* (Cape Town, Umuzi, 2009), p. 88.

fact, the policy did not change and mathematics continued to be a school subject.[43] From 1958 to 1965 a total of only 431 black matriculants passed mathematics.[44] The number of blacks who matriculated with a school-leaving certificate remained steady. The main problem was a lack of qualified teachers in key subjects, not only in mathematics but also the natural sciences.

Liberal scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970 criticised some aspects of the Bantu education but also noted the improvement in the provision of mass education and the general standard of literacy. A 1968 study by Muriel Horrell, of the SA Institute of Race Relations, was critical of Bantu Education, especially its use of mother-tongue instruction, but wrote approvingly of the syllabi. Those for primary classes were "educationally sound" and an improvement on the previous syllabi, while those for the junior and the senior certificate were the same as those used for white children.[45] Ken Hartshorne also states that the syllabi of some subjects were "very much the same as those used in white provincial schools and were an improvement on those in use previously".[46]

Bantu Education "stunting black development through mother-tongue education"

Another major point of conflict between the government and the urbanised black elite was over the extent to which traditional black culture had to be made part of the school syllabus. ZK Matthews argued for the "preservation of the African heritage and for using the powers of the vernacular languages to effect social rejuvenation".[47] Other ANC leaders, however, rejected any "Bantuization of native education": Blacks had to be educated "to live side by side with Europeans".[48]

43 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe onderwys", WJ Verwoerd, (samesteller) *Verwoerd: so onthou ons hom* (Pretoria, Praag, 2001), p. 172.

44 M Horrell, *Bantu Education to 1968* (Johannesburg, SAIRR, 1968), p. 72; J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe-onderwys", W Verwoerd (compiler), *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom*, (Pretoria, Protea, 2001), p. 177.

45 M Horrell, *Bantu Education to 1968*, pp. 58-59, 71.

46 K Hartshorne, *Crisis and challenge: Black Education, 1910 –1960* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 41.

47 C Kros, "Deep rumblings: ZK Matthews and African education before 1955", *Perspectives in Education*, 12, 1 (1990), p. 35.

48 P Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971), pp. 150-152.

Both Verwoerd and Werner Eiselen, who headed the commission that laid the groundwork for the Bantu Education policy, believed in mother-tongue education as the best form of education. A Professor of Anthropology before he became a chief inspector of native education in the Transvaal, Eiselen had a great respect for the particular culture of blacks and genuine concern about the preservation of the Bantu languages.[49] His commission dismissed the idea that there were inherent differences between whites and blacks in intellectual ability. The commission report strongly argued that the education for blacks had to be tied to "a Bantu culture and a Bantu society".[50]

Verwoerd received his secondary school education in the medium of English in Milton Boys School in Bulawayo before enrolling at the University of Stellenbosch. He became the first student in the country to write his doctoral dissertation in Afrikaans. In 1924 he received his doctoral degree, a year before Afrikaans was proclaimed an official language. Afrikaans quickly developed from a low-status language to one that could be used in all walks of life. Afrikaans speakers, along with English speakers, now began to experience what Neville Alexander called "the benefits of mother-tongue education from cradle to university".[51]

Bantu education, as introduced by Verwoerd in 1954, entailed the provision of eight years of mother-tongue education (MTE). In addition, English and Afrikaans were taught as second languages. In the ninth year of school, students were expected to switch to learning through Afrikaans and English, the official languages.

The department laid down the principle that it would not use African languages as medium of instruction in the two highest school standards until the black community requested it. An education advisory council, which was established in terms of the policy, polled the boards of control of black school all over the country to assess their support for different options. It provided the following result:[52]

- Afrikaans and English 64%
- Only Afrikaans 5%

49 TD Moodie, *The rise of Afrikanerdom* (Berkeley, University of California Press), 1975, p. 272.
50 JD Shingler, "Education and political order in South Africa, 1902-1960" (Ph.D., Yale University, 1973, pp. 279-280.
51 Cited by D Braam, "A Boost for Mother-tongue education", *Mail&Guardian*, 16 March 2012.
52 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe onderwys", WJ Verwoerd (samesteller) Verwoerd: *So onthou ons hom* (Pretoria, Praag, 2001), p. 175 (The source notes that the percentages were rounded off).

- Only English 31%
- Mother tongue 1%

The scant support for MTE on an advanced level is a significant indication that blacks – unlike Afrikaner nationalists – were not convinced of the merits of mother-tongue instruction.

In 1974 the Department of Bantu Education instructed schools in Soweto and other townships in the southern Transvaal to teach mathematics and social studies in the medium of Afrikaans in Standard Five and upwards. This had to start in 1975. The minutes of cabinet reveal that it had not discussed the instruction before the Department had sent it out. The Department's disastrous action triggered the youth uprising in Soweto in 1976.[53] It now became easy for the black resistance movement to rally against not only Afrikaans as medium of instruction but also against mother-tongue instruction after the very first years in school.

Yet, MTE was not out of line with what many Western scholars regarded as the best educational practice. Kathleen Heugh, an acknowledged authority on language use in education, remarks that developed countries teach their children in the mother tongue because they are convinced that such a policy is pedagogically much sounder. They also believe that it helps people to make a greater contribution to the economy than those taught in a second or third language. Developing countries, by contrast, tend to use the colonial language of instruction because they believe, incorrectly as it happens, that it is a short cut to a good education and job opportunities.[54]

In South Africa the result of Bantu Education between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s was positive, measured by pass rates. Heugh writes that:[55]

> … between 1955 and 1975, there was a steady improvement in the achievement in literacy and numeracy… Eight years of MTE resourced with terminological development, text-book production, competent teacher education and competent teaching of English, resulted in a school-leaving pass rate of 83.7% for African students in 1976. This is the highest pass rate to date.

53 J Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black revolt, white reaction* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1978), pp. 12-16.

54 K Heugh, "Languages, development and reconstructing education in South Africa", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 19, 1999, pp. 301-302.

55 K Heugh, "Multilingual education policy in South Africa constrained by theoretical and historical disconnections" (Article scheduled to appear during the second half of 2013 in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*), Vol. 33, 2012.

Heugh concludes that the education policy of the apartheid government consisted of two phases: the first part, up to 1976, worked to the educational advantage of black students; the second part, from 1976 on, to their disadvantage, with mother-tongue education being limited to three or four years.[56] In 1983 the NP government accepted the principle equal opportunities for education, including equal standards, regardless of colour or race. The amount spent on a white pupil was still seven times more than the amount spent on each black pupil.[57] By 1990 the gap had narrowed to 5:1.[58]

When the ANC came to power in 1994, South Africa suddenly found itself in a situation where blacks as members of the new dominant political group had to compete with better educated whites, who seemed destined to remain economically dominant for quite some time. Although per capita spending and the class room size were quickly equalised, black education remained in the doldrums.

At the end of a conference, held on 5 September 2012 in Cape Town, to launch the third Carnegie inquiry into poverty, Deputy President of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe, argued that the legacy of Bantu Education hampered rapid progress in the battle against poverty and inequality. There was a dramatic moment when a young black student asked quite a question: "How come the government constantly talks about Bantu Education, Bantu Education, Bantu Education? I didn't grow up under Bantu Education and I'm not sure what it has to do with me - I feel it cannot be blamed for my problems."[59]

Conclusion

When Hendrik Verwoerd introduced Bantu education in 1953 the state for the first time assumed chief responsibility for black education. He took special care to address two main concerns of the NP's constituency and the larger white electorate. First, mass education for blacks would have a radicalising political effect. His provincial leader, JG Strijdom, had warned that this could happen. This was why he emphasised that blacks would only have the opportunity for advanced jobs in the homelands.

56 K Heugh, "Languages, development and reconstructing education", pp. 301-313.
57 CH Feinstein, *Economic history of South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 2005), p. 243.
58 K Hartshorne, *Crisis and challenge: Bantu Education, 1910 to 1990*, p. 42.
59 Comment by conference participant to author, 29 August 2012.

Second, the fast growing black population would demand an increasing share of the budget at a time when the economy was not growing particularly fast. Verwoerd addressed this concern when he announced at the outset that the government would put a ceiling on funding by allocating a fixed sum to black education, which would be supplemented by taxes blacks paid.

For years, commentators had assumed the policy was carried out as announced, and gave this as reason why a gap of 1:20 had opened up by 1970 in white black per capita spending. But the practical implementation of the policy took a different course. By 1962 the idea of a ceiling on spending had been discarded. Between 1962 and 1967 funding jumped by more than a third. More importantly, without telling the electorate, the costs of building schools and other capital expenditure were not brought on to the department's budget but on that of the Department of Public Works.

Given the electoral and budget constraints, the Department of Bantu Education went far in realising its policy objectives in the first fifteen years. Syllabi, textbooks and other study material were prepared in nine indigenous languages. Incentives were given to teachers to improve their generally low qualifications. Afrikaans and English, the two official languages, were made compulsory subjects for the first time.[60] Between 1950 and 1970 there was an impressive growth of black pupils from 800 000 to 2,75 million.[61]The target set in the Eiselen report of doubling secondary school enrolment ten years after the introduction of Bantu education was achieved in 1959, the numbers rising from 20 000 to 43 496. Between 1960 and 1966, black children in secondary school increased from 54 598 to 66 568 and the number in Matric grew from 717 to 1608.[62]

Several misconceptions about the Black Empowerment (BE)-Policy must be noted. The use of mother-tongue education for seven of eight years was not a backward step, as some assumed, but a more successful way of teaching and learning. The syllabi in most subjects were the same of those for white children. Verwoerd's words that better blacks would not be able to get higher-level jobs in the so-called white areas were harsh but in line with the policy followed by the previous government. There was no assumption of the inferior potential of black minds. The most important shortcoming in policy implementation

60 J Rousseau, "Iets oor Bantoe-Onderwys", WJ Verwoerd (samesteller) *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom* (Pretoria, Praag, 2001), pp. 172-173.
61 JW Fedderke et al., "Uneducating South Africa…", *International Review of Education* , 46, 3, 2000, p. 262.
62 Giliomee and Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to nation-building*, p. 118.

was the lack of teachers, giving rise to large classes, which negatively affected the quality of teaching. Yet, compared to the current state of black education, Bantu Education could hardly be considered an unmitigated failure. In 1976 there was a school-leaving pass rate of 83.7% for black pupils, which is the highest pass rate to date.[63] It should be stressed, however, that the Matric numbers were very low.

Opposition within the ranks of the black urban elite did not last long and the masses did not take Bantu Education up as a major issue. It was only after the mid-1970s, when the struggle for state control entered a new phase, that the education of blacks became a major issue. It was then that cabinet ministers dealing with black education for the first time realised how deeply black activists, from one generation to other, resented Verwoerd's fateful words, expressed in 1953, that blacks could not rise above a lowly station in jobs they held outside the homelands.[64] The activists aspired to a unified system of education and a common citizenship – in their eyes the very opposite of the thrust of Bantu education.

63 K Heugh, "Multilingual education policy in South Africa constrained by theoretical and historical disconnections" (Article scheduled to appear during the second half of 2013 in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*).

64 This was communicated several times to the author by Dr Gerrit Viljoen, who became minister responsible for black education in 1980.