



CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION SECTOR IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE AFRICAN UNION

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Abstract

Considers the necessity for a high-quality education to move the African continent into the future. Theory evaluation and industry needs are handled in light of future demands. The importance of changing present educational processes and focusing on future economic trends is emphasised. It focuses on the issues encountered and the answers implemented based on sub-regional data. It examines the African educational experience from the perspective of the larger regional education setting and makes short- to long-term recommendations for future planning to ameliorate the problem and boost efforts to accomplish the continent's educational, social, and economic goals.

Keywords: Africa, education, development, problem

Introduction

Academy advancement and long-term viability have been exceptional since Plato's day. There are several factors at play, such as changing governmental regimes and population trends as well as technological advances that have shaped its history (Buchen, 2005). The majority of educational institutions across the world, including those in Africa, have survived and thrived unlike many enterprises. With the exception of a few sectarian



institutions, the total number of institutions has actually risen. In fact, Africa's rapid expansion has occurred at a time when most countries have decided to open up and welcome new participants. Even more crucial is the church's involvement in making education more widely available. Professional development has evolved to the point where it not only complements but competes with and even exceeds its parent versions of higher education. This is according to Buchen (2005) who claims that there are two separate future-driven educational alternative providers. The first type of educational entrepreneur is a non-profit organisation. They are innovative and experimental alternatives to the typical academic approach. Despite their resemblance to more traditional programming, these shows may stand on their own. The second trend is the advent of corporate universities, which operate as fully self-contained educational institutions on the premises of their parent companies. Corporate research is a feature of these organisations. These options are more tailored to the individual and the market. Professionals will desire and even be obliged to become permanent students in order to stay up with changing and growing workforce needs and the prospect of downsizing and outsourcing. There will be a radical shift in our educational system, which will be driven by workforce and professional desire, as a result. Essentially, this type of growth means that novel personalised courses are always being developed.

A Review of The Modern Literature

All children, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or educational requirements, have a right to a high-quality education as part of the Millennium Development Goals, a promise made by the worldwide community. Significant progress has been achieved, and there is no doubt about that. School attendance in Africa has increased by a third since 1999, but the region has serious difficulties that will require more attention in policies and commitments made for the post-2015 era. The most difficult part of implementing a policy is moving from talking about it to doing it. Our existing thinking about systems and practises must be questioned, leveraging and integrating the most recent thinking and approaches, such as cognitive science and mobile technology, to accomplish this.

In my mind, there are two main obstacles. Access to education is the first step. 67 million children throughout the world are still not attending school, with 43% of them residing in Africa. Children in conflict zones or 'fragile' states make up a large portion of this population, as do those in rural regions. Ten million children in Sub-Saharan Africa drop out of basic education every year. There are several explanations as to why these children are not attending school, including a lack of resources, cultural norms, the necessity of working, and so on. However, occasionally small steps may have a significant impact. In South Sudan, a Save the Children effort raised school attendance significantly by creating



permanent classrooms with hygienic facilities for students. It's easy to see why kids preferred this setting over "neath the tree." Girls, rural poor, and students with specific educational needs all need more of these creative solutions. Many people believe that low-cost private schools may help the poorest children, yet there is little actual evidence to support this claim. Further research and experimentation is required.

However, elementary school students aren't the only ones that have trouble getting an education. The increasing number of secondary school students, as a result of the impact of Education for All, might be a considerably larger burden; presently, 400 million 12- to 17-year-olds throughout the world are not in school. Secondary schools necessitate highly qualified instructors and a cost-effective curriculum that includes both academic and vocational/technical disciplines. Many existing secondary school systems do not meet these requirements. Current systems can't keep up with demand, so we'll need new approaches to provide high-quality, low-cost secondary care at scale. With over 28,000 secondary students enrolled in the NAMCOL (Namibian College of Open Learning), an open schooling approach proposed by the Commonwealth of Learning is one option.

There's also pre-school. A child's long-term success in school is clearly influenced by the quality of his or her pre-school education. Sub-Saharan Africa's governments are putting more emphasis on education in their programmes. Ghana, for example, aims to provide two years of free and mandatory pre-primary education to all children under the age of four, and enrollment is growing rapidly. As a result, teachers with advanced degrees are increasingly being sought after in teacher preparation programmes. Teaching resources for this age group have been developed and documented by Wenja educators at the University of Education. As a result, a large percentage of children in the area remain without access to pre-primary schooling.

Government and development organisations have long ignored higher education, but that is changing. Now they are placing a greater emphasis on it. In many countries, the number of students wishing to attend university far outstrips the number of available spots. For instance, nearly a million Nigerian high school students pass the university admission test each year, however they must compete for only 300,000 available places. The number of PhD candidates who are eligible to apply for membership in the Academy will rise as a result of increased investment in academic infrastructure and increased academic capacity. An innovative method to assist doctoral students at Makerere University in Uganda is being implemented that aims to foster academic excellence.

Quality is my second, and no less important, issue. However, how many of these additional students are actually learning? The sad reality is that large numbers of children in grades 2



and 3 classrooms in many countries are unable to read even a single word in a paragraph after two or more years of schooling, according to several studies. Without the ability to read, these children's chances of achieving any kind of academic success appear to be grim. Educators must be well-trained, as well as have access to resources such as books, computers, and other materials. Teaching professionals are in short supply in every field. In addition to a lack of access to high-quality training, the profession's negative reputation is a contributing factor. However, regulations and innovative undertakings are evolving in a favorable direction. Teaching in Kenya will become a graduate profession and instructors who graduate from elementary school will not be able to transfer to high school. This has the potential to elevate elementary school teachers' status and provide more security for the school's professional community, both of which have an impact on professional growth and the quality of the school's practises. New technologies and open educational resources are helping schools become learning communities by facilitating classroom-focused in-service teacher education, which provides access to other communities of professionals while allowing teachers to develop their knowledge in their own professional context. Many African countries are featured in the TESSA initiative's case studies. The Read-Learn-Lead initiative, which involves teachers, parents, caregivers, and community tutors, is showing promise in the early grades in Mali. As a result of working on this project, students' ability to recognise letters has improved dramatically. We can see great potential in this complete local plan if this progress can be maintained and enhanced.

Free material that can be adapted for different situations and duplicated without incurring licencing charges has the potential to transform education throughout the continent. So Africans may add to the global reservoir of knowledge in this way. For OER to be widely accepted as an educational tool, the Paris Declaration was critical. In the Declaration, people all around the globe committed to raising awareness of open educational resources (OER) and making it easier to create ICT environments that encourage the development and use of OER. Higher-quality materials may be produced more quickly and cheaply with the use of open educational resources (OER). Despite the fact that few students in Malawi have access to the required textbooks and other resources, faculty at the University of Malawi have developed an e-learning certificate programme in midwifery using OER and local case studies. Remote rural locations and students who cannot access more traditional kinds of information will increasingly be able to access this content thanks to the ubiquitous mobile phone. An interesting example of how digital technology and OER are being used to provide a rich resource bank of local stories for early reading is the "African Storybook" led by OER Africa. OERs are also allowing younger learners to access the content.



Main Education Challenges of the African Union

Equity and Access

38 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa have never attended school as of 2004. This is despite the fact that foreign funding, under the Education for All framework, places a high premium on elementary education. (UNESCO 2006). Infrastructure and teachers are very poor in rural areas, where the problem is even worse. It's made worse by the fact that many parents don't want their kids to go to school because of poverty and cultural practises. The job prospects for people who go to school aren't very good. This means that African countries need better economic conditions and more money from governments and development partners to build new schools, train teachers, and provide educational materials. This will help them meet their goal of education for all by 2015. 10 Public perceptions of the value of education need to change, too. Reforms are needed to make sure that children get an education that prepares them for self-employment and other activities that make money off the farm, not for paid jobs. Gross enrollment in primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa is 91%, but the net enrollment rate is 66%, which means there is still a long way to go before all children in Africa have a chance to go. At all levels of education, there is a big problem with getting in. This is shown by the low gross enrolment ratios at secondary and tertiary levels, which are 30% and 5%, respectively, which is the lowest level in the world. The number of girls who go to school is much lower than the number of boys. However, even though over time there has been less of a difference, the difference still is very high Female-male ratios for girls at each level of schooling are 0.89, 0.78, and 0.62, respectively. This means that 85 per cent of girls at each level of schooling are enrolled.

Quality and Relevance

In the past, the African education system has placed an emphasis on the development of education without giving appropriate consideration to its relevance, which has resulted in resource loss and waste. The language of instruction is a question that is closely related to the subject of relevance. Experience has shown that the use of African languages throughout the early years of school can minimise the number of repetitions and dropouts, as well as provide opportunities for early employment. This has been proven by research conducted in Zambia, Namibia, and Tanzania, among other places. The issue of relevance is particularly acute in the upper secondary, higher, and vocational levels, when, in addition to increasing access, curriculum alignment with labour market demands becomes increasingly important. Education in science and technology must begin early in a child's school experience. However, the issue of how to improve the curriculum for students who



drop out before completing the basic cycle continues to be contested. The fact that the majority of schools in Sub-Saharan Africa are unable to create kids with the essential knowledge and talents is a major cause of controversy. Between 1995 and 1998, SACMEQ conducted an examination of the reading capacity of primary school kids and discovered that, in four out of seven nations, fewer than half of sixth-graders achieved the requisite level of reading competency. According to the PASEC study (2016-2020), between 14% and 43% of fifth-grade pupils displayed 'poor' achievement in either French or maths. Students in Senegal, for example, had difficulty ordering values with two decimal points, a figure more than 40%. There has even been some reversal of course. Comparing the results of the SACMEQ surveys conducted in 2015-2019 with those conducted in 2020-2021 revealed a 4% drop in grade 6 literacy performance levels, with the most notable variances happening in Malawi, Namibia and Zambia (UNESCO 2021). Students in Ghana's basic and secondary schools experienced reading issues because they primarily read for tests, according to earlier research (MaClure 1997), whereas students at the university level preferred to swap textbooks rather than purchase numerous books for their own learning and future usage. Writing skills were found to be below expected norms in Mali and Togo, and only a small number of pupils expressed an interest in improving their handwriting abilities. In these nations, poor grammar instruction was highlighted as a barrier, whereas oral communication difficulties were observed in Benin and Togo, respectively. Students and instructors in Cameroon have expressed concern about the lack of communication and writing abilities they possess.

Financing of Education

Due to the inability of many African governments to raise taxes to fund increased economic and social investments, education finance by African governments remains woefully inadequate. Although government funding of education appears to be large when expressed as a proportion of GDP, the per capita spending on education remains extremely low when expressed in absolute terms. As a result, most African countries are forced to rely on international assistance to maintain education funding in order to keep up with the rapidly expanding young population. Since the 1990 Jomtien conference, there has been a significant mobilisation of support for Education For All, including subsequent initiatives such as the Dakar conference in 2000, the Fast Track Initiative in 2002, UNESCO's Global Initiative for Education, and the Global Action Plan, all of which are aimed at achieving education for all. Education For All is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Since the 1990s, substantial strides have been made in the financial sector, with new financial arrangements such as budget assistance and SWAps being established. After decades of project-based education assistance had produced poor outcomes, this was a response. Due to the fact that it does not address flaws in the larger environment in which



it is presented, project aid has a number of drawbacks. It has been pointed out by Colclough and colleagues (2003) that new teachers will be ineffective if they do not have access to texts that support them in their delivery of the curriculum. Teachers who are not trained in the usage of new instructional resources will not be able to benefit students from them. Improved teacher housing will not enhance teacher morale as long as real salary declines continue unabated." A consultative process with development partners was to be used to develop sectoral policies and priorities as well as performance indicators, as well as required expenditures, management, and accounting arrangements. The government was to be the driving force behind the development of new financing arrangements and their implementation. Aid agencies were hired for the planning, negotiating process, developing, and writing the specifics of the programmes in practise due to a lack of capability within the Ministry of Education in this area. However, because of the way education is funded, it is possible that the majority of initiatives will have only a minimal influence. Very few African countries have a financing formula for education and other social services, and funding is typically provided based on convenience and expediency rather than on standards based on input and output goals or performance indicators. Budget adjustments are executed by administrative decision-making across-the-board directives that are made without prior engagement or risk assessment. For the World Bank, the rule of origin constraint prevents it from fully implementing its 2004 recommendations on SWApS in the education sector, which were implemented with the World Bank's assistance. Despite the private sector's involvement in education provision, ensuring their participation in education financing in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remains a priority.

Educational System

The African education system, on the whole, is decentralised and lacking in administration, planning, assessment, and incentives. Countries lack a trustworthy information system to aid in the development of policies and strategies as well as the management of financial and other resources. Worse, because of unethical behaviours, the system often fails to ensure proper use of money. Some of the challenges in resource mobilisation, administration and accountability, and sustainability of the education system may be resolved if local involvement was allowed in most African nations' education delivery systems. In most nations, decentralisation has not been effectively implemented because of the difficulties in developing local ability and devolving authority and resources. Decentralization, however, has been made ineffectual in certain circumstances due to a lack of adequate budgeting and spending tracking systems, or it has simply meant that corruption was transferred from the central to the local level.



Features of Education in Africa

Expansion of Education

Following the continent's independence in the early 1960s, education immediately became a primary concern for each new administration. As a result, education funding was increased, which was strongly supported by donors who also saw education as a critical priority. As a result, activities like as classroom building, teacher recruiting and training, and the purchasing of instructional materials expanded significantly, resulting in enrolment expanding at a quicker pace than in any other area of the globe throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the United Nations Development Programme reports that by 1980, Sub-Saharan Africa's aggregate primary enrollment ratio had nearly caught up to that of South Asia and the Middle East. The adverse result of this increase was a dramatic decline in quality relative to what it had been during the country's colonial history. Teachers with limited experience and training were placed in classrooms without supervision and expected to educate an increasing number of students despite a shortage of appropriate teaching supplies, textbooks, and school infrastructure. The former colonial powers' educational institutions and practises were reproduced in colonial-ruled African countries. This was frequently manifested through curriculum that was divorced from its surroundings and a high cost of education delivery. Curriculum materials and teaching strategies developed in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s were used in Africa decades after European methodology ceased to be successful there. In far too many situations, even at the elementary level, the language of teaching was the language of the former colonial authority, which is unacceptable. As a result, education, particularly at the postsecondary level, became inefficient and costly on both an internal and external level, and graduates lacked appropriate educational content and/or quality (Mihyo 2005). As a result, there was also a mismatch between the worlds of work and education. Mali's scenario, where just 30% of 1986 university graduates found job, and Guinea's, where graduate unemployment led in a 40% decline in university enrollment, illustrate the mismatch between supply and demand for trained labour (Diambomba 1988). According to recent data, just 49 percent of graduates in Benin are able to find work that is linked to their degree of education, and 15 percent remain unemployed (Migan 2007, Banque Mondiale 2008).

Decline and Stagnation

In the 1960s, favourable trading terms for Africa's traditional products fueled the spread of schooling. Most African nations, however, had a deteriorating balance of payment in the 1970s and 1980s exacerbated by the oil price shocks of the 1970s and the worldwide economic crisis. Cutbacks in "non-essential" spending, such as school expansion,



maintenance expenses, and the provision of teaching aids, were implemented by governments in the wake of financial crisis. Inflation undermined the actual worth of teacher wages, which were maintained in nominal terms. International organisations, such as the IMF and World Bank, began calling for "structural adjustment," which in this case meant additional cuts to social sector expenditure, by the mid-1980s, when this kind of borrowing had reached crisis levels. In addition, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which resulted in the attrition of instructors and the orphaning of children, began in the 1980s and gained steam in the 1990s until recently, when it began to decline in certain nations. Brain-drain became a big problem in several nations during this time. According to some estimates, the OECD nations have snatched up more than 30% of Africa's highly qualified workforce (Carrington and Detraciage 1998; Haque and Aziz 1998, as quoted by B. J. Ndulu of the World Bank). As a result of these considerations, it becomes vital to educate a bigger number of people to ensure that at least some of them remain employed within their community. Systemic and institutional issues also had a role. African countries in the seventies and eighties emphasised governmental control over education and repressed the participation of private sector and other entities. Schooling and the school system were employed as a means of indoctrinating young people to support the political aims of the current dictatorship. Although certain religious groups were allowed to provide limited educational services and some institutions linked with the state were authorised to run schools, education was made the sole province of the state. In the vast majority of situations, it was a public service.

Strengthened Attempts to Overturn the Movement

More and more countries are eliminating primary school fees in many countries, and foreign aid is increasing overall, which has benefited the education sector (AfDB 2007; Education for All, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Education for All, pledges to the Millennium Development Goals, and elimination of primary school fees). Due to the lower GDP in Sub-Saharan Africa, governmental spending on education as a percentage of GDP has been steady; yet, overall expenditures have lagged behind other sectors. According to data from 1970, primary school per-pupil expenditures were comparable to those in other regions. However, throughout time, they have remained largely consistent. Per-pupil expenditure at the secondary and postsecondary levels increased significantly in the early 1970s as a result of early attempts to mimic European educational systems. After a period of time in which this scenario persisted, spending per student began to fall, and by 1995 it was close to or slightly below the national average.

Lessons learned from COVID-19



School closures damaged the education of more than 90 percent of African children at the height of the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 education crisis compelled some African countries to devise novel solutions, including remote learning using a mix of low-cost and high-tech techniques ranging from printed home study materials to media classes delivered via broadcast on television, radio, and digital platforms. Africa's educational institutions are woefully unable to support students' learning outside of the classroom. An estimated 121 million students, or half of the student population, were effectively excluded from digital or broadcast distance learning in Sub-Saharan Africa due to a lack of supportive policies or household assets required to access digital or broadcast education. Furthermore, many countries lack the necessary infrastructure and equipment for water, sanitation, and hygiene. Schools in Africa, for example, lack hand-washing facilities and drinking water. When such gaps exist, providing in-person classroom instruction in accordance with WHO and health authority regulations becomes challenging.

Recommendations

1. The time has come for African nations to study the fundamental reasons why individuals in specific groups (such as those of secondary school age) fail to participate in education. More inclusion in schools, with special attention to groups that drop out. In order to remove the most significant roadblocks young people experience in obtaining a secondary education, certain policies must be developed. One way to do this is to implement policies that increase the number of students required to complete a secondary education, as well as to improve the relevance of courses to the labour market. Governments can also establish measures such as social security programmes that involve financial transfers or child allowances to encourage more teenagers to stay in school.
2. To increase academic achievement, place an emphasis on the fundamentals from an early age. Preschool and primary school education in Africa may be improved by focusing on teaching fundamental reading and math skills. Learning should begin as early as possible. Governments can make a huge push for reading and numeracy and urge schools to discover new methods to strengthen the core learning abilities, even if it means spending a few hours weekly to teaching youngsters how to read and perform arithmetic at suitable levels. They should do this.
3. Connecting to the internet should be a top priority for learning and skill development. It's very important for Ministries of Education to work with telecommunications companies and internet providers to lower the prices of airtime, mobile data, and broadband services so that all kids, even the poorest and most vulnerable, can get access to online learning resources. There must be cooperation between the Ministries of Education and



Telecommunications in order to achieve this goal. ICT infrastructure and strategic partnerships will also be needed, as well as a clear road map and inter-ministerial collaboration platform. These things work best when there is a clear plan in place.

4. Educators should strive to provide safe, healthy learning environments for kids. It's imperative that schools implement health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) policies in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Handwashing facilities are now unavailable in half of all African elementary schools, and the situation is similar in high schools. Investing in WASH infrastructure, developing detailed protocols on hygiene measures in schools (such as handwashing, the use of protective equipment, and safe food preparation practises), and developing easy-to-understand protocols on physical distancing measures are all necessary measures to better prepare African countries for future crises.
5. Increase the importance of teacher education, particularly those using digital pedagogical skills. There was a chronic dearth of skilled instructors in African schools, which hampered their ability to provide a quality education to their students. All stages of teacher training in Africa must be redesigned, incorporating digital and pedagogical abilities, to ensure learner-centered, inclusive quality education for all students. In order to address students' diverse needs, instructors must now be proficient as facilitators and instructional designers, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 school closures. In order to achieve this objective, teacher preparation and professional development programmes must be made available to all educators.
6. Identify and implement cost-effective and creative means of supporting higher education. Many nations' education budgets are predicted to stagnate as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's economic consequences. Utilizing few financial resources effectively necessitates increasing productivity. It is important for African countries to examine their budgetary policies and reallocate education sector resources more strategically in order to avoid negative educational results as a result of government spending cuts. Insights can be gained via audits and assessments of education expenditures that are open and transparent.
7. Contribute to strengthening educational systems that can withstand disruptions. More resilient educational systems are needed in Africa so that excellent and inclusive education can be provided to all students, regardless of the conditions. This requires costed national education plans that are backed by a solid outcomes framework. In order to build successful education systems, a complete approach to education management is required that incorporates assessment, teaching and learning as well as administration and evaluation. Africa's governments must work to enhance the flow of information across education stakeholders so that suggestions for changes may be discussed and acted upon.



As a result, important participants at the local, subnational, and national levels must coordinate their efforts in a more efficient manner.

8. Invest in the development of educational data and management information systems. Progress requires evidence-based knowledge. Significant barriers to progress measurement might occur as a result of a lack of crucial data, such as markers of learning outcomes. Producing high-quality data enables evidence-based programming, informs policy, and enables a country's progress toward national, regional, and continental goals to be tracked. African governments must urgently invest financial and human resources in data management infrastructure in order to record evidence and track success. At the continental level, it is also critical to ensure that disparate producers and sources of education data are harmonised, which can be accomplished through the establishment of effective coordination mechanisms and functional data repositories at the Regional Economic Community (REC) and African Union levels.

Conclusion

The future of education in Africa, as well as its practical application, is critical to the continent's future. Education in the future will continue to evolve in the same manner that education has always evolved to meet the demands of companies and industries. Weak economic growth is dependent on the ability of our educational system to produce a workforce capable of sustaining both our present and future economies. As the world's population grows and renewable resources become scarcer, it is clear that a certain level of forecasting or anticipating of future educational demands will become increasingly crucial. The level of readiness for these threats is critical for Africa's future. Education in Africa can be reimaged in the wake of the Ebola outbreak as a place where children can learn in safe, healthy, and inclusive environments. More emphasis should be placed on the use of digital technologies and the training of teachers to bring these technologies to life in order to help children learn. With such a youthful population (3 out of 5 Africans are under the age of 25), it is therefore imperative for African governments to increase their investment in education in order to avoid missing out on the current window of opportunity for development. Taking advantage of the continent's demographic dividend and investing in human capital have the potential to have a significant influence and provide significant outcomes in and for Africa. A bank's involvement in mobilising resources and intellectual energy from both Africa as well as the world at large might bring up debates on how to improve the quality and effectiveness of education in Africa, as has been the case thus far. Globalization has created new opportunities and hazards for African countries and the continent as a whole, and robust education and employment plans are needed to deal with them. Regional and sub-regional action may be important; however, African policies and



institutions are still in the early stages of development, and they need more international aid to strengthen their education systems.



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