

**Prospects for Enhancing Caribbean Higher Education
Policy Research:
The Trinidad and Tobago Model for Strategic
Development of the Higher/Tertiary Education Sector**

Ali, E. R.

*Presented at the Regional Seminar “Research and Higher Education Policies
for Transforming Societies: Perspectives from Latin America
and the Caribbean”*

19-20 July 2007
Port of Spain, Trinidad



Biography for Eduardo Ali

Eduardo Raoul Ali is the Education Adviser and Head of the Higher Education Services Division of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. He has responsibility for coordinating policy and legislative research, policy analysis, strategic alliances development, international liaison and management of co-operation programmes for tertiary education development in Trinidad and Tobago. He strategically directs a joint initiative between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the European Union for development of the non-university tertiary education sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Ali is a member of the Board of Directors of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Commission on UNESCO, Deputy Chairman of the IDB-funded Seamless Education System Project Oversight Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Education, Executive Member of the Fulbright Alumni Association of Trinidad and Tobago and Public Relations Officer for the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning. He also participated in many national and CARICOM regional projects in open and distance learning, lifelong learning, seamless education and training and quality assurance and accreditation systems policy.

He was an academic, researcher and teacher at secondary and higher education institutions in Jamaica, Trinidad and Canada in life sciences; managed executive and continuing education programmes on behalf of US-based universities; developed national vocational qualifications and curricula with the National Training Agency; was responsible for human resource and organizational development for a US owned Caribbean-based technology corporation; and led a US/Caribbean based overseas higher education advising enterprise.

Mr. Ali is a recipient of some 9 national and international awards, scholarships and fellowships including a national scholarship, Caribbean Conference of Churches Scholarship, Commonwealth Scholarship, and the United States Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs International Scholarship. Mr. Ali's academic education and training is in the life sciences, education policy research, public policy analysis, programme management, international affairs, quality improvement and accreditation. He is currently completing his doctoral dissertation with the University Of Sheffield School Of Education in comparative and international education policy where he is comparing accreditation laws and policies in 5 emerging CSME territories, namely Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Prospects for Enhancing Caribbean Higher Education Policy Research: The Trinidad and Tobago Model for Strategic Development of the Higher/Tertiary Education Sector

Eduardo R. Ali

*Higher Education Services Division, Education Adviser & Head
Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education
AliE@govt.tt, era_shef@yahoo.com, edp03era@sheffield.ac.uk*

ABSTRACT: Within the past two decades, in particular, the Anglophone Caribbean has faced a number of critical policy challenges for investing in higher/tertiary education reforms. Despite the challenges ahead, numerous advances have been made through policy reforms and interventions by national governments, CARICOM, international education enterprises (UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning) and with the support of regional/international financing agencies (the Caribbean Development Bank, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the European Commission etc.). Such policy challenges have been most seriously impacted by internationalization and globalization policies and movements and the need for increasing the output of knowledge and skilled workers to develop the Caribbean workforce. With the unprecedented pace of change within the past 5 years, some regional players in higher/tertiary education policy reform have been utilizing an agenda approach to tackling problems that they are faced with whilst others are using the professional development and standards route to regulate what happens within their industries. The Caribbean is now faced with the need for coordination of efforts in higher/tertiary education policies which will maximize output and impact and lessen the burden on national and regional governments and institutions.

Notwithstanding the regional attempts, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has also explored its own policy options for managing its investment in tertiary education towards development of civil society by 2020. Today, a large effort is being made for rationalization of tertiary education investment through an integrated model for tertiary education sector research which will enable a data-driven approach to national policy development and implementation in areas related to funding, finance, research and development and institutional capacity building. This paper outlines the existing and emerging models for building policy research capacity and policy analysis within the tertiary education sector in Trinidad and Tobago. While the model is being implemented, it is being monitored and evaluated to determine its likely sustainability for the long haul. It is believed that given that the model is now being implemented nationally, lessons can be learnt from the country's experiences by other Caribbean territories so as to work towards integrated national policy research programmes for their higher/tertiary education sectors.

Higher Education Policy in the Caribbean

Before I attempt to make any statements on higher and tertiary education policy in this paper, I think it is necessary for me to declare my understanding of the terms: 'policy', 'higher education' and 'tertiary education' as they apply to the Caribbean region.

Understanding the Policy Concept

First and foremost, policy has been regarded by many theorists as "political strategy", "political outcomes", "processes within and between the state and society" and "the context by which political decisions are made". In my argument I will draw upon these themes/definitions of policy as they apply to the Caribbean region and certainly to education and training delivered within the tertiary education setting. I regard the issue of "process" as very central and important for making pronouncements on public policy in tertiary education. As I previously described, (Ali, 2004) research, in its varying forms, is absolutely necessary when deciding on education policy as it relates to issues of curriculum. The question of who teaches, what is taught and how it is taught and the impact that teaching and learning has on schools, societies and decisions governments have to make about curriculum must be guided by research. Further to this understanding, Freire posed another issue in the education policy debate when he said:

"Often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their task is just alienated and alienating rhetoric."

(Freire 1970, p. 77)

His point reminds me of the role of politicians and the political process and the assertion that their contributions may have profound and lasting effects on our ideas and knowledge about social context. This becomes even more critical when we recognize his idea that both educators and politicians communicate in ways that is generally misunderstood, misrepresented or misappropriated within the civil society. Again this makes a case for having well designed policies that are truly representative of all interests in a dynamic complex society and certainly one which can be understood by all. A clearly defined programme and process for research should certainly enable more effective data-driven education policies especially in sectors that are inherently complex such as the tertiary education sector.

Distinguishing Higher Education and Tertiary Education

For some four centuries, the concept and philosophy of higher education has been regarded by Caribbean society as that level of education beyond secondary schooling that engages Caribbean nationals for active participation within growing economies and societies. This education was originally conceptualized as taking place within the walls of the traditional university, a place where citizens entered to acquire knowledge and skills for further education, enlightenment and workforce engagement. It is within the past two decades that Caribbean society has shifted its paradigm to rethink this form of education to include vocational education, career education and other forms of learning that do not take place within the university environment. This ideology has been shaped to a large extent by globalization and internationalization policy agendas which

have found their course within the Caribbean archipelago. We now have adapted propositions by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for example, which have espoused and articulated the concept of tertiary education to include all levels of formal and non-formal education beyond successful completion of secondary education that addresses civil society needs with a much greater emphasis on workforce development (Alexander, 1998). Tertiary education is therefore regarded by many as having four classification levels: i) sub-baccalaureate; ii) baccalaureate; iii) masters; and iv) post-masters/doctoral (World Bank, 2002). Given the emerging definition acceptance within the region, what were traditionally higher education policies which focused on regional and national universities in the Caribbean have now somewhat shifted to concentration on all forms of tertiary education.

The Tertiary Education Demands and Policy Challenges

The demand for tertiary education in the Caribbean is faced with many challenges. In historic terms, Caribbean tertiary education has evolved from a sector in the Caribbean dominated essentially by a one main provider, that is, a regional university and has now seen the likes of a diverse community of national, offshore and private tertiary education institutions. As far back as 1962, the philosophy of tertiary education emanated from the considerations of the University of the West Indies (UWI) as being that institution that would promote development of the Caribbean as a post-colonial society of leaders, managers and thinkers whilst relieving us of our dependence on a British hegemony. This it would do and would still be relevant to the national development agenda in the territories where it was found.

Ambitious and laudable as these may seem to the Caribbean over the years, the region Caribbean has now found itself in a very plural educational community characterized by a plethora of private and offshore institutions providing a wide array of local and foreign-based tertiary education programmes which challenge the very existence of the UWI. Beckles summarizes this well in his report:

“The most visible expression of global trade liberalization within the regional HE sector is the expansion of ‘for profit’ foreign universities, mostly registered as ‘offshore’ institutions that are transacting corporate style business within most communities. This development has attracted an international reputation for the Caribbean market which is seen as a lucrative frontier for HE exploration. At the same time there is a sense of genuine concern for the future of UWI within this environment. Some foreign institutions are seeking to ‘creolize’ their internal provisions and ‘nationalize’ their constitutional status.”

(Beckles, 2004 p. 1)

Taking up on Beckles’ argument, Caribbean governments have now to deal with the challenges of a regional tertiary education sector with so many players offering different modalities of learning to its citizens and catering to diverse student populations and diverse workforce and community development needs.

Not being ignorant of this fact, both regional policy setting entities, CARICOM and the OECS have spearheaded some reforms aimed at ensuring that the Caribbean region understands the environment and demands for tertiary education in the Anglophone Caribbean. The region now

faces major hurdles in governing tertiary education. This is primarily noted in the way it sets about establishing policies that should facilitate sustainable development of the sector itself and certainly their nations and the region as a whole. Following up from the CARICOM Revised Treaty of Chaguaramus (CARICOM, 2004), the announcement of the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), has as a major single market policy objective the implementation of the CSME Free Movement of Skilled Persons agenda. This Programme has serious implications for the development of human capital in the region as it will require persons to be holders of CSME Skills Certificates which would recognize tertiary education qualifications within member states. Whereas Ministries of Foreign Affairs issue these certificates, national accreditation bodies would have to assess qualifications of nationals to issue such certificates or approvals.

Transnational corporations and international agencies resident in the Caribbean have also facilitated policy in tertiary education development, sometimes to the advantage and yet in some instances to the detriment of our education systems. UNESCO, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2001) and the OAS, in particular, have supported the idea of refashioning of curriculum delivery and pedagogy to learner-centred models, aligning curricula with international labour and cultural demands, enhancing quality to meet international standards, providing avenues for public-private sector finance, creating appropriate legal and political frameworks, ensuring educational democratization through widening and deepening access and alignment of practices with international policy and experience. Further regional challenges for tertiary education systems include:

Governance, Management and Regulatory Issues

- ❖ Legally establishing/disestablishing institutions, as regulated by the state
- ❖ Creating level playing field for all kinds of institutions: public, private, offshore, others
- ❖ Effectively managing funding for students, institutions and research
- ❖ Ensuring internal and external quality assurance/accreditation
- ❖ Introducing unified credit-based systems for allowing smooth regional articulation
- ❖ Strengthening leadership and managerial capacity within state, regulatory enterprises and institutions themselves
- ❖ Sustaining increasing enrolment without having barriers to access
- ❖ Linking programming to national and regional demands for lifelong learning
- ❖ Improving and applying knowledge through enhanced research, relevant to the community's needs.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Issues

- ❖ Recognizing and introducing non-traditional (e.g. e-learning, work-based learning and open learning) and informal/non-formal education systems catering to diverse learners'

needs

- ❖ Delivering learner-centred systems for both administration and teaching/learning
- ❖ In small states, having the need to rationalize programming offered by state institutions to minimize excess and surpluses in programming tied to state funds

Some of these policy issues have been articulated by policy reports many times prepared by these agencies in collaboration with unsuspecting technocrats working within Government and usually in the absence of comprehensive policies for tertiary education within territories. While these policy interventions may seem feasible to some, in many instances they are designed on models that have not worked in similar environments, may have worked but are not socio-culturally relevant to the needs of the territories or cannot be sustained given capital projections over the long term. These issues have to be studied carefully within practical terms and in the institutional environment to determine whether in fact cases do exist for these models in the varied institutions in diverse tertiary education sectors within different geo-political environments having different kinds of economies. Despite the shortcomings, these policy support programmes are designed with the notion of allowing the Caribbean to invest adequately in stimulating a productive, well regulated, self-sustaining and manageable tertiary education sector.

While we think about the several concerns which CARICOM must be cognizant of in terms of negotiating tertiary education policy for the region, within the recent past there has been the emergence of international liberalization agreements which can seriously have deleterious impacts on the region's tertiary education landscape. The World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO-GATS) has surfaced as an urgent agenda that has attracted much discourse, debate and concern among academics, trade specialists and governments as a whole. The concern had initially surfaced when one examined the WTO agreements signed by Jamaica where it made commitments under the GATS to liberalize its HE sector and where this could have led to a proliferation of foreign institutions and programmes operating within the region that may or may not add value to the region's development as well as could be charges on public funds. Again, Beckles (2004, p.1) refers to this as 'unplanned liberalization'. Here he makes the point that the Caribbean region would have committed to a cause in the interest of international trade liberalization but would not have planned to deal with the social impact that this intervention could have on the region itself. Moreover, in Beckles' discourse he maintains that this commitment may lead Caribbean education- being a public good- into a battle of sorts between the spheres of 'internationalization' and 'global liberalism'. Although this argument was tending to make a case for the UWI's strategy of dealing with unplanned liberalization of tertiary education, the report also highlighted implications for foreign universities operating as offshore institutions with respect to the UWI as well as other national tertiary providers. In his debate, he felt that the UWI would now have to re-constitute itself to confront these global challenges. Agreeing with Beckles' concerns, I too share the view but would like to suggest that the issue does not only relate to the UWI and the national tertiary education institutions alone, but concerns all for-profit providers of tertiary education operating within the Caribbean tertiary education marketplace, regulatory bodies concerned with quality assurance and recognition and governments concerned with financing sustainable investments in tertiary education.

Is There a Need for HE Policy Analysis Frameworks?

Critical policy analysis models have been recognized by many proponents as useful and convenient tools for public policy development, analysis, research and implementation. Gordon, Lewis and Young (Taylor et al 1997, p. 36) made a distinction between what is referred to as *analysis of policy* and *analysis for policy*. In analysis of/for policy, political aspirations, state strategy, socio-economic contexts and sector outcomes should be carefully linked by a research agenda all supported by a programme of financing which ensures that state administered strategies are drilled down to projects delivered within institutions. This must be documented in the policy text adopted by the state and care must be taken not to misreport these statements so that what is recorded is delivered etcetera. Important also is for performance output to be measured and for data from educational activities within educational environment to be captured to inform policy at the state level. Taylor et al. (1997, pp. 36-53), Easton et al. (Taylor et al, 1997 pp. 27-28), Dale (1999, pp. 6-7), Morrow and Torres (Burbules and Torres, 2000 p 43) and Ozga (2000 p. 2) have raised renewed notions of policy analysis. Collectively they have described policy as 'more than documentation or content', 'more or less process and product; involving the production of text and the text itself and with ongoing modification of the policy content' and a 'top-down and bottom-up or two-way interactive policy development process'. They rationalized policy as not using a traditional rational linear model but rather being an intricate network of social relationships that are linked by distinct policy processes. Accordingly, the design of policy analysis models that have worked in other jurisdictions and contexts and that use a 'one-size-fits-all' doctrine should be discouraged. What must also be noted is the state's competition coming from external policy actors. That is, one must document clearly the external influences in policy drawn from international and global interests.

Policy Analysis Frameworks, therefore, provide useful tools for managing information on socio-economic, political and cultural triggers on policy and looking at how these influence education and educational settings whilst stressing the limitations and constraints posed by the state to deliver the education policy. Given the enormity and complexity of the interests of higher/tertiary education coming from globalization and internationalization agendas, labour, culture, industry and tertiary education institutions there is dire need for policy analysis frameworks that facilitate policy research, policy design, macro-programme setting, programme financing, project execution and certainly monitoring and evaluating impact on the academies and the sector.

One clear case for such a policy stems from the 2000 CARICOM draft policy/legislation for establishment of national accreditation bodies (CARICOM, 2000) which ensures the introduction of accreditation authorities in the member states¹. In the development of the legislation draft a consultancy was commissioned which engaged three principal consultants who undertook a study to analyze the need for such legislation in each territory. The findings enabled member states to establish their accreditation agencies through their national legislature machinery. Recent research I conducted showed that there was very little to no risk analysis, preliminary budgeting, leadership assessment or quantitative profiling of institutions within the tertiary education sector performed to determine first of all whether this legislation would have the adequate support to finance, lead and manage it and secondly whether or not there were

¹ Currently there are accreditation agencies in Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago with more to be established in other territories.

adequate number of clear cases requiring establishment of national agencies in each territory that had one. Beyond this fact, there was no monitoring and evaluation system in place at the regional level to determine successes, shortcomings or failures of the policy/legislation within the region. A policy analysis framework would certainly enable proper design and management of the system and also to see whether this intervention alone, that is the legislation and accreditation agencies, was all CSME territories needed to ensure skills movement in the region.

The Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Approach to HE/TE Sector Development

Trinidad and Tobago has articulated its Vision 2020 Strategy for developing the country's capacity by 2020. A central pillar is the facilitation of development of an innovative people and a responsive, caring, productive society. In its quest to stimulate development of knowledge and skills capital for achieving these goals, the Government established a policy for development of the tertiary education sector (Green Paper, 2004).

Among others, the policy highlights the government's approach to developing and regulating its institutions, programmes, ensuring student success and graduate output for employment. It flagged research and development as being needed not only on societal issues for development of the country but also the need for a re-engineered Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education catering to tertiary education research, intelligence-gathering, formulating policies and managing policy investment in the sector.

To date, the Ministry has re-engineered itself by creating a new strategic direction for change towards a policy research driven entity and it has been working on preparing stakeholders and the country for development through a research approach to policy formulation. The first main initiative in this regard came when in 2000, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago developed a country strategy for co-operation with the European Union and the design of a tertiary education policy framework followed which will be implemented over 4 years under the 9th European Development Fund Sector Policy Support Programme for the Non-University Tertiary Education Sector. The multi-million dollar 4-year grant financing agreement focuses on bridging, widening and deepening access from secondary education to tertiary education and skills training whilst catering to overall development of the tertiary sector by establishing legislation, further policies for tertiary education, doing research on the needs of the tertiary sector and managing outputs with institutions. The investment here is heralded as a major strategy for reform but works concurrently with the Government's own recurrent and development programme investment for tertiary education sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the tertiary education research and development model, the academy is central to the research cycle. Its educational practices will be carefully studied to enable benchmarking, quality improvement, institutional strategy development and policy advice to the government for improved policies. Institutional research capacity will be boosted as the Ministry having established a Tertiary Education Strategy Advisory body in the interim will be a platform for dialogue, analysis and further direction of research studies to improve the research output. Eventually, a Tertiary Education Council will be established by law which will further this idea but provide independent policy advice to the Minister to contribute to more effective policy making based on research studies conducted on the tertiary sector. All this research is being analyzed against the global commitments made by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for higher/tertiary education with particular emphasis on the 17 global articles in the World

Declaration and Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education established by UNESCO.

Can the Anglophone Caribbean Adopt a Strategic Policy Analysis Approach?

Trinidad and Tobago's model for strategic development of the tertiary education sector is currently being implemented and tested. The Anglophone Caribbean stands to benefit from this approach in that it can refer to the existing system which would have worked to ensure critical success and eventually scale this out regionally. There are however, some important lessons here for the Caribbean given that apart from CARICOM, the OECS, UNESCO, national governments and the UWI, there are funding, development, professional standards and professional development bodies operating with regional remit. The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA), the Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE), the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI), Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL), the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN) and many others have been playing very needed though sometimes duplicated roles in research and professional development in the Caribbean. They sometimes draw upon the same resources; financial, material and human to achieve their objectives. One might proffer the argument that this may need careful rationalization if the region is to move forward. Some of the recommendations which could be suggested to rationalize this may effort, include:

Strategy One:

Need to design HE/TE Policy Analysis Framework for CSME reflecting each country's sector needs. The Trinidad and Tobago model may be a good reference and benchmark.

Strategy Two:

One may attempt to utilize, streamline, fund and manage existing tertiary sector research conducted by regional entities such as ACHEA, CANQATE, CARADOL, ACTI, Caribbean accreditation agencies and UWI

Strategy Three:

Creating a Caribbean sub-regional network for HE/TE policy research which dovetails with national, regional and international policy frameworks and agendas might aid in having a platform for discussion and decisions about research

Strategy Four:

If one captures the Caribbean sub-regional network research within a web-interfaced sector research information system and it is to be shared uniformly the impact the regional (CARICOM) national (state) and institutional (HE/TE) levels could be great and profound

Strategy Five

States and institutions may wish to consider utilizing the data from this network in policy design, strategic planning and development of TE programmes.

Having understood the issues at hand, what may be now needed is a framework for action that is supported as a matter of policy by CARICOM Council on Human and Social Development and funded by lending agencies.

Bibliography

Alexander, T.J. (1998). From Higher Education to Tertiary Education: Directions for Change in OECD Countries. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Conference Proceedings. At the World Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education for the 21st Century: Vision and Action

Ali, E. R. (2004). Policy or Politics?: Interpreting Educational Reform in Caribbean Society. Ed.D. Module 5 Paper, University of Sheffield. pp. 29 (unpublished)

Beckles, H. (2004). UWI At Risk! GATS/WTO and Higher Education Liberalization in the Caribbean. pp 1-11.

CARICOM Secretariat (2000). Draft Bill for Establishment of National Accreditation Bodies.

CARICOM Secretariat. (2004). Working Document for the Eleventh Meeting of the Council on Human and Social Development: Investing in Human Resources with Special Reference to Education, Guyana.

Dale, R. (1999) *Specifying Globalization Effects on National Policy: A Focus on the Mechanisms*. Journal of Educational Policy, Vol. 14: (1). pp 6-7.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum Publishing Co.

Government of Trinidad and Tobago. (2004). Green Paper on Tertiary Education, Training, Distance and Lifelong Learning. Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education

Inter-American Development Bank (2001). Rationalizing and Restructuring of Tertiary Education in Trinidad and Tobago: Profile 1. IDB Trinidad and Tobago

Morrow, R. A. and C. A. Torres (2000) 'The State, Globalization and Education Policy'. In: N. C. Burbules and C. A. Torres (Eds.) *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, London

Ozga, J. (2000). 'Researching Education Policy: Some Arguments' (reprinted in her edited *Policy Research in Educational Settings: Contested Terrain*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Taylor, S., F. Rizvi, B. Lingard and M. Henry. 1997. *Educational Policy and the Politics of Change*, Routledge, London

UNESCO (2006). World Declaration and Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education. ONLINE: <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-html>. Accessed on 02/06/2006

World Bank (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*