

Fascinating Development of Education in Africa Since Independence

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Abstract

In view of the importance of education in the development of Africa, the present investigation looked at education at Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and University levels, in the past thirty years. The investigation also looked at the goals of education as proposed by African Union Ministers of Education in the last 20 years. The study then critically examined the extent to which such goals have been, are being and will be achieved by the set date of 2015. The results showed that some goals have been accomplished; others will be realised by the year 2015, whereas the remnant will be met beyond the set date. Fifteen African countries selected from five major geographical regions of Africa, linguistically represented by French, English and Arabic participated in the study. The Theme of the Triumph and Prosperity of Education in Africa is the amazing story of the triumph and prosperity of Ed for the past thirty years, in bringing about total transformation or revolution, if you wish, in the entire system of education. It is a story that both Africans and other peoples of the world eagerly await to hear in this century.

Keywords: Education, early, primary, secondary, tertiary, university, African countries, development, evolutionary, transformation.

Introduction

African countries realize and embrace the fundamental importance of education, because without it, there can be no meaningful development. Through education, the interrelated and interdependent sets of human capacity that predispose a person to think, know and act in the context of social awareness, as well as values and skills are developed (Mwamwenda, 2019, 18,15, 14). In fact, education is the cornerstone for sustainable development; it is a tool for producing and managing human resources; for inculcating values, thus ensuring the common bond of humanity in a global village; a tool for scientific research and technology

What has been presented in this Paper deals with the significance of education as an indispensable tool for human, national and continental development. It is a panorama of the world of education as reflected in the entire system of education, comprising: Early Childhood Education, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary/University Education. If prior to independence, African countries worked and struggled for political and economic independence, then during post-independence years, they have truly worked towards educational independence, which is an emancipating force in all human endeavours. Some thirty years ago, one of this publication's authors

had the honour of writing a joint paper with Canadian Professor, David Baine, who spent three months at the University of Transkei in Mthatha, as a visiting Professor. From the article, published in the International Review of Education, we cite as follows:

Southern African countries have placed high priority on education as key to individual and national developmentⁱ (Correspondingly, large percentages of government budgets have been allocated to educationⁱ As a result since independence, African nations have made monumental improvements in spite of enormous limitations of resources: economic, human, technological and material. A recent World Bank report (1989) stated that African educational development since Independence has been spectacular and impressive. According to Heynemanⁱ the expansion of the educational system is unique in human history. In the past fifteen years, the educational growth rate in Africa has doubled that of other

developing countries in Asia and Latin America¹, ¹.

African nations have made monumental improvements in the world of education that are impressive, spectacular, unique in human history, and exceed what had happened in Asia and Latin America. In no uncertain terms, education endeavours have been superseded by leaps and bounds, in light of what has taken place in the last three decades. God bless Africa and her people.

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Early Childhood Education

Conclusion: In brief we examined Early Childhood Education in the participating African Union countries on the basis of expansion, enrolment, teachers, rural, and gender distribution. In the last three decades, Early Childhood Education has undergone tremendous changes in terms of growth and development. More schools for Early Childhood Education have been constructed in villages, rural areas and urban areas. Such construction has been in response to the demand of the people for such provision (Mwamwenda, 2014; Mwamwenda & Lukhele-Olorunju, 2013). This indeed is a new chapter in the history of Africa, given that for too long, neither the governments in power nor parents paid that much attention to Early Childhood Education. Governments did not pay that much attention, simply because the governments they succeeded did not have that much attention to Early Childhood Education. They too had inherited such concept from where they came from. Parents did not care just as much, because in their lives, they never attended Early Childhood Education. And so this brings to mind an anecdote related to us in Maseru Lesotho three decades ago. Some UNICEF representative from Nairobi visited a senior government officer in one of the Southern Africa countries, marketing the idea of starting Early Childhood Education in their capital, which would be financed by UNICEF. The response was not a palatable one. He said he was

brought up in a village by his parents, and as he grew up, he never attended any Early Childhood Education. For that reason, he saw no need for the establishment of Early Childhood Education Centres.

On hearing this, I was rather disturbed. But as I have gone through the experience of reading what has been going in Early Childhood Education in Africa, I realize that there are many people who still hold similar beliefs about Early Childhood Education. Take any one of the participating countries, and see how long the Ministry of Education finally accepted to house Early Childhood Education as part of Education. ECE had to be housed by several departments before it was finally accepted as part of Education. In most countries, Early Childhood Education has been in the administration of the private sector, and only in recent years governments have reluctantly agreed to be involved.

On the other hand, many Africans have moved on to embrace Early Childhood Education as an integral part education for their children. It is partly for this reason, that Early Childhood Education has made strides that are unprecedented in African history and development (Mwamwenda, 2014; Mwamwenda & Lukhele-Olorunju, 2013).

Conclusion: In an individual educational profile, not much attention is devoted to one's primary education, as it is to the University attended and highest degree conferred. Yet no one would have attended university and conferred a degree without the foundation of primary education (Mwamwenda, 2018; Mwamwenda & Lukhele, 2013). This only goes to confirm the importance of primary education in a country, as well as in a person's life.

It is partly from this perspective that the world at large emphasises on access to primary education, not only for some pupils, as the tradition and practice has shown, but that beyond this, there must be primary education for all school-age children qualifying for education. In all developed countries, there is universal primary education. In the past three decades, African countries have made great strides to catch up with developed countries in the shortest time possible, to make primary education universal. Many have achieved such a noble goal, and others are in the race of ensuring that they achieve such goal, in the immediate foreseeable future.

On the basis of the reports provided by participating African Union countries and the brief summary presented above, countries such as Ghana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and others are providing universal primary education to school-age children who are in millions.

Conclusion: Secondary School students are a sole resource for the supply to meet the demand at tertiary/university level, otherwise higher learning institutions could as well close down indefinitely (Mwamwenda, 2014). This brings to memory the Tanzania experience shortly before independence in 1961. President Julius Nyerere made a recommendation to the soon- to-depart British government for the establishment of a university in Tanzania. They did not build a single university for the forty or so years they governed the country. Their response was of ridicule, and asked Mwalimu Nyerere, as to where he was going to get students to admit into such a university? Their answer was based on the fact that, there weren't students in the country that would have justified the creation of a university. But this did not deter the determination for the establishment of a national university. Therefore the University of Dar es Salaam was established the same year, the British granted independence to the Trust Territory of Tanganyika. But the British were not that far off the mark in their answer, as the University College of Dar es Salaam had no more than seventeen students!

Tracing the history of secondary education in most African countries shows that, before independence most of these countries had a negligible number of secondary schools staffed by expatriates from the governing nations. There were other countries which did not have any secondary schools at all, and their students had to go to other countries to obtain such education. This was particularly true with some of the southern Africa countries which have South Africa as their closest neighbour. Similarly, in Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, there were some secondary schools in existence, but they were insufficient to meet the demand for such education. For this reason, they had to go all the way to Uganda for secondary education.

In this context, it is amazing that the number of secondary schools in most African countries has skyrocketed close to a hundred fold. In some countries, secondary education has assumed the status of universal secondary education, meaning

that every eligible adolescent is free to join secondary school Mwamwenda & Lukhele-Olorunju, 2013). Congratulations go to those who have been responsible for promoting secondary education, to the extent they have done so.

Conclusion: More than fifty years ago, most African countries attained their independence from whatever foreign nation had had the reigns of governance. Prior to independence and during independence, thousands of African students were sent to Europe, Asia, Australia and America for further studies, in preparation for their participation in the governance of their own respective countries. On completion of their studies, thousands returned to serve the role for which they were sent to further their studies. Others chose not to come back.

Prior to independence and for some, even after independence, they had no university of their own at all. The rare countries that had such institutions may have had one or two. After independence, most of them made sure that they had at least one university to cater for their national needs. The one or two established then were a monopoly, as they remained the only universities for over two decades, with very little increase in enrolment for various reasons, particularly for financial reasons and manpower limitations. Such universities were almost exclusively staffed by expatriates for many years.

Yes, that was the reality of higher education then, and remains part of the history of higher education in Africa. In the past three decades, the landscape of higher education has undergone a total transformation and evolution. All steered under the leadership of Africans themselves, in charge of their destiny (Mwamwenda, 2019). Three decades later, there is not a single country that has no university of its own. Those that had one or two, which monopolised the scene of higher education for close to two decades, they have been surpassed at a supersonic speed. Nigeria which had three universities at independence, now has 110; Tanzania 40; Kenya 53; Zambia 19; Rwanda 30; Ethiopia 22; Ghana 24; Egypt 17 and others have universities that far exceed those they have had at any time in their history of higher education. It is not only a question of expansion of geographical space all over the countries, it is also the men and women enrolled in such universities that are immensely amazing and overwhelming numerically. They hold the future of Africa, as a

trust in their hands. If there is nothing else Africans can be proud of, they ought to take pride in this spectacular achievement, as it is truly the work of their own hands and minds.

There are numerous reasons why Africa is investing so many billions of dollars in tertiary and university education. Higher education is a public and social good, which develops, advances, preserves and disseminates knowledge and provides stimulation for intellectual life. Moreover it develops physical and intellectual skills towards self-reliance and problem-solving at various levels of human endeavour, be it at personal, family, regional, national and international level. Higher education leads to appreciation of one's personality as well as others, their environment and that of others. It also promotes scholarship, community service, national, regional and international interaction and understanding. Most importantly, it serves as a reliable source of middle and higher level manpower, for the national and economic development of any given country in the continent of Africa. Prior to independence, so many Africans had to go abroad and overseas to acquire higher education for the service of their countries. Such approach was too costly and unsustainable. It is inconceivable how African countries would have maintained a workforce in numerous areas of the labour market without the students graduating from African universities.

The Status of Education in Africa: Current Issues

You may be interested to know that as many as over 50 percent of the sub-Saharan Africa comprises young people who are below 25 years of age. Africa is young in spirit and chronologically.

This is not all as yet. In the next ten years, it is estimated that there will be 11 million African youth actively participating in the world of work in a formal way. This is significant indeed, in so far as it does offer a gorgeous opportunity for our Continent to create a valuable and viable "base of human capital that will serve as the engine for economic transformation".

To be more specific, it will only count as beneficial on proviso that such young Africans will be distinguished on the solid foundation of being educated, trained and employable. This, inevitably will require improved learning outcomes at every level of education namely Early Childhood,

Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and University Education.

It is interesting to note that unlike in the yester years the World Bank, in partnership with other international Organizations and African countries are keenly directing "a long-overdue focus on higher education" with emphasis on the content of the curricula as well as the essential skills that are marketable in the world of work and thus making a valuable contribution to Africa's economic and national development.

It is acknowledged by economists both in Africa and Western countries that in the last decade or so, Africa has done well in its economic growth, averaging 4.5 per cent per year, underscored by prudent macroeconomic management. This being so, we are now called upon to build economic growth that is marked by reduction in poverty, inequality and greater value addition on Africa.

It is reported that every so frequently, mines are being discovered in different African countries. For Africans to be knowledgeable and have required ability not only to extract, but more importantly to refine and market the mineral resources is of paramount importance.

For Africa to get where it should be economically and developmentally, we must do two things:

- 1) Correct long-standing imbalances in the educational systems;

- 2) Developing science and technology.

In the past, the school curricula were planned for the production of civil servants whose main function was that of serving the government in various administrative structures. Very little emphasis was placed on scientific disciplines. Partially as a result of this, there are more African graduates at secondary and tertiary level skills embedded in humanities and social sciences. The proportion of African students who have had adequate exposure to science, technology, engineering and mathematics is estimated to be less than 25 per cent.

Cognate with this is the well-known fact that there are less women actively engaged in science, mathematical-science and-technological related courses and professions in most African countries. To arrest such trend and practice, the newly merging talented and ambitious Africans "must be equipped with modern skills and knowledge they need to formulate and implement African solutions for African challenges".

Over a month ago, a forum on Higher Education Science and Technology was held in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. The Forum was attended by African ministers, academics and scientists from India, China, Brazil and Korea. As the two-day Conference winded off, there was a call for action featured by ambitious goals for strategic investments in science and technology with the principal purpose of accelerating Africa's development into knowledge- based society. In more precise language, the Conference emphasized on a courageous target of substantially increasing the number of African University graduates in the field of science and technology in the next ten years_ that is by 2025. Education in science, technology and mathematics is essential for the improvement of quality of instructions and learning. Ways and means by which quality education can be realised is by: Use of external examiners, benchmarking and increasing the cross-country comparability of standards.

The production of well-trained teachers responsible for preparing the human capital of the next generation of African students will be costly. It entails selective, coordinated investments in the establishment of Centres of Excellence which will optimize limited resources and simultaneously create synergies across sub-regional groups of countries.

The World Bank is engaged in ongoing administration of operational support for science and technology in a number of African countries, namely Nigeria, Tanzania and Senegal. There is further planning by the World Bank bringing African Universities together with the objective of jointly addressing some of the challenges that are of common interest in higher education development. In addition to universities, there will be the involvement of other sectors such as extractive industries, energy, environment, health, agriculture and ICT.

The first phase of the project will comprise West and Central Africa followed by phase two comprising Eastern and Southern Africa. As a result of these clusters working together will lead to their building joint laboratories, set common standards of Research Development and engage in sharing knowledge and expertise.

Partnerships with in African universities as well as those beyond African universities can be mutually valuable given the outcomes such as advance the

quality and depth of scientific education; ensure that graduates are in a position to transfer theoretical knowledge to the work they will be doing. One way of achieving such objective is seeing that the private sector is an active participant in the establishment of Centres of Excellence. The private sector can lend their support in funding Centres of Excellence and funding programmes in science and technology. Thus investing in the next generation of technicians and prospective corporate recruits. It must be borne in mid that the public is not enough tor the funding of higher education. Hence the rationale for the private sector rightful contribution of ensuring that graduates have the skills expected in the job markets.

The youth of Africa will drive the growth and prosperity of the Continent into the next generation_ but only if we equip them to do so".

A similar line of thought could be extended to quality of life in Sub-Saharan Africa, where paradoxically it has been reported that for the past half a century, the quality of life has been on the decline (Africa International University (AIU, 2014). However, this need not be cause for alarm and despair in view of the emergence of powerful forces such as technology revolution, the end of the cold war, the democratization of ideas are, as a matter of fact, a catalyst for fundamental change in the global economy, as it has impact on the nature and relationship of markets, products, competition, trade as well as sources of comparative benefits.

The new global economy is our best hope for mankind, particularly in the continent of Africa so far as, "It offers the promise of allowing less developed countries such as those in Africa, the chance of leapfrogging over the traditional development process in order to improve the quality of life for their citizens".

Whether this opportunity dawns in Africa calls for ability and capacity to exploit the global system entailing: generation and transformation of knowledge; generate indigenous knowledge; diffuse and transfer information and maximise the use of such knowledge in productive engagements in various aspects of life in society.

For this to materialise, Africa must undertake a leap forward, "in the knowledge-intensive global economy, it must be able to produce large numbers of scientifically and technologically-literate, innovative, receptive, highly adaptable, and problem-solving minded people with predisposition

to lifelong learning” Moreover, this must be carried out on accelerated timeframe work. Placed in a simpler equation, the onus of producing such cadres of leadership rests with tertiary institutions in Sub-Sahara Africa (AIU, 2014).

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