

EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING
IN BELIZE

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Presented to
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The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Josephine Wilson
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of educational planning and the planning process in Belize; a developing nation of Central America, formerly known as British Honduras.

Five questions guided the study and these were directed at the historical, social and economic context of Belize, and at the cultural and linguistic divisions which influence educational planning in the country.

The procedures used in the study consisted of an examination of relevant documents, and an analysis of the results of interviews.

The study indicated that the citizens of Belize are demanding a widening of the goals of education as they recognize its importance for development. However, it was found that problems such as regional disparities of educational opportunity, language diversity as well as financial limitations, prevent the full realization of these objectives.

Educational planning in Belize was shown to be government-dominated with little if any input from citizens. The Cabinet exercises a tight control over the whole process, such that plans drawn up by the Ministry Development Committee must be approved by the Cabinet Development Committee, after which they become part of the overall government plan.

It was found that the dual control of education by Church and State created tensions between the two parties. At present control of secondary education rests almost entirely with the various

denominations for whom it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep pace with the expanding system.

Based on the findings of the study, twelve areas of concern were considered. These included the dual system of education; disparities existing between city and rural schools, English as a Second Language; the Common Entrance Examination; the involvement of citizens in educational planning; the need for agricultural expansion and the problems of school leavers.

Seven recommendations for further study were also presented, some dealing with areas recommended above for practice. In addition were the following: the effects of the expansion of education on development; the achievement patterns of bilingual children; British and Belizean education in the nineteenth century; and non-formal education in developing countries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x

Chapter	Page
1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
INTRODUCTION	1
THE PROBLEM	3
RESEARCH PROCEDURES	5
Sources of Data	5
Documentary Evidence	5
Interviews	5
Interview procedure	6
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY	6
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE STUDY	7
Articulation (of policy)	7
Culture	7
Educational Policy	7
Historical Context	7
Social Context	7
Social Division	8
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	8
2. THE GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, ECONOMY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELIZE	9

Chapter	Page
THE GEOGRAPHY OF BELIZE	9
AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF BELIZE	14
THE ECONOMY OF BELIZE	22
THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELIZE	27
SUMMARY	33
3. THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN BELIZE: THE FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING AND THE PROCESS	34
THE HISTORY	34
The Pupil-Teacher System	35
The Education Ordinance 1926	36
The Easter Report	37
The Dixon Report	38
The West India Commission	40
Secondary Education	41
Government Reports	42
Higher Education	45
The Education Ordinance 1962	47
United Nations Surveys	50
Dual Control: The Attitude of Government	52
Government Development Plan 1964-70	53
Implementation of UNESCO Recommendations	53
The Present System of Education	55
Administration and supervision	55
Primary Education	55
Special Education System	56
The Secondary School System	56

Chapter	Page
Teacher Education System	57
Adult Education System	57
Government Draft Plans	57
Government Development Plan 1977-79	59
Educational Achievements	65
Organizational Drawbacks	69
Current Achievements	70
The Caribbean Examination Council	72
Educational Financing	73
THE FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN BELIZE	75
Educational Planning Defined	75
Educational Planning in Belize	78
District Involvement in Planning	81
Future Plans	81
Agriculture	82
The Need for Teachers	84
The Problem of Rural Education	84
Non-Formal Education	86
Conclusion	87
SUMMARY	88
4. SUMMARY, ISSUES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	89
SUMMARY	90
The Case of Belize	90
The Historical and Socio-Political Context	90
The Institutional Context	92

Chapter	Page
ISSUES AND CONCLUSIONS	92
Belize	92
The Social Context	92
The Common Entrance Examination	93
Government Secondary Schools	95
The Position of the Private Schools	95
The Institutional Context	96
Dual Control	97
AREAS OF CONCERN	98
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	106
APPENDICES	115

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Value and Balance of Trade	24
2. Sugar Production	25
3. Citrus Production	25
4. Population Breakdown by Ethnic Origins	28
5. Yearly Intake of the Belize Teachers' College 1954-1978	48
6. Forecast for Primary School Children and Teachers During the Period 1977-1979	61
7. Forecast for Secondary School Students, and the Projected Requirements for Secondary School Teachers During the Period 1977-1979	64

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Belize: Position	10
2. Belize: Rainfall	13
3. Belize: Land Use	15
4. Organizational Framework of Planning	80

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to provide a description and analysis of educational planning in Belize: a developing country with British traditions, which has governed itself, except for matters of defence and foreign relations, since 1964.

Belize, formerly known as British Honduras, is situated along the Eastern (Caribbean) coast of Central America, on a long, tapering isthmus which it shares with six Spanish speaking republics: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. The country is bordered on the North and Northwest by Mexico, and on the West and South by Guatemala. Due to its British Colonial traditions, Belize identifies more, in matters of education, with the British and ex-British Caribbean countries, than with her closest neighbours; and yet, due to her geographical position and her multi-cultural, multi-lingual heritage, she is also quite distinct from them.

Most developing countries, at least since the early nineteen sixties, have been committed to changes and improvements in their educational systems. During these years UNESCO conducted many educational planning missions in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, the West Indies, and Latin America, with the expressed

objective of accelerating educational expansion in those countries.¹ However, the targets set, often proved unfeasible in the light of reality, and it has become obvious that "educational systems cannot be realistically planned without taking careful account of the needs and constraints of their economic and social context."²

Belize is a poor country with an estimated \$500.00 per capita income in 1975.³ The population of 120,000, living in a land area of 8,866 square miles, gives Belize one of the lowest population densities in the world: about fourteen per square mile. However, the natural population growth of 3.74% per annum has brought about a population structure in which 49.3% are under the age of fifteen.⁴ The economy is overburdened, since it has to bear the costs of essential government services, of which the social services, including education, amount to about one third of the budget.⁵ Attempts to invite foreign investment, especially from North Americans, have met with little success. In fact, not only have investors generally shown a reluctance to invest, except in partnership with local interest--a rare opportunity due to lack of Belizean funds--but they have instead engaged in land speculation in both tourism and agriculture.⁶ Belize

¹Philip Coombs and Jacques Hallak, Managing Educational Costs (O.U.P., New York), p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Belize: New Nation in Central America (Cubola productions, Benque Viejo del Carmen, n.d.), p. 18.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶C.H. Grant, The Making of Modern Belize (C.U.P., 1976), p. 235.

is characterized by uncleared jungle and swamps; it has to contend with the ever-present threat of devastating hurricanes and in spite of the potential of soil and climate, more food is imported than exported.⁷ In such a country, how to plan for development is a difficult and pressing problem.

THE PROBLEM

The following questions were addressed in order to provide a meaningful description of educational planning in Belize. These five questions which form the focus of the study throughout, will be dealt with in-depth, as part of the narrative.

1.0 The historical and social context of education planning in Belize.

The first problem was to describe the historical, social and economic background which influenced educational planning in Belize.

1.1 What are the historical factors which affected educational planning in Belize?

1.2 What are the social factors which affected educational planning in Belize?

1.3 What are the economic factors which affect educational planning in Belize?

2.0 The cultural and linguistic context of educational planning in Belize.

The second problem was to describe the cultural and linguistic divisions which have influenced educational planning in Belize

⁷P.A. Furley and A.J. Crosbie, The Geography of Belize (Collins, London and Glasgow, 1974), p. 43.

2.1 What are the cultural differences which have influenced educational planning in Belize?

2.2 What are the different linguistic backgrounds which have influenced educational planning in Belize?

3.0 The institutional framework of educational planning in Belize.

The third problem was to examine the role of the Minister and the other participants in the educational planning process in Belize.

3.1 What is the role of the Minister in educational planning in Belize?

3.2 What is the role of the Head of the Central Planning Unit in educational planning in Belize?

3.3 Are there other persons whose roles can be defined in the planning process? If so, what are their roles?

4.0 Policy articulation and formulation and its relationship to educational planning in Belize.

The fourth problem was to examine how policy is articulated and formulated, and how it is related to educational planning in Belize.

4.1 How is educational policy articulated in Belize?

4.2 How is educational policy formulated in Belize?

4.3 How is educational policy related to educational planning in Belize?

5.0 Short-range and long-range educational goals in Belize.

The fifth problem was to identify the educational goals in Belize, both short and long-range.

5.1 What are the long-range educational goals in Belize?

5.2 What are the short-range educational goals in Belize?

5.3 What are the general goals related to problems of education in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society?

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The procedures used in this study consisted of an examination of relevant documentary evidence, and an analysis of the results of interviews.

Sources of Data

1. Documentary Evidence. The following documents were examined: Government of Belize Development plans; Department of Education annual and triennial reports; the Easter Report on the Education system of British Honduras, 1933-34; the Dixon Report on the Initiation of Jeanes Supervision in British Honduras, 1936; Report on the UNESCO planning mission in British Honduras, 1964; statistical reports, circulars and policy statements published by the Ministry of Education or by other advisory bodies, as well as by various school and college administrators.

2. Interviews. The study also employed interviews with persons holding key positions in education and related fields. The following persons were interviewed:

- (a) The Head of the Central Planning Unit, Government of Belize
- (b) The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education
- (c) The Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education
- (d) The Principal Education Officer for Secondary and Higher Education

- (e) A District Education Officer
- (f) The Community Development Officer, Ministry of Education
- (g) The Principal of Belize Teachers' Training College
- (h) The Principal of St. Catherines Academy, Belize City
- (i) The Principal of St. Michael's School, Belize City
- (j) The Principal of the Ecumenical High School, Dangriga
- (k) The Principal of San Pedro High School, Ambergris Caye
- (l) Former Chief Education Officer
- (m) A member of the Board of Governors of the Ecumenical High School, Dangriga

Interview procedure. A semi-structured interview guide was used and a separate schedule prepared for each interviewee; however, as far as possible the same questions were used for each interview.⁸ The interviews were not taped, since it was felt that officials are often uninclined to speak freely or disclose information in such circumstances.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that a study of how educational planning has developed in Belize will be useful to educators in other developing countries who are attempting to modernize their systems. The study will demonstrate that planning and the results of planning are

⁸See Appendix A for list of questions.

influenced to a very large extent by geographic, social, cultural, economic and political realities.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

Brief definitions are given here of terms which might possibly be misinterpreted.

Articulation (of policy)

Clear, distinct, unambiguous written expression, by those persons responsible for policy making.

Culture

The body of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits constituting a distinct complex of traditions of a racial, religious or social group: that complex whole which encompasses knowledge, belief, morals, law, customs, opinions, religions, superstition and art.

Educational Policy

A set of decisions about educational goals, and the methods chosen to attain them.

Historical Context

The historical base, both general and more specifically educational, from which present educational planning must develop if it is to prove successful.

Social Context

The existing background of society; the product of the

community's history, with which educators must be in tune, but which it must in turn transform, in order to create a new one, more developed and informed.

Social Division

The division of society into traditional groupings, whether based on religious, linguistic, economic or educational similarities.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 describes the geographical, historical, social and economic context of Belize; while Chapter 3 traces the development of education and educational planning in Belize from the early days of colonization to the present day. Chapter 4 summarizes and discusses the issues and conclusions reached in the study, and makes suggestions and recommendations based on them.

CHAPTER 2

THE GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, ECONOMY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELIZE

THE GEOGRAPHY OF BELIZE

Belize is a small country having an area of 8,866 square miles which includes the Cays. Formerly known as British Honduras, it is bordered on the north and northwest by Mexico and on the west and south by Guatemala, while to the east lies the Caribbean sea.¹ The country is long and narrow extending for 174 miles from north to south, while at its widest it is only seventy miles from east to west. The frontier with Mexico follows the lower part of the Hondo River to its mouth; the frontier with Guatemala runs for many miles along the mountains in the west and for a short distance along the Sarstoon River in the south. Compared to most other Central American and Caribbean countries, Belize is very sparsely populated with a density of less than fourteen persons per square mile for a total of 120,000.²

The Maya mountains, an eastward extension of the much higher mountain chain which forms the backbone of Guatemala, take up over one third of Belize. They rise sharply from the surrounding lowlands to a rolling plateau generally below 3,000 feet in altitude (See Figure 1, p. 2). This plateau is composed of ancient sedimentary

¹See Figure 1, p. 10.

²D.A.G. Waddell, British Honduras (O.U.P., 1961), p. 57.

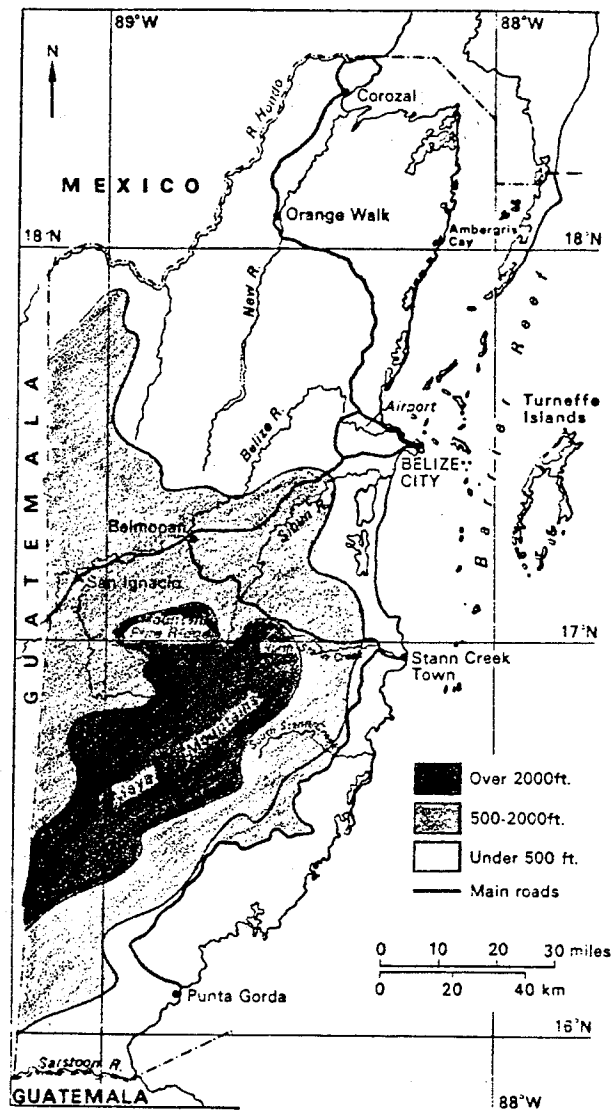


FIGURE 1

Belize: Position

Source:

John Macperhson, Caribbean Lands (Longman Caribbean Ltd., 1963), p. 158.

rocks, mainly sandstone and shale with many granite intrusions which have brought minerals including gold and tin to the surface. Weathering of the granite itself has produced "kaolin" or white china clay. However, as the various mineral deposits are so difficult of access, little is known about them and no mining operations have yet been attempted.³

The northern lowlands consist of limestone slopes and plains mostly under five hundred feet in elevation although on the mountain sides it is higher, giving rise to typical Karst⁴ scenery. The southern lowlands contain a greater variety of sedimentary rocks, including limestone, while the hills are generally low and rounded.

The coastal strip connecting the northern and southern lowlands is only about ten miles wide since the Maya mountains end very close to the sea. Coastal currents depositing sediment have formed sandbars across river mouths. In this way lagoons are formed, some of which have been entirely cut off from mountains and which flow for long distances in a north-easterly direction towards the sea. These are often bordered by swamps, and in places they broaden into lakes. In the coastal waters there are numerous reefs and sand and mangrove cays many of which are large enough for the

³Macpherson, op. cit., p. 158.

⁴"Karst" is the name given to areas of limestone which develop types of scenery quite different from other kind of rock. Here great caves exist high above the level of the rivers and towering hills surround swamp-filled hollows. Karst is named after a district in Yugoslavia where the process responsible for these features have been studied intensively. See P.A. Furley and A.J. Crosbie, Geography of Belize (Collins, London and Glasgow), p. 5.

cultivation of coconut groves and the maintenance of fishing communities. The main reef, farther offshore, extends for almost the whole length of the coast and attracts tourists from many parts of the world; it is the largest unbroken Barrier Reef in the Western Hemisphere.⁵

Belize is situated between latitudes 16°N and 18°N in the path of the Trade Winds, therefore it has a climate similar to the rest of the Caribbean region. Mean temperatures on the lowlands range from 81°F (27°C) in August to 75°F (24°C) in February. On hot summer days the temperature may rise to 97°F (36°) while when a cold north wind or "norther" is blowing it may fall to below 50°F (10°C).

As Figure 2 illustrates, rainfall increases rapidly from north to south due to the location of the mountains.⁶ Near the Mexican border there is an average of only fifty inches per year, while the south has an average of one hundred seventy-five inches. The hot rainy season lasts from June to October and the cool dry season lasts from December to May in the north, but only from February to April in the south. During the months of August and September in particular, there is always the danger of hurricanes, and Belize was severely struck in 1931 when at least a thousand lives were lost, and again in 1961 when casualties were fewer due to improved warning systems.⁷

⁵Macpherson, op. cit., p. 158.

⁶See Figure 2, p. 13.

⁷The West Indies and Caribbean Year Book, 1976-77, p. 126.

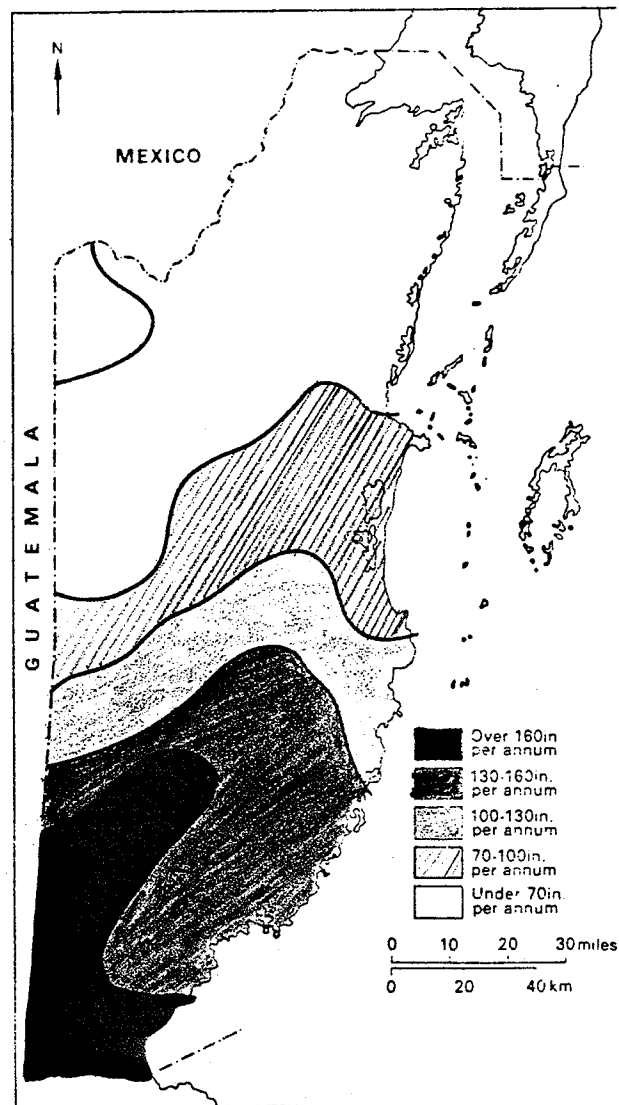


Figure 2

Belize: Rainfall

Source:

Macpherson, op. cit., p. 159.