

Deconstructing Kenya's Education: A Historical Paradox and Complexities

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Abstract

The education system in Kenya plays a crucial role in shaping the country's socio-economic development and human capital. This paper provides an overview of the education system in Kenya, highlighting its structure, key components, challenges, and recent reforms from a historical perspective. The education system consists of three levels namely primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary education is compulsory and caters to children aged 6 to 14 years, while secondary education is divided into two cycles: junior secondary (14 to 17 years) and senior secondary (18 to 19 years). Tertiary education includes universities, technical and vocational institutions, and middle-level colleges. In recent years, Kenya has implemented several reforms to address challenges facing education and enhance its quality and standards. Furthermore, the curriculum has undergone significant revisions to align with the changing needs of the job market and the global economy. Emphasis has been placed on STEM subjects namely Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to foster skills development and entrepreneurship. Despite these positive changes and several challenges, Kenya can continue to foster a well-educated populace capable of driving sustainable development and economic growth in the country.

Keywords: Skills, Development, Structure, Learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Kenya is a vital component of national development and social transformation, marked by a commitment to providing accessible and quality education to all citizens. Education in Kenya is characterized by a strong emphasis on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The government has implemented various policies and initiatives to improve education, including the provision of free primary education, school feeding programs, and efforts to enhance infrastructure and teacher training. Despite these strides, challenges such as limited resources, regional disparities, and high dropout rates persist, necessitating ongoing efforts to enhance educational outcomes and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens.

African Indigenous Education: The Taproot of the Kenyan education system

Indigenous education refers to the traditional systems of learning and knowledge transmission that have been practiced by African communities over time and space. Such practices are deeply rooted in the

socioeconomic and political values of the society playing a crucial role in shaping the identities, skills, and values of generations present and those to come. Philosophical canons of African indigenous education included: Preparedness / Preparationism; The main purpose of training the learner was for the purpose of equipping them with a specific skill in order for them to perform a particular role in the family or society. Both male and female learners were trained to be self-reliant and to perform specific gender roles based on the well-being of the larger community. The second one is functionalism; Knowledge and skills and values that were imparted to the learner were relevant to the individual well-being and the society at large hence education was for utility value.

The third one was communalism where the responsibility of educating the learner was not solely the responsibility of the parents but that of the entire community, this included also the discipline of the child. The fourth canon is Holisticism or Multiple Learning where learners were trained to specialize in a particular profession but also received other professional pieces of training, for example, a boy who

trained to be a professional hunter, would still learn some skills in farming, this ensured that the learner had an opportunity to participate in the diverse socio-economic and apolitical aspects of the society. Very limited room for specific career specialization existed in society. The last philosophical canon was Perennialism; where education was seen to be conservative in nature and aimed at preparing the learner to preserve and maintain cultural heritage that has been handed down from one generation to the other for the maintenance of social stability.

From the above discussion, African indigenous education is holistic in nature and focuses on developing the whole person rather than solely the intellectual growth of the learner as the case with Western formal education. Indigenous education acknowledges the interconnectedness of the different aspects of human life for the well-being of the wider society. This form of learning relies heavily on oral tradition as a primary means of knowledge gain and transmission. Custodians of knowledge including Elders, griots, and other senior members of the community are tasked with the responsibility of passing down knowledge, history, cultural values, and wisdom to the learners / young ones through narratives, riddles, proverbs, songs, and rites of passage or rituals from one generation to the next.

Learning is often experiential, emphasizing practical aspects and hands-on involvement of the learner within the communal environment. Learners learn through apprenticeship, observation, imitation, and participation in community affairs. This enables learners to acquire essential skills that would make them useful members of the community. Learning as a communal endeavour took place within the confines of the community. Elders and senior members of the community played a central role as educators, repositories, or custodians of knowledge and skills to the younger generation. They attached learning to the importance of nurturing the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of individual learners. With the main focus on instilling a sense of interconnectedness with the cosmic world and the community, promoting social values and norms. Religious aspects are integrated into the curriculum in order to foster a deeper understanding of the natural world and individual's duties and responsibilities to oneself and the community.

It is worthwhile to note that African traditional Education is not monolithic in nature, individual communal cultural practices may vary across different communities. Furthermore, over time, western education systems and practices have led to the neglect and marginalization of traditional knowledge. However, there is a rising recognition of the value, benefits, and importance of African traditional knowledge in promoting and maintaining cultural diversity, visionary

and sustainable development, and social and political cohesion in the bid of creating a cohesive society. Currently, efforts are being made in many African nations to integrate traditional and indigenous knowledge into the current educational frameworks to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational system.

The Phase of Colonial Education up to 1962

The colonial phase in the growth of education in Kenya can be traced from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, during this phase education played a significant role in the British colonization process and dominance of the country. The colonial government introduced a system of education that primarily served their selfish interests, aimed at creating a submissive African labor force and a class of limited African elite who were sycophants, less critical and creative, and who would give the colonial administrative structures unwavering support.

Missionary Education marked the initial phase of colonial education in Kenya. The arrival of two Church Missionary Society Missionaries (CMS), Rev. Ludwig Krapf and Rev. Johann Rebman at the coast of Mombasa in the 1840s led to the establishment of schools at Mombasa and Rabai Mpya, this was the pivot point for the establishment and development of western formal education in Kenya. Missionaries established schools within mission stations whose education primarily focused on teaching Christianity and basic literacy to Africans, this kind of education was famously referred to as the 3R (Reading, writing, and arithmetic). This was to enable Africans to know how to read the Bible, write scriptures and count the verses. During this phase, education was restricted to a smaller number of African converts, collaborators, and children of the African chiefs and senior village elders. It should be understood that the African response to European missionary education during this period was that of indifference, hostility, apathy and suspicion.

The colonial administration on the other hand was very reluctant to provide Africans with education, they tried to cooperate with and encourage missionaries to provide Africans with technical education. In 1902 the colonial government passed the Education Ordinance, taking an active role in the provision of African education. The ordinance established government-controlled African schools with a curriculum that emphasized technical and vocational skills. In 1909 the colonial government established the first education commission, chaired by Professor Nelson Frazer from India that recommended among many other recommendations, racial segregation in education based on the British Indian colonial experience. European schools received the most resources and offered a curriculum that prepared students for higher education and administrative positions or rather white-collar jobs as opposed to the

African education that prepared them for blue-collar jobs. Asian schools on the other hand provided education that was a median of African-European education with an emphasis on commerce and trade.

The government established and sustained industrial educational schools in areas away from the areas served by missionaries for example Machakos in 1915, Narok in 1919, Kabete in 1919, Kitui in 1909, Kabianga in 1925, Kapsabet, Tambach in 1928 and Kapenguria in 1928. In 1925 the colonial government established the permanent advisory committee on education which recommended that education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations, and traditions of all people conserving all elements of their social life, this recommendation was a radical move in the expansion of African education. In 1943 the Royal Commission on Higher Education for Colonies recommended that Makerere College be a constituent college of the University of London expanding African higher education opportunities. In 1949 the colonial government adopted the Beecher Report (chaired by Archdeacon L. J Beecher) that made recommendations on the scope, content, and methods of African education in all schools in a bid to monitor the quality and standards of African education.

The 1952 Binns Education Commission report recommendations were adopted in 1957, this defined the coordination of Teacher education for different regions in the country to be coordinated at Kagumo (for the eastern and central regions), while western colleges had a center at Siriba teachers training college. This was another milestone in the growth of African education. In the process of expanding higher education for Africans, the Royal Technical College was established in 1956 with funds from the colonial academy in memory of Mahatma Gandhi to offer courses in technical and commercial subjects leading to the award of diploma certificates. Similarly to Makerere it was inter-territorial and admitted students from all over East Africa.

Africans demanded literary education as was provided in the British schools. Local Native Councils (LNCs) played significant roles in the provision of education for Africans by establishing schools through funds collected from taxes. Such schools included Kakamega in 1932, Kisii in 1934, and Kagumo in 1934. LNCs financially supported African government-aided schools such as Narok, Kericho, Kajiado, Tambach, Loitoktok, and Kapenguria, and equally provided land for the establishment of schools. Following dissatisfaction with the quality of education offered in missionary and government-aided schools, Africans started independent school movements. The pioneer school was established by John Owalo a former follower of the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland in Kikuyu where he was educated and became a teacher. With his follower Ezekiel Apindi they

established *Nomia Luo* mission schools. In central Kenya we had the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) and the Kikuyu Karing'a Educational Association (KKEA) under these organizations, African independent schools rose to 34 by 1933 with a total enrolment of 2,500 pupils, and by 1939, enrolment rose to 12,964. It should be noted that the 1952-1957 State of Emergency led to the closure of all independent schools however they were reopened in 1958 under the supervision of the District Education Boards.

In 1939 independent schools established Githunguri Teachers Training College (African Teachers College). The first principal was Peter Mbiu Koinange the son of senior chief Koinange Wa Mbiu. Peter Mbiu was a Colombia University Master's graduate. By 1936 there were 44 independent schools in Kenya with an enrolment of 3948 pupils. On the other hand African Ex-soldiers after World War I and II demystified European superiority and demanded equal educational opportunities for Africans. After 1957 Jaramogi Oginga Odinga obtained scholarships for Africans to study in eastern communist countries such as U.S.S.R (Russia), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, East Germany, and North Korea. Tom Mboya and Gikonyo Kiano organized airlifts of students to the U.S.A and Canada on funds raised privately in Kenya and abroad.

Overall, the colonial phase of education in Kenya was characterized as a period of contestation between the missionaries, the colonial government, and Africans themselves in the provision of education. Colonial government education and that of the missionaries were meant to serve the interests of the British colonial administration and provide limited education to Africans while reserving better educational opportunities for Europeans and Asians. The colonial education system as demonstrated in this paper, aimed at perpetuating the colonial power structure and control. However, it also laid the groundwork for the later struggle for independence and the eventual transformation of education in Kenya.

Post-Colonial Education Up to 2000

Education in this phase witnessed significant changes and challenges as the country sought to establish a national educational system after gaining independence in 1963. The independent government of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta was determined to fight diseases, poverty, and ignorance; this was to be achieved through the adoption of proper educational policies. The government came up with appropriate measures meant to propel the nation toward this path of development. The government set up education commissions, and task force committees, enacted laws, and developed sessional papers that saw the expansion of educational opportunities in the country. This included: The Ominde Commission/ Education Commission Report of

1964, the 1968 Education Act CAP 211 (revised in 1970 and 1980), The Teachers Service Commission Act of 1968, the 1970 UNESCO Report, Wamalwa Commission of 1971, The Ndegwa Commission/Taskforce Committee of 1971, 1972 International Labour Organization Report on Employment Incomes and Equity: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya, Bessey Commission Report 1972, Gachati Commission report of 1976/ National Committee on Education Objectives and Policies, Waruhiu Commission 1980, Mackey Commission 1981 / Presidential Working Party for the Establishment of the 2nd Public University, 1988 Kamunge Report; Presidential Working Party of Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond and the Davy Koech report of 1999/ Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training. All this was aimed at improving the quality and standards of education in Kenya.

At independence in 1963, Kenya inherited a discriminatory and elitist education system that was focused on producing a small mass of educated Africans for administrative and professional positions. The main focus of the government was to prioritize the expansion of access to education. Free primary education was introduced in 1974 though it never picked up until 2002, leading to a significant increase in school enrolment. The curriculum at this time was largely based on the British model, with a focus on academic subjects and an insufficient emphasis on practical skills and vocational training. The period of 1980s witnessed the Africanization and adoption of local content and the incorporation of African cultural values, languages, and history into the curriculum. This policy aimed to foster and promote a sense of national unity. The government also introduced a system of national examinations to assess students' progress and ensure standardized education across the country.

The period of the 1980s and 1990s can be termed a period of Structural Adjustments and Challenges. The country was forced to adopt structural adjustment programs in line with recommendations from international financial institutions in order to resolve some of its challenges. These economic reforms had a significant impact on the education sector, leading to reduced government funding, increased school fees, and resource constraints. The quality of education suffered, as schools faced shortages of teachers, textbooks, and basic infrastructure. Privatization of education increased, with the emergence of private schools and universities, which catered mainly to the urban elite. This period saw the Introduction of the 8-4-4 Structure of education in 1985, replacing the 7-4-2-3 structure. The 8-4-4 structure consisted of eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and a four-year university education. The new system aimed at providing a more practical and vocational-oriented education, with the inclusion of subjects like

agriculture, business studies, and technical training. However, the implementation of the 8-4-4 system faced various challenges, including inadequate resources, a shortage of trained teachers, and a mismatch between education and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, post-colonial education in Kenya up to the year 2000 witnessed significant efforts to expand access, incorporate local content, promote vocational training, and address gender disparities. However, the sector faced numerous challenges, including resource constraints, quality issues, and persistent inequalities. The impact of these developments set the stage for further reforms and improvements in the subsequent years.

The Second Republic Education 2002 to 2017

Education Sector strategic plan 2003-2007, Sessional Paper No 1 of 2005 Policy Framework on Education, Training, and Research, Prof. Douglas Odhiambo Taskforce Report 2012 and Prof Fatuma Chege task force report 2020 played a significant role in the development of education in the country. President Emilio Mwai Kibaki adopted the Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy (2003) which abolished primary school fees, making primary education free. The adoption of this policy saw an increase in enrolment and improved access to education, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized rural populations. Another major milestone was realized in the introduction of the Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) policy in 2008. Building on the success of Free Primary Education, the initiative aimed at reducing the financial burden on parents and increasing access to secondary education.

Prof. Douglas Odhiambo Taskforce Report 2012 set the centre stage for the adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in 2017 in Kenya. Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) main focus is to develop practical skills, competencies, and talents among learners. It emphasizes on 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and problem-solving. The curriculum aims at producing well-rounded individuals capable of addressing real-life challenges. President Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta introduced the Laptop Project in 2013 with the goal of providing every child in standard one with a laptop. The launch of the Digital Learning Program (DLP), main objective was integrating technology into teaching and learning processes. Under this program, primary schools were provided with digital devices, such as tablets, projectors, and e-learning content, to enhance instructional delivery and facilitate interactive learning. The project aimed to enhance digital literacy and equip students with the 21st-century skills mentioned above. The full implementation of the project faced various challenges and delays and later on, collapsed.

The government also developed the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) for the period of 2018-2022. The plan outlined key priorities and strategies meant to address issues of access, equity, quality, relevance, and governance in the education sector. It aimed to align education with Kenya's development agenda and international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Another milestone of Uhuru Kenyatta's administration was the establishment of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) in 2013. The government established the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) to regulate and coordinate technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions. TVETA aims to improve the quality and relevance of TVET programs, promote partnerships with industry, and enhance the employability of graduates. The government also put in place reform measures to enhance Examination and Assessment Systems: The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) made several reforms to the national examination system from 2017 in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in order to improve the credibility and integrity of examinations, reduce cases of cheating, and promote a fair assessment of students' abilities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while these reforms and initiatives have brought about positive changes in the education sector, challenges such as inadequate funding, unequal access to quality education, outdated teaching methods, socio-economic disparities, regional inequalities, inadequate infrastructure, and shortage of qualified teachers hinder the overall learning outcomes and preparedness of students for higher education and the job market. Standardized examinations, such as the KCPE and KCSE, dominate the system and often lead to a narrow focus on memorization rather than fostering the 21st Century Skills. Efforts have been made to enhance practical education to address employability needs, but further investments and improvements are required. The adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE), demonstrates the government's commitment to improving the quality and standards of education. However, sustained efforts and focus on

inclusive and equitable education are necessary to overcome the existing challenges and provide quality education for all Kenyan children as a priority for national development.

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