

Integrating African values into the Institutionalised Education and its Implications for the Youth in Kenya

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Abstract: African countries have for a long time emphasized on the role of institutionalised education in promoting economic and social development. Indeed, education is considered a gateway to furnishing the continent not only with the future manpower but with inculcating values which contribute to the enrichment of peoples' lives. In Kenya institutionalised education has impacted both negatively and positively to the present generation. Globalized way of exchanging ideas, new opportunities and communication has come as a result of formal education which was received and domesticated as institutionalised system of education. This is a positive thing as people can share information and communicate freely and easily across the globe. In spite of this, the negative impact seems to outweigh the positive due to the emerging trends of unfulfilled goals. High rates of unemployment, cyber and electronic crimes, irresponsible parenthood and lack of integrity are just a few indicators of how institutionalized education is negatively impacting on the young generation in Kenya and Africa at large. Those who graduate from most educational institutions are not being fruitful to the society as expected. This paper discusses how traditional education in Kenya can be integrated with institutionalised education. The integrated education will develop the students morally, intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially.

Keywords: institutionalised system of education, traditional education, traditional values, integrated education.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a critical review of the Institutionalised education system in Kenya and its implication to the young people today in the light of job acquisition and life copying mechanisms. The paper presents the concept of education the way it was conceived in the traditional African understanding as a holistic process that nurtured; intellectual, moral, physical, psychological and social aspects of an individual. A synopsis of the historical emergence of institutionalised education in Kenya with the advent of missionaries and its development to the present time has been captured to set the basis of the discussion on the current implications of education in Kenya. The reader will hopefully gain some insights and appreciate the role of education in shaping character. The reader will also see how the revolution of education has posed challenges resulting from the misconception of the same especially among young people in Kenya.

It has been argued that the current system of education offers little impact for young people to develop copying mechanisms and ability to face the challenges of life, rather it narrows their thinking to the intellectual level believing that after graduation, one is

automatically entitled to secure a white color job. This has been a disappointment that has led many young people to turn into antisocial activities and immoral behaviors.

The Current Situation of Institutionalized Education in Kenya.

There is a general outcry that institutionalised education system in Kenya is producing young people who do not find self-fulfillment[1]. Majority of the youth are either in schools, middle colleges and universities or have graduated from the same institutions. Those who have already graduated with their degrees are always looking for employment mainly in the formal sector. Those who succeed in securing jobs can only apply their intellectual abilities without giving back to the society as expected of them. This is because the phenomenal expansion of middle colleges and universities produce unwanted products; products that miss certain qualities of holistic education. Indeed, many middle colleges that were technical learning institutions were converted into Universities. In fact, Kenya is now touting with the idea of having a University in every County in addition to the already existing ones. However, one wonders whether the

universities will serve the purpose that higher learning need to fulfill in the development of a nation. A visionary government has the ability to envision the needs of its nation and figure out how to expose the surplus expertise. Nevertheless, Kenya seems to focus on mass production of graduates without figuring out where the market or consumers are for the products and whether the products meet the consumer threshold.

Much as institutionalised education in Kenya is not meeting the desired goals, many families are struggling to ensure that their children get to the highest level of education possible. The parents sell their land, property including livestock or they get loans to pay for their children's education. The only problem is that after graduating, the majority of the young people remain helpless, seeking job opportunities that do not exist.

Unemployment remains a thorny issue in Kenya. The general rate of unemployment in Kenya currently stands between 45% and 56%; while the rate of unemployment for young people stands at an average of 65%. Overall, above three quarters of unemployed youth are educated either in middle colleges or universities [2]. To make a mockery of the situation of youth unemployment, politicians use it as an opportunity to ascent to power. Every political aspirant uses youth unemployment as an agenda for campaign to the political position with empty promises that he or she is going to create jobs for young people.

The question that bothers scholars in Kenya is: Should we always perceive institutional education as a way to getting employment or should it be a tool to empower young people with skills and technical-knowhow to become creative and innovative? An education system is good to the extent to which it encourages critical thinking. In view of this, Indangasi [3] blames Kenya's system of education for lack of critical thinkers. The concern raised implies that there is need to interrogate if institutional education is truly a tool for employment or empowerment. A careful examination of the education system shows that institutional education in Kenya and its future value have been maintained as a myth that was left by the British colonialists. It perpetuates the perception of its end results as getting a white color job. This myth as propelled by many institutional education systems suggest that so long as one works hard and passes exams with good grades, it will automatically land him or her a good job. Learning has mechanically been reduced to mere exams. Here exams mean not mastering the subject to excel, but memorizing what was given by the teacher. Those who are not able to reproduce what they acquired never pass exams and in that sense are regarded as failures. This is a weakness that requires the government to re-think the way the country educates its children. There is need also to

review the curriculum to ensure that students are not only critical thinkers but they can apply the knowledge learnt to life situations.

The above discussion reveals that time is ripe to begin asking hard questions and review our thinking and attitude towards institutional education in Kenya. There is need to see education beyond the misconception that it should produce readymade students for white color jobs. We need to see institutional education as a process that helps to unleash individual's potential, passion and thereafter shaping their future goals. Education is to be understood as a tool for transforming people's thinking and attitude towards bettering their life in general. It should and need not be reduced to a mere cognitive process that helps one to master a certain subject or memorize particular topics of the subject that are necessary to pass exams. Kabagi [4] was right when he argued that we should strive to establish a system that is relevant to the learners' life experiences. He also observed that there is need to impart practical skills and develop individual talent.

Despite having a few young people who have worked against the odds to become successful innovators and creative self-employers, majority remain suffering from the consequences of misconceived phenomena of education. In Kenya the perception and attitude towards institutionalised education for life and job expectations are two realities apart. Many young people graduating from universities and colleges do not see institutional education as a way that enhances their approach to life; rather they see themselves as complete and ready for employment. Such education go against what Dewey [5] emphasized "Education is not preparation for life. Education is life itself." It is a fact that there exist no job opportunities to absorb all the graduates and more so many of them do not meet the job demands in the market. This in reality should not be the case. In the present society what should be understood as education in a broader sense has been reduced to institutional education per se. This understanding has very little to do with traditional upbringing that nearly all Kenyans experienced in the past where education was seen as a value for enhancing life challenges. The institutionalised education offered in schools, colleges and Universities does not fully integrate the traditional values that were learned in traditional ethnic communities with a view to shape in an individual to meet his or her future responsibilities. The traditional African society's norms and morals were all built into the education system, something that is lacking in our current institutional education in Kenya. The abandonment of African norms and morals is due to the uncritical adoption of western cultural values.

In view of the above, rationality has become the norm of the day as Africans claim to be educated. Starting from politics, to the public service and the private sector, we find irresponsible behaviors that point to moral decadence in our society. For instance corruption, lack of integrity, accountability and stewardship all point to a society that lacks moral capital. How can institutionalised education incorporate the traditional values into the process to bring up a holistic and well groomed personality that can possibly deal with eventualities that comes his way in life?

Traditional conception of education

In the traditional African system, education was facilitated through a series approaches; rites of passage, storytelling, riddles, dances, artifacts and songs. These broad approach to education provided values that embodied learning as a process. The learning itself was also simultaneously woven to accompany everyone as they transited from childhood, adolescent, to elder-hood. The learning itself involved a lot of creativity, ingenuity, reasoning and innovation. The initial challenge that each person was placed with was to first and foremost understand his identity as an individual, and his lineage. Every African ethnic community had its way of celebrating rites of passage which were very significant in situating an individual in the family and community. It is through these rites of passage that one gained an identity, was assigned roles and responsibilities in the family, learned norms and values of his or her community and also learned on how to nurture relationships. These values and norms dictated and controlled one's actions, behavior and thinking.

Mandela [6; p-28] says of the traditional education he received that "now [he] might marry, set up [his] own home, and plow [his] own field. [He] could now be admitted to the councils of the community; [his] words would be taken seriously". Young people who join the universities are already carrying with them such expectations as Mandela's, of the family and community. They are to establish their own families as well as perform their duties as taught and expected of them by their communities. Yet, those who join institutionalised education are not able to live up to what is expected of them from the traditional African society. In the institutionalised education system, there seem to be a problem in internalizing or incorporating the acquired traditional values with those encountered in the learning institutions.

As earlier mentioned institutionalised education is examination oriented and promotes competition. However, the practice is contrary to what good education should be. Socrates, the Greek philosopher who lived between 469-399 BC, is described as one of the wisest people of our time [7]. Most of his time was spend on discussing virtues,

justice and piety with the aim of seeking wisdom about right conduct that might guide the moral and intellectual improvement. Like Socrates who did not leave behind any written wisdom, traditional African people did not engrave their wisdom in books. They were engraved in the hearts of the people. This is what is needed in the present system of education.

Incorporating African Traditional Values into the Western Formal System of Education

The focus this paper is an attempt to rethink and revamp our view of institutionalized education in Kenya into a more inclusive process that go beyond our narrow minded view that education is for job acquisition. We are attempting to show and call for an inclusion of traditional values that form one into a holistic human being ready to cope with life challenges.

When speaking of traditional values, many may wonder what values we are talking about. Human beings are what they are because they belong to a particular cultural affiliation. This is what distinguishes every human being from others and animals. For Africans, we may as well echo the Africans' philosophy of Ubuntu "I am so we are" or what our African philosopher Mbiti [9] refers to as our communality "I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am". These two statements imply that no one can isolate himself in African community. It is the community that bequeaths the accepted norms and values.

Since the attainment of political independence, Kenyans have been meant to believe that western values and its education system are superior to our African values that define who we are. On such grounds we are found swayed from one corner to another without understanding and affirming our identity. Culture is "what makes who you are". If this is the case, then how can a person use someone else's culture to define the self? Whose culture is superior here? In this case, the person using other peoples' culture to define self is seeing the self as inferior. This is the myth that was inherited from the British colonial masters and early missionaries; and to date little effort is being made to confront it and live according to our true Africanness. The inferiority that has been bequeathed to us still undermines our potentials to use education as an empowering tool that unleashes the power within us and shapes our lives. We have remained a society that always complains of the violations that the colonial masters did to us, rather than learning from the past and focusing on shaping a brighter future. We complain of the institutionalised education system that fails to secure us job opportunities, breeds lots of evil than good; corrupt society, selfishness, jealousy just to name a few, but little do we focus on incorporating our golden values from our traditions into the institutionalised education system.

The authors suggest a different approach to institutionalised education in Kenya as argued in the next paragraphs. They recommend the borrowing of some lessons from the traditional African way of thinking, and incorporating them into the learning process to make a holistic development of an individual. The African way of education was holistic in approach. It placed human beings at the centre with the aim of enabling them to become responsible members of the society fit to face the challenges of life. This is contrary to our present institutional education that places learners on the periphery while focusing on rote learning which is not applicable in life. Consequently, many young people who go through the education system only to get to the end with nothing but a paper that has little to offer in daily life. African society has therefore become what sociologists call a “credential society”.

Mandela [6] has shown that in the institutionalised education system, “the educated English-man was our model; what we aspired to be were ‘black Englishmen,’” . During the era of colonization there was a struggle between the British, early missionaries and the indigenous African communities. The colonial governments and missionaries strived to entrench their cultures and values into the African set-up in the name of christianizing and civilizing Africans. They demonized all that was African as primitive, backward, outdated, inhuman and unchristian. Despite this attack, the African teachers who were recruited ensured that instruction began with the children mothers’ language. This was to make the children not only feel at home while transiting in the learning process but also to master their local languages which gave them their identity, and served as the channel of transmitting the wisdom of their communities. The instructions took place from nursery to lower primary school. In the homes, the traditional values were upheld because parents could teach their children about them using oral tradition that included myths, folktales riddles and tongue twisters among others. The oral tradition had hidden messages to be unraveled by the listeners. The revolution that took place under the missionaries was to convert African indigenous people not only into Christianity but also introduce an institutionalised western education system. They set up schools and drew children from the African families to convert them to Christianity. The schools became an incentive to those who converted as they were promised white color jobs.

The need to become someone respected in the society and the introduction of a money economy propelled so many people to move into urban centers so that they could get access to western education. Everything was now judged and perceived in the prism of western education. To be a good leader, a good

speaker or to live a good life meant being educated in the western education system. This kind of thinking has not only been nurtured in our education system, but also in our political arena, socio-economic and religious fields.

After attaining political independence in 1963, the African Kenyans who had been educated by the colonial masters became new leaders and assumed the powers once held by the colonialists. At this time, the new masters took control of everything; turning all community and government properties into individual or ethnic affiliated possessions. Leys [7, p-207] outlines how the allocation of government civil service position drew more ethnic affiliations with strong ethnic groups controlling the center of power while the minority remained at the periphery. Community land was made into individual property; and some communities were re-located to give way for those in power to possess more land and wealth to become political leaders. The effort was designed to entrench the colonial systems that gave the new leaders veto powers to reign over and become demi gods within their own communities. Each leader had total powers and began to employ only his cronies. Nepotism and negative ethnicity became the norm at all levels of government and institutionalized systems in Kenya. Those without cronies in the political powers had little advantage to access institutionalized education and secure a white color jobs. Since then, the common phenomena was, for one to get to the best school or access a good job he or she had to have ethnic affiliation with those in power.

After independence and with increased institutionalized education, English predominantly became the language of instruction. Despite the fact that Kiswahili was a national language, every school assumed that for better performance and results, English, the foreign language be made compulsory. Children from kindergarten are forced to speak English and not their mothers’ tongue (indigenous language of every ethnic group). Kiswahili is only given preferential days to be spoken within a week. Any child found violating the rule by speaking any other language other than English is severely punished. However, this did not create equal opportunities in Kenya. The opportunities were available only to those who headed institutions and were already in leadership positions. Instead of creating equality and harmonious coexistence, they used the available resources to take their children to very expensive and well established school on the expense of the common man’s cost in order to acquire the best education. Majority of the ordinary Kenyan people began to realize the hopelessness of their situation and struggled to educate their children to the best level possible, but job opportunities continued to be scarce.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that education should enhance the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of every individual. This in turn should transform the individual to live and meet all the expectations at personal level and society at large. We cannot address the increasing vices in Kenya such as lack of integrity, unfaithfulness in marriage, dishonesty, arrogance, murders, robberies, terror attacks, ethicizing our institutions and services, nepotism in work places, bribery, and unemployment amongst young productive Kenyans if we continue perceiving education as a gateway to getting white color job. We urgently need to begin to borrow from the holistic education theory which is very much similar to the traditional African understanding of education and incorporate it into the institutionalised education. The values for institutional education should go beyond passing examinations. It should be about development of skills in all aspects: cognitive, spiritual, moral, social, intellectual and physical. All these values were embedded in the traditional African education yet, the same is lacking in our Kenyan institutionalised education system.

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