REASON and research findings compel us to recognize the importance of formal education and functional literacy in social and economic development. Inkeles found no stronger predictor of modernity than education, and Lerner’s data support his assertion that literacy is the basic personal skill underlying the whole modernization process.

In the present paper, we continue a theoretical and empirical concern for these salient problems. Most generally, we will examine the relationship between educational achievement and several indicators of modernity. More particularly, and within the constraints of our data, we will examine the manner in which functional literacy relates to participation in development. Finally, we will take a speculative and preliminary look at how level of national development may affect the relationship between education-literacy and modernity.

Modern Social Systems and Modern Man

If we attempt a specification of modernity at an individual level, as Inkeles has done, strong empirical grounds enable recognition of modern man as innovative, knowledgeable and opinionated, future time oriented, committed to planning, and believing in the calculability and controllability of events by means of science and technology. Moreover, modern man sees his own roles in social processes as efficacious; he is tolerant of difference, a believer in distributive justice, and holds the dignity of man in high value.

* We gratefully acknowledge the support of International Programs, Michigan State University, and the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities, Inc.


The specification of modernity at a social structural level, after Moore, and others,\(^1\) points to structural differentiation, functional specialization, and high levels of urbanization, industrialization, and educational achievement.

Our approach to the question is in no significant way discrepant from these individual and structural specifications. We begin the conceptual analysis with a concern for social roles as vital links between actors and systems of participation. There are four rather specific questions – and one rather general – that might be asked about social roles, and the answerability of the questions may then tell us something about the modernity level of the social systems that provide a context for role behavior.

Firstly, we ask: How many social systems are there in which the actor has positions to occupy and roles to play? The condition can be actual or aspirational. If the systemic context of positions and roles is more limited in number and more restricted in space, the condition points to the more traditional case. If the systems relevant to role performance are many and spatially diffused, the condition points to modernity. We can term this the dimension of Role Spread.

Secondly, we ask: How are roles assigned? How do actors come to occupy positions and become subject to the role expectations that focus upon the position? If the relevant criteria stress birth rights or other ascriptive qualities, the condition points to traditionalism. If position occupancy is established by skill acquisition and the promise of expertise, the condition points to modernity. We can call this second dimension Role Assignment.

The third question inquires into the basis upon which role behavior is maintained and rewards allocated. In the more traditional case, an actor's continuing occupancy of a position, his role behavior and rewards are based upon tenure, or right of occupancy. In the more modern case, the right of occupancy and the level of rewards must be validated by performance or continuing expertise. This third dimension might be termed Role Reward Allocation.

Fourthly, we ask about changes in role behavior. Is there an implicit perfection in the position-role relationship such that modification in roles, innovative behavior, and experimentation is held to be undesirable? If yes, we are closer to the traditional case. If improvability is implicit, then change is desirable, and we are closer to the modern case. This dimension can be labeled Role Stability.

A final question, at a somewhat different and certainly more general level, points to the function of role behavior. Whose interests are most notably served? What are the primary objectives to normative behavior? In the more traditional case, the primary function is closer to maintenance of the system and subordination of the individual. In the more modern case, roles function to maintain and enhance both the system and the actor.

---