

**Abdelkader Djeflat, *Technologie et Système Educatif en Algérie.*  
Co-édition Unesco Cread – Médina, 1993**

In Algeria, the word Technology seems like a magic incantation people chant in order to conjure up better days for the country, if only, as they say, its transfer was possible. However, the present book reviewed is in no way into this kind of mental state. It deals with the incursion (one cannot speak of a systematic use) of technology into the educational system, which spells problems because of some known social, economic, cultural and political characteristics of the country, which do not always facilitate the somehow natural encounter between both processes.

Professor Djeflat's book offers an interesting and idiosyncratic insight into the systems of education and training, so much talked about and criticised but rarely dissected in a professional way. More often than not the studies about these systems tend to be more polemical, highly critical, but rarely argumentative. Today, it is trendy to lampoon the government (*démocratie oblige!*) through low-key articles in the so-called daily independent newspapers. There is a fashionable way to cultivate the sensational, to the detriment of non-partisan if not scholarly, or scientific approach to problem-setting. Djeflat avoids giving in to easy and counter-productive discourse. He has undertaken and succeeded in unveiling the mechanisms behind the two processes with the most objective concern possible. Djeflat is well-placed to carry out this analysis: he teaches at the Institute of Economic Sciences at the University of Oran in Algeria, co-ordinates the Magtech Network, is associate-professor at Lille 2 in France, and visiting professor at the *Institut de Développement et de Planification* (IDEP), under the aegis of the United Nations, in Dakar, Senegal.

The book sets out to identify the problem-areas generated, in particular in education, by the policy of heavy industrialisation which started in the early 1970s. The result of this encounter, with the help of the reigning educational idea of that decade – i.e. Politechnical Curriculum Theory – led to the launching of the Foundation School in the early 1980s, which meant a very strong scientific, technical and ideological bias in the school curricula: a major shift in educational philosophy. The main problematic of the book, which revolves round the relationship between the sector of production and that of the education system, tackles the thorny problem of two worlds which collide: one heading for the future, the other not yet ready to take a clearer direction. The main question posed concerns the relationship between the system of training and the requirements of jobs for school-leavers with a scientific profile. To illustrate his points, the author uses, as a case-study, the situation of the sector of petrochemistry.

In his book, the author undertakes to unveil the mechanisms behind Algeria's technological policy in the sector of petrochemicals and the place of training in this policy. While tackling the problem of innovation, Djeflat tries to identify the types of impact such innovation had on the competencies needed, hence the role devoted to education, but also education planning. One of his aims is to show the everlasting inadequacies between the requirements of petrochemistry and the educational system as well as that of training, each one seeming to work at different levels and speeds.

Among his main statements, the writer hypothesises that the country's technological policy has difficulties meeting the requirements of the overall growth despite the decision-makers' pious wishes (one cannot talk about a systematic approach to the building of the country's future). He also underlines the fact that the creation of the sector of production, of a system of training which is autonomous from the school system (which is understandable, the formal educational system being unable to provide the adequate wo/man power), separate from the school system, has not had but positive results. The near failure of the technological policy of the country seems to reside also in the quasi total absence of R&D and technological innovation, even in strategic sectors like petroleum. Another area of tension described by the author is the vague relationship between the basic training given in the formal educational system and the specified one provided in training centres. This does not come as a surprise: each cycle of the school itself seems to be working in total isolation (one possible cause of its failure), let alone in collaboration with the outside world. This shows how long-term objectives in the school system are ignored, therefore disabling all the more the latter in its utopian fight to meet the specific demands of certain economic sectors which are vital for the country's growth.

Methodology-wise, Djeflat has worked at both macro and micro levels. In the first and larger domain he has succeeded in describing the technological policy of the country, and its place in the system of national education. A closer analysis focuses attention first on R&D and technological dissemination in the whole of the petrochemical complex, and then at the level of the plant, to study the use of the imported technological tool. Another important part of the whole puzzle is the lack of synchrony between the formal system of education and the requirements of employment in one of Algeria's key sectors. In the face of such a question, the writer makes an interesting remark: one cannot say whether there is correspondence between training and employment; one should talk about complementary systems (education and training), each one playing either a cultural/educational/political or economic/strategic role. This, of course, does not allow any optimistic perspective for the country's economic and educational fate.

The other not so blatant point is that thanks to training, the educational system has created new training programmes and profiles. Unfortunately, one must add that these programmes and profiles still rely heavily on the training abroad, which boils down to the everlasting question of dependence on foreign expertise, something that the government is theoretically anxious to avoid.

The level of analysis developed in this book is undeniable. The links between education in general and employment are made clear. The obstacles to balanced growth are identified and the inadequacies underlined. The worrying thing is that such a book will be of some import only to university researchers or curious readers; decision-makers will likely forget to ponder over such an uncompromising analysis. The only point of criticism one can put forward is the use of some not always reliable source of statistics on which certain points of the argument are based. This of course poses the problem of validity. But one knows how difficult it is for researchers to find one hundred percent reliable data in countries where basic pieces of information are at best a secret. The other point one can put forward is more of a *desideratum*: the very important variable, namely trainers, has not been dealt with fully. For many a researcher, the systems of training and education have failed basically because of those in charge of training: lack of experts, lack of pre- and in-service training, absence of motivation, lack of professionalism.

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