

The Economics of "Adaptive Education": How British Colonial Educational Policy Institutionalized Poverty among Indigenous Zambians

Farrelli Hambulo (PhD)

University of Zambia (UNZA)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2026.11060292>

Received: 21 June 2026; Accepted: 26 June 2026; Published: 20 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the Phelps-Stokes Commission's "adaptive education" policy, implemented during the British colonial era in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), analyzing its role as a structural mechanism for economic containment rather than human capital development. While colonial authorities and philanthropic bodies packaged "adaptation" as a culturally sensitive curriculum tailored to rural African life, this study argues that its primary function was the institutionalization of socio-economic subjugation. By systematically confining indigenous Zambians to rudimentary agricultural training and manual crafts, the policy deliberately restricted access to advanced literacy, scientific knowledge, and professional qualifications. Utilizing a historical-structural framework, the paper demonstrates how this educational gatekeeping reinforced the colonial "color bar," effectively blocking Africans from high-wage employment, administrative positions, and commercial independence. Consequently, indigenous populations were funneled into a permanent, low-wage migrant labor reserve for European-owned mines and commercial farms. This artificial suppression of earning power prevented indigenous families from accumulating surplus capital, thereby entrenching generational, institutionalized poverty defined here as; the systematic, state-sanctioned creation of fiscal and educational barriers that permanently cap labor returns and restrict intergenerational mobility. The study demonstrates that while post-independence economic trajectories were heavily shaped by later macroeconomic shocks and policy choices, the long-term ramifications of "adaptive education" created an initial, severe deficit of highly educated professionals and a structurally distorted economy. Ultimately, the paper re-conceptualizes "adaptive education" not as a benign pedagogical experiment, but as a deliberate economic tool designed to sustain colonial hegemony at the expense of indigenous prosperity.

Keywords: Adaptive Education, Colonialism, Institutionalized Poverty, Labor Exploitation, Northern Rhodesia, Human Capital Deficit

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between formal education and economic stratification in postcolonial Africa remains a subject of intense historical inquiry. In the context of Zambia, formerly the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia, the contemporary challenges of structural poverty and uneven economic development are frequently analyzed through the lens of late twentieth-century macroeconomic shocks, global copper price volatility, or post-independence policy missteps. While these post-colonial factors such as the devastating mid-1970s oil shocks and subsequent structural adjustment programs undeniably accelerated economic decline, an exclusive focus on them suffers from a historical blind spot. Such analyses overlook the historical-structural scaffolding erected during the early decades of formal colonial administration.

To understand this trajectory, this article introduces a precise definition of "institutionalized poverty" within a peripheral capitalist economy as the systematic, state-sanctioned deployment of legal, fiscal, and educational barriers designed to deliberately disrupt local asset accumulation, cap indigenous labor returns below the cost of human reproduction, and restrict intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. The genesis of this institutionalized economic disparity in Zambia cannot be divorced from the systematic design of its early educational policies. Prior to 1924, formal schooling within the territory was largely fragmented and

underfunded (Hambulo, 2025; Hambulo & Matandiko, 2025; Hambulo, 2016). The British South Africa Company (BSAC), which administered the region primarily as a commercial fiefdom and a labor reserve for Southern Rhodesian and South African enterprises, maintained a policy of laissez-faire neglect toward African development (Snelson, 1974). Educational provision was left almost entirely to the disparate agendas of various Christian missionary societies, whose primary objective was evangelical conversion and basic literacy rather than systematic socio-economic advancement (Carmody, 1992). This neglect was compounded by fiscal mechanisms like the Native Tax Ordinance, which forced indigenous males into wage labor by demanding cash taxes that could only be earned on European enterprises.

The administrative transition of Northern Rhodesia from corporate company rule to direct British Colonial Office oversight in 1924 marked a fundamental shift in imperial governance. This political reconfiguration coincided with the arrival of the second African Education Commission, popularly known as the Phelps-Stokes Commission. Funded by American philanthropic capital and heavily influenced by the racial accommodationist educational models developed by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute in the United States, the Commission sought to standardize native education across East and Central Africa (Lewis, 1962). The ideological cornerstone of the Commission's recommendations was the concept of "adaptive education." This policy framework explicitly rejected the traditional, academically rigorous European curriculum for African learners, pronouncing it culturally alien, psychologically destabilizing, and practically useless for the indigenous populace (Jones, 1925). Instead, the Commission advocated for an educational model strictly "adapted" to the local environment, prioritizing character development, simple village hygiene, rudimentary subsistence agriculture, and basic manual crafts (King, 1971; Snelson, 1974).

While official colonial rhetoric and subsequent philanthropic historiography perceived "adaptive education" as a benevolent, progressive, and culturally sensitive reform, the socio-economic reality for indigenous Zambians was profoundly destructive. By analyzing this policy transition through a critical political-economy framework, this article argues that the Phelps-Stokes recommendations served as a deliberate instrument of economic containment. Far from uplifting the indigenous populace, the calculated omission of advanced scientific, mathematical, and literary training from the native curriculum was engineered to align with the discriminatory demands of the colonial state and white settler capital. The policy provided a pseudo-scientific, pedagogical justification for the "color bar" which was the systemic reservation of white-collar, managerial, and skilled technical jobs for European immigrants (Gann, 1964).

Crucially, this analysis does not advance a mono-causal determinism because it acknowledges that the modern Zambian economy has repeatedly been hit by complex internal and external dynamics post-1964. However, it asserts that "adaptive education" established the initial structural baseline of human capital starvation. The policy effectively institutionalized poverty by legally and educationally disabling Africans from competing in the modern cash economy, forcing them into a state of permanent dependency as a low-wage, unskilled labor pool for European-owned commercial farms and the burgeoning copper mining industry (Clammer, 1980). This paper details the specific structural mechanisms through which a seemingly benign educational philosophy propagated the systematic economic underdevelopment and prolonged suffering of the Zambian majority.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historiography of colonial education in Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) has broadly evolved through two analytical waves, moving from paternalistic administrative narratives to critical political-economy evaluations. Early colonial and missionary historiography frequently framed the expansion of formal schooling as a benevolent vehicle for modernization and social progress. Scholars aligned with early imperial perspectives, such as Gann (1964), argued that the British administration faced an infrastructural vacuum and that any introduction of formal literacy, however basic, was an unmitigated benefit to the indigenous population. Within this traditional paradigm, the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 was heralded as a progressive milestone that rescued African education from disorganized evangelical agendas and anchored it in "practical" and "culturally appropriate" rural development (Lewis, 1962). These early accounts, however, suffered from an analytical blind spot in that they accepted the philanthropic and paternalistic rhetoric of "adaptive education" at face value, failing to interrogate how these policies served imperial labor demands.

A major analytical shift occurred in the post-independence era as revisionist historians began to unmask the structural limitations of colonial schooling. Snelson (1974) provided a foundational, comprehensive critique of educational development up to 1945, documenting the chronic underfunding, administrative neglect, and severe lack of secondary education options for Africans. Similarly, Carmody (1992) exposed how missionary societies, despite their local rivalries, effectively operated as ideological partners to the colonial administration, prioritizing religious conversion and social control over genuine intellectual empowerment. While these revisionist works successfully highlighted the quantitative deficits of colonial schooling such as low enrollment rates and the lack of advanced schools, they largely treated the curriculum as a product of racial prejudice or administrative incompetence rather than a deliberate macroeconomic strategy.

More recently, critical educational historians have begun linking colonial curricula directly to the demands of peripheral capitalism. King (1971) traced the transnational migration of the accommodationist "Tuskegee model" from the racially segregated American South to East and Central Africa, demonstrating that the Phelps-Stokes Commission intended to reproduce a compliant, politically docile black underclass. This line of critique was extended by Africanist scholars who argued that "adaptive education" was an active mechanism for underdevelopment (Clammer, 1980).

Alternative Perspectives & Counterarguments:

To build a balanced and rigorous analysis, it is necessary to engage with alternative historical interpretations of "adaptive education." Structural-functionalist historians and colonial administrators often defended the policy on two grounds: fiscal pragmatism and cultural preservation. They argued that given the volatile revenues of a young protectorate, a highly academic, literary education for the masses was financially unsustainable and would create a politically volatile class of "displaced, white-collar aspirers" who refused manual labor. They maintained that focusing on village crafts and subsistence farming was a realistic way to achieve self-reliance within rural economies. Furthermore, some argued that keeping instruction in local vernacular languages protected indigenous social cohesion from the psychological alienation of rapid westernization. However, this article contends that these defenses of "fiscal pragmatism" and "cultural sensitivity" mask a deeper structural reality. The choice to contain costs by starving African education while simultaneously heavily subsidizing elite European schooling (as demonstrated in Section 5.2) reveals that fiscal constraints were selectively applied along racial lines. "Environmental adaptation" was not an effort to foster organic rural self-reliance. Instead, it was a deliberate strategy to deny indigenous populations the cognitive tools such as advanced English literacy and scientific logic needed to challenge the highly lucrative European monopoly over the cash economy.

By using a strict economic-historical approach, this study addresses a distinct gap in the literature. While existing scholarship widely acknowledges that the Phelps-Stokes policy restricted African political consciousness, there remains a shortage of detailed empirical analyses showing exactly how the policy structured long-term economic suffering. This article explicitly connects the specific mechanics of the adaptive curriculum such as the deliberate suppression of English and scientific literacy, with the financial data of the colonial state and the wage structures of white settler capital, demonstrating how "adaptive education" functioned as a primary structural anchor that institutionalized generational poverty among indigenous Zambians.

Theoretical Framework

To unpack the systemic mechanisms through which the Phelps-Stokes Commission's "adaptive education" policy institutionalized poverty in colonial Zambia, this study adopts a synthesis of Dependency Theory and the Coloniality of Knowledge. By merging these frameworks, the article moves beyond traditional pedagogical critiques, analyzing the curriculum not merely as a flawed educational experiment, but as a structural apparatus designed to integrate Northern Rhodesia into the global capitalist economy as a subservient, low-wage periphery.

Dependency Theory, particularly as articulated by Walter Rodney (1972) and Samir Amin (1976), contends that the underdevelopment of the Global South is not an organic state of backwardness, but a deliberate

consequence of Western imperialist exploitation. Within this paradigm, the primary function of the colonial state is to restructure the economic, legal, and social institutions of the colonized territory to serve the metropole. Education acts as a critical ideological state apparatus within this restructuring process. In colonial Zambia, the imposition of a highly restricted, manual-centric curriculum was an economic imperative.

According to Rodney (1972), colonial schooling was intentionally metered to produce just enough low-level literacy to facilitate administrative extraction and labor compliance, while simultaneously suppressing the technical and analytical capabilities required for industrial competition or economic self-determination. This directly explains the operational mechanics of institutionalized poverty. By capping the intellectual and technical development of the African worker, the state guaranteed that indigenous labor could never command a high market premium. This artificial ceiling on human capital development ensured that local asset accumulation was structurally impossible, trapping the native population in an endless cycle of subsistence and low-wage labor.

While Dependency Theory explains the macroeconomic aspects of this exploitation, the concept of the Coloniality of Knowledge which is historically grounded in the work of Frantz Fanon (1963) and expanded by Latin American decolonial scholars like Aníbal Quijano (2000), exposes the epistemic violence that legitimizes it. Quijano argues that colonial rule established a racial hierarchy that classified the knowledge, intellect, and culture of indigenous populations as inherently inferior, primitive, and unevolved. The Phelps-Stokes Commission applied this exact epistemic hierarchy under the guise of paternalistic benevolence. By asserting that the African mind was "unsuited" for abstract, literary, or scientific European education, the Commission pathologized indigenous capacity (Jones, 1925). The resulting "adaptive" curriculum localized and restricted the African intellectual horizon to the immediate rural environment. This framework demonstrates how epistemic subjugation directly reinforced economic subjugation. This owing to the aspect that, by convincing the colonized that their natural societal role was confined to agricultural labor and manual crafts, the colonial apparatus attempted to manufacture psychological and structural compliance with a low-wage, racially stratified economic order (Fanon, 1963).

Together, these theories illuminate how "adaptive education" functioned as an ideological and economic gatekeeper. It normalized the structural boundaries of institutionalized poverty by providing a pedagogical justification for why indigenous Zambians should remain at the lowest rungs of the colonial class structure, converting an act of raw economic exploitation into a professed act of educational care.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative historical-structural method to investigate the socio-economic ramifications of the Phelps-Stokes Commission's "adaptive education" policy in colonial Zambia. Unlike traditional educational histories that focus primarily on pedagogical changes or institutional growth, a historical-structural approach examines historical events by analyzing the underlying economic, political, and social structures that shape human agency and institutional policies (Tosh, 2015). This method allows the study to trace the direct causal links between the introduction of the 1924 adaptive curriculum and the systematic restriction of indigenous Zambians to low-wage sectors of the colonial economy.

The empirical foundation of this article rests on a critical review and qualitative content analysis of primary documentary sources. Primary archival research was targeted at uncovering the structural intentions and economic calculations of both the colonial state and the corporate entities operating within Northern Rhodesia. The primary data for this study was collected from three main repositories. The following are the three main repositories which acted as sources of the primary data utilized in this study:

- **The National Archives of Zambia (NAZ):**

Located in Lusaka, the archives provided access to crucial British Colonial Office correspondence, Northern Rhodesia Department of Native Education Annual Reports (1925-1950), and minutes from the Legislative Council meetings. These documents reveal the financial allocations, curricular designs, and explicit debates regarding African employment and education limits.

- **The Phelps-Stokes Fund Archives:**

These records provided the original reports of the African Education Commission (specifically the 1925 report, Education in East Africa), personal correspondence of the commission's chairperson, Thomas Jesse Jones, and memoranda detailing the collaboration between American philanthropic bodies, the British Colonial Office, and international missionary networks.

- **Missionary Society Records:**

Documents from the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the White Fathers were analyzed to observe how the adaptive directives were translated into practice on the ground, and to capture early indigenous resistance to these educational restrictions.

The collected qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis, structured around the core components of the theoretical framework. The analysis involved a multi-stage coding process. First, documents were coded chronologically to map the implementation timeline of the adaptive policy from 1924 through the peak mining boom of the 1940s. Second, the text was coded axially to identify recurring thematic concepts, such as "labor requirements," "industrial color bar," "agricultural suitability," and "native unrest."

To ensure historical reliability and validity, the study employs source triangulation and historical contextualization (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). Statements found in official colonial policy briefs regarding the "benevolent intent" of adaptive education were systematically cross-referenced with internal economic data, colonial budgetary files, mine labor wage schedules, and settler-led legislative debates on the restriction of skilled African workers. This critical juxtaposition allows the study to look past the paternalistic language of colonial benevolence and lay bare the underlying economic motivations that institutionalized indigenous poverty.

Presentation of Findings

The empirical evidence gathered from the National Archives of Zambia and colonial administrative records reveals that the implementation of the Phelps-Stokes "adaptive education" policy in Northern Rhodesia was systematically structured to align with the exploitative economic demands of the colonial state and white settler capital. The findings indicate that education did not operate in a vacuum but that it was integrated with land alienation and fiscal policies to enforce economic containment. The findings are categorized into three distinct operational mechanisms highlighted below:

Curricular Retrenchment and the Restriction of Literacy

Analysis of the Annual Reports of the Department of Native Education between 1925 and 1939 demonstrates that the colonial state immediately operationalized the Phelps-Stokes recommendations by actively suppressing academic, scientific, and literary instruction. The curriculum designed for indigenous Zambians was deliberately anchored to the physical and economic geography of the newly created "Native Reserves." Under the Crown Lands Orders in Council, indigenous populations were systematically removed from fertile lands along the line of rail and relocated to peripheral, ecologically fragile reserves.

The adaptive curriculum was specifically designed to keep Africans within these reserves by limiting their skills to basic local survival. According to the 1925 curriculum framework, instructional time in village schools was divided unevenly, with up to 70 percent of the school week dedicated to manual labor, including rudimentary subsistence agriculture, mud-brick making, thatch weaving, and basic carpentry (Northern Rhodesia, 1926). Academic instruction was limited to vernacular literacy, basic moral character training, and arithmetic that did not extend beyond simple addition and subtraction necessary for tax collection or trade tallying.

Crucially, English language instruction which was the primary linguistic currency of the colonial administration, the legal system, and commercial enterprise was explicitly barred from the lower primary

segments. The 1929 Syllabus for Native Schools stipulated that English could only be introduced in select upper primary classes, effectively ensuring that over 95 percent of indigenous children who attended school never gained the linguistic competence required to seek white-collar employment, challenge administrative injustices, or navigate the colonial bureaucracy (Northern Rhodesia, 1930).

Financial Disinvestment and Resource Allocation

The economic priorities of the colonial state are starkly illustrated by the radical disparity in educational expenditure between European and African children. The following is a historical budgetary data retrieved from the legislative council records which evidently shows a calculated policy of financial starvation regarding native education, even during periods of immense mineral wealth generation.

Fiscal Year	Total Native Education Budget (£)	Per Capita Expenditure per African Child	Per Capita Expenditure per European Child	Ratio of Spending (European to African)
1926	£7,000	£0 4s 3d	£14 12s 0d	68 to 1
1935	£23,000	£0 5s 11d	£28 4s 0d	95 to 1
1945	£114,000	£0 11s 2d	£41 18s 0d	75 to 1

Source: Compiled by author from the *Northern Rhodesia Blue Books and Department of Native Education Financial Memoranda (1926–1945)*.

This stark financial asymmetry meant that while European schools were equipped with modern libraries, science laboratories, and highly paid professional teachers, African schools were starved of basic infrastructure. The vast majority of native schools remained poorly constructed mud-and-thatch shelters managed by underqualified, poorly paid missionary teachers who were expected to focus on manual production to make the schools self-funding (Snelson, 1974). This institutional starvation guaranteed that African students could not achieve the academic benchmarks necessary to qualify for higher education or technical training overseas.

Subjugation to the "Color Bar" and Wage Suppression

The primary economic output of this educational gatekeeping was the creation of a permanent, legally trapped, low-wage labor pool. This educational containment worked alongside the Native Tax Ordinance, which mandated that every adult African male pay a poll tax in cash. Because the adaptive curriculum limited agricultural training to basic subsistence methods, and because the Native Reserves lacked market infrastructure, Africans could rarely generate a cash surplus through farming. Consequently, the fiscal system forced them out of their villages and funneled them directly into a migrant labor reserve for European enterprises.

Correspondence between the Chamber of Mines and the Governor of Northern Rhodesia in the 1930s reveals that the mining conglomerates actively endorsed the "adaptive" model because it suppressed the rise of an educated, politically conscious African working class that could challenge the European labor monopoly (Clammer, 1980). By denying indigenous workers technical certifications or engineering literacy, the educational system functioned as the structural bedrock of the industrial "color bar." This was clearly demonstrated in the wage differentials on the Copperbelt. In 1938, the average monthly wage for an uneducated or "adaptively trained" indigenous underground miner was £1 2s 6d, whereas a European miner, performing similar or supervisory tasks, commanded an average monthly wage of £28 10s 0d (Gann, 1964).

The findings indicate that the Phelps-Stokes policy provided the perfect pedagogical justification for this disparity: by certifying that the African was educationally "adapted" only for manual and rural tasks, the

colonial state justified a wage structure that kept indigenous workers below the subsistence line. This ensured they could never accumulate capital, purchase land outside the reserves, or achieve economic autonomy.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The empirical findings presented in this study reveal that the Phelps-Stokes Commission's "adaptive education" policy was not an innocent pedagogical experiment in cultural relevance. Rather, it functioned as a highly effective ideological and structural instrument of economic containment. By explicitly connecting the data on curricular retrenchment, extreme financial disparity, and institutionalized wage gaps with the chosen theoretical frameworks, that is, Dependency Theory and the Coloniality of Knowledge, this section of the paper demonstrates how "adaptive education" systematically under-developed human capital to institutionalize generational poverty among indigenous Zambians.

Epistemic Violence and the Justification of Inequality

When viewed through the lens of the Coloniality of Knowledge (Quijano, 2000), the Phelps-Stokes policy represents a profound example of epistemic violence. The Commission's core philosophical premise, that an academic, literary education was "unsuited" to the African psyche, served a vital ideological purpose (Jones, 1925). This is because it naturalized a racial hierarchy that placed the European at the peak of intellectual and administrative capability, while confining the African to a state of perpetual socio-economic infancy.

By structuring a curriculum that devoted up to 70 percent of instructional time to manual labor and banned English from primary schools, the colonial state constructed what Fanon (1963) describes as a zone of non-being for the colonized. This calculated exclusion from global languages of commerce, advanced mathematics, and scientific thought effectively localized the indigenous intellectual horizon to the rural periphery.

While colonial apologists defended this as a "cultural preservationist" effort to prevent social alienation, the structural reality demonstrates otherwise. The colonial administration pathologized African capacity, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. It did this by legally denying indigenous people the education required for professional roles while claiming that Africans were simply "not ready" for high-wage employment or self-governance. This epistemic subjugation provided the pseudo-scientific legitimacy needed to sustain a profoundly unjust economic order without provoking immediate, widespread moral outrage in the metropole.

The Political Economy of Labor Extraction and Dependency

While the Coloniality of Knowledge explains the ideological justification of the policy, Dependency Theory exposes its raw, macroeconomic mechanics. As Rodney (1972) and Amin (1976) argue, the underdevelopment of the colonial periphery is driven by the systematic restructuring of local institutions to serve metropolitan capital. In Northern Rhodesia, the primary economic engines were white-owned commercial farms and, crucially, the expanding copper mining industry. These capital-intensive enclaves required a massive, continuous, and above all, cheap supply of manual labor to maximize profit extraction for foreign shareholders (Clammer, 1980).

The findings clearly demonstrate how the adaptive education model served as the structural baseline for this labor extraction machine. Defenders of colonial policy often cited "fiscal pragmatism" and tight state budgets to justify the restricted curriculum, arguing that a young territory could not afford mass academic schooling. However, our empirical findings completely invalidate this defense. The stark financial spending ratios highlighted in the findings climbing as high as 95 to 1 in favor of European children by 1935 clearly prove that the state's financial constraints were selectively applied along racial lines. The state was not short on revenue; rather, it chose to invest its mineral wealth in white supremacy and capital accumulation. Starving native schools of infrastructure and professional teachers ensured that indigenous youth could never cross the educational threshold required to break through the industrial "color bar." Consequently, the extreme wage disparity on the Copperbelt where a European miner earned over 25 times more than an indigenous counterpart in 1938 was directly engineered by this educational gatekeeping. "Adaptive education" ensured that the indigenous worker remained legally and educationally trapped at the lowest rung of production, generating

massive wealth for British and South African mining houses while receiving wages well below the cost of human reproduction (Gann, 1964).

The Complex Post-Colonial Trajectory: Beyond Determinism

To avoid an overly deterministic historical narrative, it is vital to acknowledge that the persistent structural poverty of contemporary Zambia is not the monolithic product of colonial policy alone. The economic trajectory of post-independence Zambia has been profoundly shaped by complex internal policy choices and volatile external macroeconomic shocks post-1964. Most notably, the catastrophic collapse of global copper prices in 1973-1974, combined with concurrent international oil shocks, plunged the young republic into a prolonged debt crisis. Subsequent interventions in the 1980s and 1990s through Bretton Woods institutional frameworks specifically IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) mandated deep cuts to public spending, currency devaluations, and the privatization of state assets, which severely disrupted domestic industrial growth and exacerbated urban poverty.

However, this paper contends that the long-term impact of "adaptive education" must be understood as the primary initial structural handicap that severely compromised Zambia's capacity to navigate these post-colonial shocks. When the copper market collapsed in 1973, the nation lacked a deeply entrenched, highly educated class of indigenous agricultural scientists, industrial engineers, and economic policymakers who could swiftly drive structural economic diversification.

By keeping African wages at a bare subsistence level during the colonial boom years and confining families to impoverished Native Reserves, the Phelps-Stokes framework effectively prevented domestic capital accumulation. Indigenous families were caught in a vicious structural trap: they could not accumulate surplus capital because their wages were artificially suppressed, and they could not access higher-wage jobs because the educational system denied them the necessary credentials. Thus, while post-colonial economic crises and governance choices played a major role in modern poverty, "adaptive education" served as the foundational historical anchor that institutionalized a cycle of generational vulnerability.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically re-examined the Phelps-Stokes Commission's "adaptive education" policy, implemented in Northern Rhodesia from 1924, exposing it as a deliberate structural apparatus designed to institutionalize indigenous poverty and sustain colonial hegemony. By shifting the analytical focus from a benign pedagogical critique to a rigorous political-economy framework, the study has demonstrated how the seemingly benevolent rhetoric of "cultural relevance" and "environmental suitability" masked a calculated mechanism of economic containment. Through a systematic synthesis of Dependency Theory and the Coloniality of Knowledge, the paper has illuminated the dual ideological and macroeconomic structures that engineered the socio-economic subjugation of the Zambian majority.

The empirical findings confirm that the operationalization of "adaptive education" achieved its objectives through three listed devastating structural interventions:

1. **Curricular retrenchment**, which cannibalized up to 70 percent of instructional time for manual labor and systematically barred English from primary school tiers, restricting intellectual mobility and forcing a calculated exclusion from the modern cash economy.
2. **Extreme financial starvation** of native schooling, typified by a spending disparity that favored European children by up to 95 to 1, guaranteeing that African schools remained under-resourced, peripheral institutions incapable of fostering human capital.
3. **Legal and structural reinforcement** of the industrial "color bar," which artificially suppressed African wages and trapped the population within a permanent, low-wage migrant labor reserve that fueled European mining and commercial farming enterprises.

Ultimately, the socio-economic suffering propagated by the Phelps-Stokes recommendations was neither accidental nor short-lived. By cutting off all avenues for domestic capital accumulation and restricting families to subsistence-level wages, the policy institutionalized a cycle of generational poverty. The profound institutional deficit inherited by independent Zambia in 1964 marked by a catastrophic shortage of fewer than 100 university graduates, stands as a stark testament to the long-term efficacy of this underdevelopment strategy.

Contemporary Policy Implications

The legacy of this historical gatekeeping continues to present practical challenges for contemporary Zambian education policy. The post-colonial state's long-standing struggle with primary-to-secondary school progression mandates where bottleneck transitions historically pushed the majority of youth out of the formal academic stream, mirrors the structural filters first established by the adaptive model.

Furthermore, this historical lens provides crucial insights for modern reforms in Zambia's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. For decades, vocational training in the region carried a heavy social stigma, frequently perceived as a second-class educational track designed for academic underachievers rather than a driver of high-value industrial innovation. This stigma is the direct cultural and structural inheritance of the Phelps-Stokes model, which deliberately used manual and technical training as a tool for economic containment rather than empowerment.

For contemporary TVET policies to successfully catalyze economic diversification and youth employment, planners must actively decolonize the curriculum. Technical training must be explicitly uncoupled from its historical legacy of low-wage manual containment and instead be aggressively integrated with advanced scientific literacy, digital technology, and entrepreneurial capital. Decolonizing the history of education in Zambia requires acknowledging that "adaptive education" was never a progressive educational reform, but a highly effective, exclusionary economic tool that successfully engineered inequality at the absolute expense of indigenous prosperity.

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