



LDS Growth Case Studies

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The Impact of Church Schools and Universities on LDS Growth

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Overview

Many religious groups fund and operate schools, colleges, and universities. The LDS Church has founded several educational institutions. As of early 2012, the LDS Church operated primary or secondary schools in only a handful of locations in Oceania (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga) and Mexico and four colleges or universities in the United States. The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2012 noted that no new elementary or secondary schools were planned and that operating church schools were "long-established" institutions.^[1] Three of the four higher education institutions operating by the Church in 2012 were originally started in the nineteenth century (BYU - Provo, BYU - Idaho, and the LDS Business College). This essay examines the influence of founding and maintaining church universities and schools on LDS growth.

LDS Background

The first educational institutions operated by the LDS Church were in the United States. In 1875, the Church founded its first higher education institution in Provo, Utah called the Brigham Young Academy that was later renamed Brigham Young University (BYU). The Church started two more college or universities in 1886 (LDS Business College in Salt Lake City) and 1888 (Ricks College; later renamed BYU - Idaho). Founded in 1888 and based in the rural Utah town of Ephraim, Snow College also originally operated under the LDS Church until transferred to the state of Utah in the 1932.^[2] In 1955, the Church started the Church College of Hawaii which was later renamed BYU - Hawaii. In early 2012, there were 21 young single adult (YSA) and student married stakes in Provo, Utah principally serving students at BYU - Provo, 12 YSA and student married stakes in Rexburg, Idaho principally meeting the needs of BYU - Idaho students, and three YSA and student married stakes operating in Laie, Hawaii to meet the needs of BYU - Hawaii students. At present, several public universities had sizable numbers of Latter-day Saint students which warrant the organization of YSA, student married, or student stakes such as at the University of Utah, Utah State University, Southern Utah University, Dixie State College of Utah, Idaho State University, Boise State University, Arizona State University, and Southern Virginia University.

With only a few exceptions, all other church-operated schools and colleges outside the United States have been in Oceania. There were 7,767 students enrolled in elementary and secondary education during the 2010-2011 school year and 659 staff, faculty, and administration personnel working in these church schools.^[3] In New Zealand, the Church operated a secondary school named the Maori Agricultural College (MAC) from 1913 until 1931 when an earthquake damaged the school beyond repair. Although enrollment was less than 90 every year the school operated, Maoris and other Polynesian groups attended the school when it operated. Many Maori students later became some of the strongest church leaders in New Zealand.^[4] Former MAC students advocated for the founding of the Church College of New Zealand, which operated from 1958 to 2009. The Church College of New Zealand provided high school education to 700 students at a time during its operation and roughly 10% of LDS high school students attended the school nationwide.^[5] In Fiji, the Church opened the LDS Fiji Technical College in 1975. The school has since been renamed the Fiji LDS Church College, has 370 students enrolled, and 27 faculty and four administrators.^[6] In 1969, the Church opened a primary school today known as the Fiji Primary School. At present, there are 345 students enrolled, 14 faculty, and one administrator.^[7] In Kiribati, the founding of Moroni High School occurred almost in tandem with the establishment of an official LDS presence. Kiribati natives attending Liahona High School in Tonga were instrumental in opening Kiribati to missionary work and worked with teachers from Tonga to establish Moroni High School. At present, the school has the capacity for 476 students and accommodates boarding students and day students.^[8] In Samoa, the Church has operated at least two prominent schools in Pesega and Vaiola for several decades.^[9] In Tonga, the Church attempted to open several primary schools in the early twentieth century with limited success. In 1952, the Church opened Liahona High School on Nuku'alofa. The school became one of the Church's largest educational institutions outside the United States with 1,070 students enrolled in 1997.^[10]

In the twentieth century, the Church appeared to operate a handful of small schools in Mexico. In 1964, Church opened a

preparatory church school in Mexico City called Benemérito de las Américas. The school had 125 students the first year and at present the school has over 2,100 students.^[11] The Church operates a website that allows interested individuals to register and provides social media for students and alumni. There has appeared to be no change in the number of students admitted to the school year to year over the past decade as there were also 2,100 students enrolled in 1999.^[12] The impact of the school on member activity rates and mission services has been significant. In 1999, the Church reported that 55% of students served full-time missionaries and that 75% of students remained active thereafter. At the time approximately half of students came from distant areas of Mexico and live in small buildings of 18 students supervised by a resident family.^[13]

Seminary, institute, and universities in the United States constitute most of the Church's educational resources and institutions. In early 2012, the Church had 3,281 CES employees and 48,343 teachers and part-time church service missionaries who taught seminary and institute.^[14] During the 2010-2011 school year, the Church reported 352,441 students enrolled in institute and 375,389 students enrolled in seminary for a combined total of 727,830 students worldwide.^[15]

In 2001, LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley announced the formation of the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) to provide low-interest student loans to worthy, active members that would ordinarily be unable to obtain higher education. Single males must be returned missionaries or have an approved exemption from missionary service to participate. Other requirements for applying for a PEF loan include enrollment and regular attendance in institute, residing in a country approved for PEF, priesthood leader endorsement, completing the Planning for Success Workshop offered through institute, and demonstrating commitment to repay the loan, graduate from school, obtain better employment following graduation, and pay as many school costs as possible with personal funds.^[16] Patterned after the Perpetual Emigration Fund that assisted Latter-day Saint converts to immigrate to Utah in the nineteenth century,^[17] the PEF was designed to bring individuals out of poverty by instilling economic self-sufficiency through obtaining higher education. Within the first decade of operation, over 50,000 members had benefited from the fund. Most participants have completed their education, found higher paying employment, repaid their loans, and obtained three to four times more income than in previous work.^[18] In early 2012, the Church's PEF website reported that the program was available in approximately 50 countries and territories including American Samoa, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, the Dominican Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Samoa, South Africa, Spain, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.^[19]

Analysis

Church schools have accelerated real membership growth and improved convert retention. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Church readily opened new educational institutions in several countries. The impact of starting church schools on LDS growth has been no more apparent on church growth trends than in Oceania.

All countries with over 100,000 inhabitants and nominal Latter-day Saints comprising 10% or more of the population have LDS educational institutions, namely Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati. Nominal Latter-day Saints constitute 10% or more of the population in American Samoa and Niue, but these territories have only 65,000 and 1,400 inhabitants, respectively.

The impact of church schools on recent LDS growth trends has been most stunning in Kiribati. The Church founded Moroni High School in the 1970s and at present the school is one of the most prominent secondary schools in the country. In 1970, there was no LDS presence in Kiribati and few if any Latter-day Saints. In 2010, nominal LDS membership comprised 15% of the national population and two stakes operated on Tarawa. At present, only four countries or territories had a higher percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population: Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, and Niue.

The relatively stagnant progression of LDS education efforts in the 1980s and 1990s were transitioned into the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) to address the immediate educational and vocational concerns of active Latter-day Saints in nations with less-developed economies. Since the establishment of the PEF, the Church has closed several education institutions and has appeared to not open any additional schools, colleges, or universities. This trend has likely occurred as the maintenance and amount of resources required to open educational institutions that are competitive with those already established is deemed too taxing on international LDS resources. The opening of additional schools and universities may initially yield few results notwithstanding their high costs and challenges to operate, but these shortcomings should not interfere with LDS efforts to promote the establishment of self-sufficient communities that are more resistant to immigration to the United States, become supportive of their social, spiritual, and temporal needs, and ultimately turn areas of the world that are reliant on international resources to properly function into areas that are self-sufficient and can export resources and missionary manpower to other lesser-reached or unreached locations.

In recent years, one of the methods in Europe the Church has implemented to address the concerns of a lack of LDS community and fellowshiping has been to establish young single adult (YSA) outreach centers. In early 2012, the Church appeared to establish these centers in most if not all European nations with 1,000 or more members on church records. YSA outreach centers provide good opportunities to meet immediate needs relating to fellowshiping, convert retention, reactivation, and finding. However, these centers do not provide the same permanency of a school, college, or university and only service the unmarried population.

Opportunities

Unprecedented opportunities await any renewed efforts for opening additional educational institutions in many countries around the world. The most immediate needs vary drastically by world region. For example, founding an LDS university in the United Kingdom to service Latter-day Saints in Western Europe would provide unmatched opportunities to establish a regional community of Latter-day Saint students and alumni that can strengthen the unity and strength of the Church in many ways similar to LDS universities based in the United States. On the other hand, establishing small primary schools in remote, rural areas of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia could provide students with greater educational opportunities and serve as a springboard to promote a long-term LDS presence in these communities.

Sizable Latter-day Saint populations in several major metropolitan cities in Latin America present some of the most immediate and favorable opportunities to found additional church colleges and universities. Six cities appear most favorable for a church college or university (Buenos Aires, Argentina; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Lima, Peru; Mexico City, Mexico; Sao Paulo, Brazil; and Santiago, Chile) as the Church has 200,000 or more nominal members in the country where each of these cities is located and all six of these cities have between 18 and 45 stakes. Latter-day Saint professionals trained and qualified to teach in a tertiary educational setting within their discipline appear to reside in each of these cities in sufficient numbers to staff small church colleges or universities. Many Latter-day Saints in Latin American countries have access to established schools, colleges, and universities run by government or other institutions especially through the Perpetual Education Fund. However, non LDS-affiliated universities do not provide the sense of community and permanency to local and regional membership as do church schools in locations where they operate in Oceania and the United States. Founding schools in several Latin American cities that are affiliated with the Church may also reduce convert retention challenges and accelerate outreach expansion and growth like the Church has experienced in Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati.

Oceania continues to offer some of the greatest potential for establishing more LDS educational institutions. The Church could make significant headway meeting local educational needs particularly in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as literacy rates in each of these nations are the lowest in the region among countries and territories with over 100,000 inhabitants. Opening trade schools, primary schools, and small colleges in these nations can provide educational opportunities to the general population, make graduates more competitive in the work force, and foster the development of a long-term LDS community. The Church may experience similar growth results in these three nations as the Church has experienced in Samoa, Tonga, and Kiribati if church leaders advocate for the construction and staffing of these facilities.

Challenges

The centralization of church administration in the United States creates many challenges for opening additional colleges and universities in other countries. Distance from church headquarters creates a psychological chasm between the Church in North America and the Church in other world regions. Many of the countries with the most Latter-day Saints exhibit chronic member activity challenges. Church resources appear to have taken precedence to address convert retention woes rather than promote the opening of LDS schools. The large costs to operate a school that offers a competitive education to prospective students can intimate any initiatives to expand LDS education. During the past few decades international church leaders have largely lost the vision of where and how to open additional schools and consider their long-term benefits to church growth and sustainability.

Comparative Growth - The Seventh Day Adventist Church

The Seventh Day Adventist Church has achieved the greatest worldwide impact on education among missionary-focused Christian denominations with fewer than 20 million members. Adventists report on their official website that the Church operates 5,600 schools, colleges, and universities around the world to service 1.1 million students in approximately 145 countries.^[20] The Seventh Day Adventist Church has maintained its professional education journal, The Journal of Adventist Education, for over 30 years. Archived journal articles can be accessed for free at <http://jae.adventist.org/>. Adventists generally publish new journal issues on a bimonthly basis and articles generally explore issues relating to faith and education. The LDS Church can learn many adaptive strategies from Adventists in using educational and medical institutions to broaden the influence of the Church on target populations and provide valuable services.

Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church opening additional educational institutions appears unlikely considering the trend of consoling smaller LDS schools and colleges and emphasis on the Perpetual Education Fund. The centralization of church administration and education to North America has likely dissuaded church leaders from seriously considering opening a church college or university in South America, Europe, Asia, or Africa. International church leaders should carefully review the costs and benefits of starting additional BYU campuses overseas and founding trade schools and colleges to meet local educational needs, especially in light of their significant impact on LDS growth trends in the United States, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, and New Zealand.

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[2] "Snow College," en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_College

[3] "The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2012," Seminaries and Institutes of Religion - Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 6 February 2012.

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[4] Britsch, R. Lanier. "The Church in the South Pacific", Ensign, Feb. 1976, 19

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[6] "Fiji LDS Church College," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. <http://soe.byuh.edu/node/275>

[7] "Fiji Primary School," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. <http://soe.byuh.edu/node/278>

[8] "Moroni High School," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. <http://soe.byuh.edu/node/276>

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[13] Juarez, Tarcisio R. "Benemerito! Church's vanguard school in Mexico," LDS Church News, 27 November 1999.

<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/32865/Benemerito-Churchs-vanguard-school-in-Mexico.html>

[14] "The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2012," Seminaries and Institutes of Religion - Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 6 February 2012.

http://seminary.lds.org/content/languages/english/Seminary%20Materials/General/SI_Annual_Report_2012.pdf

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[16] "Frequently Asked Questions," pef.lds.org, retrieved 28 March 2012. <http://pef.lds.org/pef/faqhome?locale=eng>

[17] "The Perpetual Education Fund: A Bright Ray of Hope," pef.lds.org, retrieved 28 March 2012.

<http://pef.lds.org/pef/aboutus?locale=eng>

[18] "PEF Progress," pef.lds.org, retrieved 28 March 2012. <http://pef.lds.org/pef/pefprogress?locale=eng>

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[20] "Education," www.adventist.org, retrieved 10 March 2012. <http://www.adventist.org/mission-and-service/education.html>