
La economía y educación ecuatoriana: una visión colonizada

Ecuadorian economy and education: a colonized view

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Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es analizar cómo los países dominantes ejercen su poder sobre los países dominados, y cómo esto afecta al sector educativo de estos últimos países. Este fenómeno se explica mediante las relaciones de poder y dominio existentes entre Estados Unidos y Ecuador en los últimos treinta años. A través de la óptica de la teoría de la reproducción social, la teoría de la resistencia, y la teoría crítica, se espera que este artículo provea de información necesaria para sensibilizar a las personas sobre el tema de relaciones asimétricas de poder.

Palabras clave: Práctica educativa; Ciencias de la educación; Desarrollo sostenible; Enseñanza pública en Ecuador

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present an account of how dominant countries exert their power over dominated countries and how their influence is reflected in the education sector of dominated countries. To explain this phenomenon the relations between the United States (USA) and Ecuador in the last 30 years are reviewed. Using as looking glass the social reproduction theory, resistance theory, and critical theory, we hope to raise people's awareness regarding the matter of asymmetrical power relations.

Keywords: Educative practice; Educational sciences; Sustainable development; Ecuadorian public education

Introduction

“As long as imperialism exists it will, by definition, exerts its domination over other countries”

Che Guevara

The purpose of this article is to present an account of how dominant countries exert their power over dominated countries and how their influence is reflected in the education sector of dominated countries. To explain this phenomenon, we chose two countries: United States (USA) as a dominant country and Ecuador as dominated country since USA influence has

impacted negatively on the socioeconomic situation of Ecuador in the last 30 years and its influence is still present today. By presenting a detailed description of how imperialist countries prevent the sustained socio-economical growth of developing countries through the lenses of the social reproduction theory, resistance theory, and critical theory, we hope to raise people's awareness regarding this matter. We cannot change the events from the past but we can definitely change the events in the future. We do not believe that dominant and oppressed groups should exist. We all should live in a world free of discrimination, racism, and wars; a world with more opportunities for work and education. Unfortunately, imperialist countries, political interests, corrupt governments, bad administrations, and mediocre leaders throughout history have perpetuated asymmetrical power relation between first world countries and developing countries.

Development

Ecuador as an oppressed country has suffered dictatorships, imperialist influence, and the effects of capitalism mainly as a consequence of the direct influence of the USA. The USA has been present in the history of Ecuador as an oppressor and in this way; it has showed its supremacy. Collins (2000) offers a definition of oppression which describes as “any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society.” (p. 4). She also believes that “race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression” (p. 4). Based on Collins' definition of oppression we can say that the United States is an oppressor and colonizer country. Concerning oppression, USA, via its politicians and economical power, has extracted natural resources indiscriminately from developing countries giving them nothing in return and denying them access to technology and knowledge. In this way USA has become a colonizer. Memmi (1991) describes a colonizer as the oppressor, which exploits, and rules other countries with economic and political force. As a result, colonized countries, as mentioned in Memmi (1991), being self-depreciated, dependent, and masochist.

This dependence is described by Freire's (2003) as *sadistic love* that is a perverted love. For Freire, one of the characteristics of the oppressor consciousness and its necrophilic view of

the world is sadism, meaning that they know the position they occupy and consciously exert their power over the weak. The United States, in an attempt to consciously dominate other countries, has used science and technology as powerful instruments to maintain countries such as Ecuador under their dominance.

One example of how the United States exerted their power over Ecuador was through their American oil companies established in the country. These companies just benefited from the extraction of our oil and did not provide any benefits to Ecuador in return. All the infrastructure, machinery, specialists and trained people to extract oil in the country came from the United States and it was inaccessible for Ecuadorians. This lack of technological and knowledge transfer to Ecuadorians was a clear manifestation of fostering inequalities and dependence, leaving Ecuador in a very disadvantageous position. For example, refineries were designed to produce only light crude oil; however, due to the lack of specialization in this area, Ecuadorian people were using light and heavy oil together. As a consequence, the machinery was damaged and the refineries lost oil and money.

Lack of technology, on the other hand, forced Ecuador to sell crude oil at low prices to industrialized countries. Ironically, these industrialized countries sold oil-derivate products back to Ecuador at very high prices. This happened because Ecuador did not have the economic and technical resources to produce refined oil. International companies took advantage of this deficiency knowledge and technology and generated money for them with Ecuadorian raw material. As it was mentioned in the documental by Rice and Meehan (2004), the Ecuadorian government's tendency to accommodate U.S. interests was a reality.

One of the most popular examples of the intrusion of oil companies in Ecuador is the Texaco Gulf Company that operated in Ecuador from 1964 to 1990. During 1972, the production of petroleum started to grow in Ecuador and its price was very high. Ecuador obtained 190 million dollars in 1970 and then it rose to more than 1300 million in 1977. This was the result of the oil production. However, it did not help the country to grow. On the contrary, because of bad administration mainly from our politicians, the money obtained from the oil went to private hands. Additionally, corrupted governments conducted unethical transactions by receiving money under the table to formulate obscure business

contracts, and deals to pass laws in favor of oil companies to exploit oil crude indiscriminately. Velasteguí (2004) states that only one-quarter of the money from the exploitation of oil was for Ecuador while three quarters of the income was for the foreign oil companies. This means that millions of dollars went outside Ecuador without any benefit for the development of the country. This unequal distribution of money exemplifies the economic power that the United States and other oppressor countries have over developing countries.

Paradoxically, during this period of abundant oil exploitation and money generation due to oil exportation in the country; Ecuador's external debt was getting bigger and became impossible for the country to pay. International funding agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) found in Ecuador an attractive country to give loans. Through these mechanisms the IMF showed an image of support and help to developing countries, particularly Ecuador. Freire (2003) defines this so-called help as "false generosity". For the IMF this false generosity was very convenient since via these loans they were able to exert their politic and economic control over Ecuador.

The results of this apparent trust to Ecuador manifested in loans caused a substantial increment of our external debt which by 1981 was approximately 2,840 million of dollars. This, according to the Banco Central del Ecuador, represented 12.4 times more than the original debt. In the next decade, other factors such as the increment of interest, a decrease in the price of oil, a delay in the payments, a military administration, and fiscal deficit caused that Ecuador's three-quarters of the national income was used to pay this debt. This means that only one-quarter of the money generated by the country was left to cover the country's obligations with its people, for instance: public health, education, housing, and employment. This way of acquiring international debt seems no to have changed trough time, currently, the Ecuadorian government has asked financial aid to new raising powerful countries such as China and Qatar.

Another example of the economic power that the United States had over Ecuador was the *dollarization*. In 1998, Ecuador suffered from high unemployment rate, poor education and health conditions, inflation, volatile trade balance, and an external debt that the Ecuadorian

government could not pay. In 1999, the national currency of Ecuador was “sucre”. The exchange rate at that moment was one American dollar equalized to 25,000 sucres. The government in that moment saw the dollarization as the solution for all economic problems that the country had and decided to change our national sucres to American dollars. This conversion meant different things. First, loss of sovereignty, Ecuador depended and still depends directly from the United States currency. Second, this change of currency caused uncertainty in the population. People, who had millions of sucres in banks, after the dollarization, saw a considerable reduction of their savings due to the conversion of sucres to dollars. Finally, the country became more dependent on the importation of several commodities from industrialized countries. This change of currency is maintained until today and due to the economic shock, that returning to sucres could cause, the use of dollar as our currency may continue for a long period of time.

Another aspect in which the role of oppressor and oppressed is clearly manifested is in the education sector. Freire (2000) presents the concept of *banking* for education. This means that students are depositories and the teachers are depositors of knowledge. Similarly happens in the ideology of the oppressor, in which the oppressed are seen as ignorant and need to be taught.

The conceptualization and arrangement of public education in Ecuador is also an example of oppression and one manifestation of this concerns the admission test that students need to approve in order to access higher education. By introducing this admission test, Ecuadorian education has reinforced inequalities among young seeking admission to public universities. It is important to note that not all public secondary schools have the same quality standards in education. It means that graduates from some secondary schools are better equipped to success in the university admission test than graduates from other secondary schools. Usually, graduates from public secondary schools which are located in deprived areas of the country tend not to perform well in these tests. This results in perpetuating inequalities and by making difficult for them to access university their role as oppressed individuals is maintained.

Bowles and Gintis (2011) highlight that the educational system works to justify economic inequality and produce a labor force. If secondary schools do not produce graduates with a sufficient knowledge to access higher education, these students will not have options but to form part of the working class which in most of the cases have mediocre jobs and restricted opportunities for developing cognitively, socially and economically.

As it was mentioned earlier in this article, due to the big amount of money taken from the national budget to pay the external debt, the budget assigned to education was very limited. This allocated budget was not enough to cover teachers' salaries, schools' infrastructure, and economic and technological resources necessary for schools to function properly. Viteri (2009) stated that the situation of education in Ecuador was dramatic, characterized by the persistence of illiteracy, low education levels, high repetition and dropout rates, poor quality of education and poor educational infrastructure and teaching materials. Luna and Céspedes (2013) added that each year about 100,000 five-year-old children could not enroll in the first year of basic education and 757,000 children and youth between 5 to 17 years old were outside schools and colleges. In addition, Luna and Céspedes (2013) stated that 2 out of 10 schools in the country did not have electricity; 1.6 out of 10 schools did not have drinking water and 3 out of 10 schools did not have sewerage.

Concerning the provision of instructional materials necessary for fostering knowledge, in the school year 1999-2000, out of a total of 1,657,963 school students only 356,837 received textbooks from the state (as cited in Viteri, 2009). Another problem was indigenous illiteracy in rural areas because of their sociocultural status.

To add concerns to the precarious education in the country, an emerging problem was illiteracy among indigenous people. According to the System of Social Indicator of Ecuador ISSE (for its acronym in Spanish) in 2001, population in rural areas had only 4,9 years of school instruction in average. This greatly differed to the school instruction average in urban areas which was 12 years. Indigenous children, in most of the cases, were forced to stop school and work in farms, mines, houses, and even on the streets selling fruits or candies.

Teacher training was another deficiency of the educational system in Ecuador. Teachers did not have training in didactics, pedagogy, and technology. Viteri (2009) presented the profile

of Ecuadorians regarding our educational attainment in 2005. This study showed the following figures about teachers' academic attainment: 1.8% of Ecuadorian teachers had a postgraduate degree, 53.3% had a university degree, 17.3% had a college degree, and 9.4% had a bachelor degree in social science. Thought, there was a high percentage of university degree holders, the low percentage of postgraduate degree holders showed the lack of specialization and knowledge production that Ecuadorian teachers had. Note that 18.0% of teachers did not have any teaching qualification. This situation affected negatively the quality of education in the country.

There had not been a sustainable solution to benefit teachers or to improve the conditions of education and the sudden intermittent and constant changes in educational policies in each government in office without taking into consideration teachers' opinions provoked a setback instead of advancement in education. The no inclusion of teachers in policy design also reflects oppressive practices in which teachers are oppressed by those who hold the power to implement policies. This oppressive practice has resulted in teachers playing a passive role in schools and their role rather than being an active agent of change has been reduced to mere policy implementers.

Conclusions

In this article, we have explained how the asymmetrical power relations can affect negatively the development of countries or individuals without power. In order to better exemplify this relation, we used the United States and Ecuador as the perfect example to explain asymmetrical power relation and how the oppressors exert their influence over the oppressed in the financial aspect mainly. Following this imperialistic influence, we also described how this financial control over Ecuador has affected negatively the quality of our public education. An ineffective public education which has in turn perpetuated oppression to excluded groups, such as students from deprived schools and indigenous groups. It is our intention that by understanding the negative effects caused by foreign influences, we start rethinking our national politics in order to promote a true emancipation from the oppressors. In this regards, the Ecuadorian government needs to first change its politics, second,

prioritize the country's social demands and third, stop seeing itself as a colonized country. These three changes can help the nation overthrow its yoke of imperialistic countries.

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