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Perceptions on the Kenyan Education System and Self-reliance

James M. Murungi, Prof Njoki Wane, Prof Muthaa, G.M & Dr D. Muriithi
Department of Education, Chuka University, Chuka, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Education is meant to develop capacity and enable members of society to become productive. African indigenous education systems inculcated self-reliance among members of society and every individual had a specific defined role within the society. The colonial education system introduced the aspects of unemployment, underemployment and job seekers. In an effort to address growing mismatch between expectations by graduates and societal employment provisions, the government has regularly formed commissions and made reforms in the education system. Despite these efforts there has been growing concerns on the effectiveness of the current education system to inculcate self-reliance among graduates. This study sought to explore perceptions on the extent to which the Kenyan education system prepares its graduates for self-reliance. The study was carried out in universities in Kenya. The study found that the contemporary education system only prepares individuals for self-reliance to a moderate extent. It was suggested that aspects of indigenous African education need to be integrated into the education system in order to promote self-reliance among students.

Keywords: *Self-reliance, African indigenous practices, Curriculum*

Introduction

The arrival of European settlers and Christian Missionaries, the subsequent colonization and introduction of Christianity and a western type education had great impact on the lives of Africans and their education system. The type of Education introduced in Kenya by missionaries and the colonial government was organized on racial

lines. It was argued that the different races in the country; Africans, Asians, Arabs, and Europeans had attained different levels of social, political and economic development and that each needed the kind of education that would preserve its culture and prepare its people for their "appropriate" role in the society (Eshiwani, 1990). Christian Missionaries played the biggest role in the introduction of the literacy-based education in Kenya. The main objective for missionary education was to bring Africans to the membership of their churches (Sifuna, Chege & Oanda, 2006). However, Sifuna and Otiende (1994) observe that there was the general agreement among Christian missionaries that Africans were lazy and manual labour was advocated as the panacea for this malaise. The belief in African inferiority and depravity led many to conclude that Africans could not possibly benefit from a literary education. With this in mind, black Africans were excluded from "academic scholarship" and were limited to rural and industrial manual education for service to the white settler (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1988).

Being practical in nature, the kind of vocational, agricultural and generally practical education that was advocated by Christian missionaries and the colonial government had some element of semblance with the type of education that Africans had offered to their children for ages. However, this new education did not match the spirit and principles of African indigenous education and carried an element of discrimination for black Africans. This education was associated with the negative aspects of colonization and to a large extent failed to take root in Africa. Thus, at the time of independence, black Africans rushed to throw off the "shackles" of colonial education to receive the academic and higher-technology education and training from which they had been systematically denied previously (McLeandand & Kamau, 1999). This gives impetus to this study.

After independence in 1963, the new government saw education as a vehicle to restore African dignity, to recapture the national heritage that had been dismissed by the imposition of an alien culture, and to prepare Kenyan society for its place in the modern international community (Republic of Kenya, 1965). Two major commissions: the Ominde Commission (1964-65) and the Gachathi Commission (1976) were appointed to review the educational system and to plan for its future (Republic of Kenya, 1964-65; Republic of Kenya, 1976). The most prominent outcome of the 1964-65 commission on Kenya's educational system was the expansion of schooling. The Kenyan primary and secondary education systems exhibited steady growth after independence in 1963 (Sifuna, 1992). The big increase in the school enrollments contributed to a large number of children being forced out of the school system each year mainly because of lack of sufficient places and facilities, especially at the primary school level (Indire, 1982). In addition, many graduates were not absorbed into the employment sector, and the general concern at the time was that they had no workable skills (Sifuna, 1986).

The growing number of primary school graduates along with a number of drop-outs was a main cause of unemployment of the youth in Kenya. The education system had progressed faster than the labour market. Attempts to alleviate the problems of unemployment among youth, particularly the primary school graduates, were directed toward the establishment of non-formal vocational education and training institutions such as youth polytechnics and the national youth service (Sifuna, 2006; Bogonko, 1992; Merrifield, 1986). These programs were to absorb youth for a few years and give them marketable skills (Hoppers, 1985).

The restructuring of the Kenya education system to 8:4:4 was as a result of one of the recommendations of Presidential Working Party on the Second University whose report was presented to the President in September 1981 (Simiyu, 2009). The report was subsequently accepted by the Government in March 1982. One of the aims of the 8:4:4 system of education was to provide practical oriented curriculum that would offer a wider range of employment opportunities. The students graduating at every level were expected to have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be utilized for either self-employment, salaried employment or for further training (Okaka, 2001). At every level students were expected to explore a variety of subjects to develop a wide range of

interests and skills and to enhance self-reliance. According to Kamunge (1988) technical and vocational education in Kenya was incorporated in the 8-4-4 system of education with specific objectives that can be summarized as follows: To lay the foundations for the vocational skills required for socio-economic development; To expose students to scientific and technological trends, skills and ideas; To develop vocational and entrepreneur skills as basis for further training and employment. To develop appropriate vocational attitudes, initiative and creative thinking oriented to work; To inculcate skills applicable to various trades, vocations and professions; To develop an appreciation for the dignity of manual work.

Kenya started the process of overhauling its education system for the first time in 32 years in January 2018. The 8-4-4 system of education that the country has been operating on and whose guiding philosophy was education for self-reliance will gradually be replaced by the competency based 2-6-6-3 curriculum. Part of the reasons behind this huge overhaul is the realisation that Kenya isn't doing enough to produce school-leavers who are ready for the world of work (Sifuna, 2016). The government's own assessments have showed that the current system isn't flexible. It struggles to respond to individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The Kenya Institute of Education produced an evaluation report about the 8-4-4 system in 2008 which identified several weaknesses with the system of education: It found that the system was very academic and examination oriented; the curriculum was overloaded; most schools were not able to equip their pupils with practical skills and many teachers also weren't sufficiently trained (Sifuna, 2016). With these challenges in mind, this study seeks to explore the perceptions of stakeholders among the university academic faculty, students and graduates of the education system on the extent to which the Kenyan system of education prepares students for self-reliance.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya, faces the challenge of producing large numbers of school leavers and graduates of the school system with an economy that cannot sustainably create new jobs to cater for the new entrants into the job market. With a bloated labour force and a shrinking job market, the country has been taking measures aimed at preparing youth to be self-reliant in order to seek alternative means of living that do not necessarily depend on wage employment. Since independence, the Government of Kenya has focused on producing self-reliant individuals through various education policies, including the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education and development of Technical and Vocational Education and training. However, the World Bank, UNESCO and various researchers have questioned the quality of graduates that the education system in Kenya produces. This study sought to explore perceptions on the extent to which the Kenyan education system promotes self-reliance among students

Objectives of the Study

The following objective guided the study:

This study sought to explore perceptions on the extent to which the Kenyan education system promotes self-reliance among students

Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive survey design and the correlational research design. The choice of these two research designs was informed by the fact that descriptive and inferential data analysis was required in this study. The study was carried out in Universities in Kenya. Students who are graduates of universities and have been out for at least two years also participated in the study. Members of the academic staff and fourth year students in the faculties or schools of education in the sampled universities were purposively selected to participate in the study. Simple random sampling was used to select at least 27 fourth year bachelor of education students in each of the selected universities to participate in this study. Fourth year students in the faculties of education were selected

since they were expected to possess sufficient information regarding the education system in Kenya with regard to self-reliance and also about the colonial education and African indigenous education. A sample size of 384 respondents made up of 60 members of academic staff and 324 fourth year bachelor of education students was selected to participate in the study. For further exploration of issues under study, in depth interviews were carried out with deans of faculties of education in selected university as well as with individuals who have recently graduated from universities. Snowball sampling was used to select 15 graduates who have graduated in the last two years from universities to participate in the study. Graduates were selected since they are expected to have information on both the education system in Kenya and the world of work especially with regard to employment, underemployment, dependency, self-employment and self-reliance. The research instrument used for data collection included questionnaires and interview schedules

Results and Discussions

Self-reliance among graduates and school leavers from the education system was conceived in this study in terms of the extent to which they exhibited an attitude of self-reliance and showed attributes of self-reliance such as creativity, responsibility, autonomy, hard work, confidence in their own capabilities and self-esteem. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with selected statements about graduates of the Kenyan education system. Selected statements captured aspects which according to literature reviewed were indicators of self-reliance. They were given fifteen items rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from: of **SD** – Strongly Disagree; **D** – Disagree; **N** – Neutral; **A** – Agree; and **SA** – Strongly Agree from which to choose. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution for Self-reliance

| Statement | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Learners leave the education system capable of living independently | 93 (24.2%) | 128 (33.3%) | 72 (18.8%) | 70 (18.2%) | 21 (5.5%) |
| Most graduates can survive without wage employment | 91 (23.7%) | 136 (35.4%) | 64 (16.7%) | 61 (15.9%) | 32 (8.3%) |
| Graduates of the education system are highly creative and versatile enough to perform many different tasks. | 67 (17.4%) | 115 (29.9%) | 83 (21.6%) | 86 (22.4%) | 33 (8.6%) |
| Graduates have great confidence in their own capabilities | 35 (9.1%) | 114 (29.7%) | 88 (22.9%) | 106 (27.6) | 41 (10.7%) |
| Graduates of education system can work independently without supervision | 46 (12.0%) | 110 (28.6%) | 85 (22.1%) | 102 (26.6%) | 41 (10.7%) |
| Graduates would rather create jobs for themselves rather than go out seeking for jobs (“tarmacking”) | 65 (16.9%) | 105 (27.3%) | 69 (18.0%) | 92 (24.0%) | 53 (13.8%) |
| Graduates can live without relying on other people | 45 (11.7%) | 120 (31.3%) | 98 (25.5%) | 84 (21.9%) | 37 (9.6%) |
| Most graduates prefer self-employment to wage employment | 72 (18.8%) | 129 (33.6%) | 60 (15.6) | 80 (20.8%) | 43 (11.2%) |
| Graduates have enough skills to survive in a world that faces shrinking job opportunities | 64 (16.7%) | 127 (33.1%) | 74 (19.3%) | 88 (22.9%) | 31 (8.1%) |
| Graduates do not continue receiving | 55 | 109 | 91 | 90 | 39 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| support from Parents and guardians after graduation | (14.3%) | (28.4%) | (23.7%) | (23.4%) | (10.2%) |
| Graduates have skills needed in the community | 38 (9.9%) | 105 (27.3%) | 80 (20.8%) | 128 (33.3%) | 33 (8.6%) |
| Graduates of the school system have high self-esteem | 39 (10.2%) | 89 (23.2%) | 90 (23.4%) | 126 (32.8%) | 40 (10.4%) |
| Educational institutions identify and develop learners potentialities | 54 (14.1%) | 105 (27.3%) | 79 (20.6%) | 106 (27.6%) | 40 (10.4%) |
| Graduates of Educational institutions can survive in any environment | 46 (12.0%) | 116 (30.2%) | 84 (21.9%) | 94 (24.5%) | 44 (11.5%) |
| Graduates have sufficient knowledge and skills to go into self-employment. | 55 (14.3%) | 95 (24.7%) | 80 (20.8%) | 104 (27.1%) | 49 (12.8%) |

Analysis of the results of the respondent's opinion on self-reliance as presented on Table 1 indicate that the majority of the respondents (33.3%) indicated that they disagreed with the statement that learners leave the education system capable of living independently. 35.5% of the respondents disagreed that most graduates can survive without wage employment. The majority of the respondents also disagreed with the statements that graduates of the education system are highly creative and versatile enough to perform many different tasks (29.9%) and that graduates have great confidence in their own capabilities (29.7%). Other statements with which majority of the respondents disagreed include; graduates of education system can work independently without supervision (28.6%), graduates would rather create jobs for themselves rather than go out seeking for jobs ("farmacking") (27.3%), graduates can live without relying on other people (31.3%) and Most graduates prefer self-employment to wage employment (33.6%). Majority of the respondents also disagreed with the statements that graduates have enough skills to survive in a world that faces shrinking job opportunities (33.1%) and that graduates do not continue receiving support from Parents and guardians after graduation (28.4%). On the statement that graduates of Educational institutions can survive in any environment, majority (30.2%) of the respondents disagreed.

Majority of the respondents (33.3%) agreed with the statement that graduates have skills needed in the community. There was agreement with the statement that graduates of the school system have high self-esteem with majority of the respondents (32.8%). Other statements with majority of the respondents disagreed include "Educational institutions identify and develop learners potentialities" (27.6%) and "Graduates have sufficient knowledge and skills to go into self-employment" (27.1%). From the results presented in Table 1, it is revealed that majority of respondents disagreed with most of the selected statements on self-reliance indicating that they do not view graduates of the Kenyan education system as self-reliant.

Further tabulation of the results for self-reliance is presented using Means and Standard Deviations on Table 2

Table 2: Means on Self-reliance

| Statement | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | C.V |
|---|-----|------|----------------|-------|
| Learners leave the education system capable of living independently | 384 | 2.47 | 1.20 | 48.34 |
| Most graduates can survive without wage employment | 384 | 2.50 | 1.24 | 49.78 |
| Graduates of the education system are highly creative and versatile enough to perform many different tasks. | 384 | 2.75 | 1.23 | 44.66 |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|------|------|-------|
| Graduates have great confidence in their own capabilities | 384 | 3.01 | 1.17 | 38.85 |
| Graduates of education system can work independently without supervision | 384 | 2.95 | 1.21 | 40.92 |
| Graduates would rather create jobs for themselves rather than go out seeking for jobs (“tarmacking”) | 384 | 2.90 | 1.32 | 45.40 |
| Graduates can live without relying on other people | 384 | 2.86 | 1.17 | 40.87 |
| Most graduates prefer self-employment to wage employment | 384 | 2.72 | 1.29 | 47.47 |
| Graduates have enough skills to survive in a world that faces shrinking job opportunities | 384 | 2.73 | 1.22 | 44.60 |
| Graduates do not continue receiving support from Parents and guardians after graduation | 384 | 2.87 | 1.22 | 42.48 |
| Graduates have skills needed in the community | 384 | 3.03 | 1.16 | 38.28 |
| Graduates of the school system have high self-esteem | 384 | 3.10 | 1.17 | 37.82 |
| Educational institutions identify and develop learners potentialities | 384 | 2.93 | 1.24 | 42.19 |
| Graduates of Educational institutions can survive in any environment | 384 | 2.93 | 1.22 | 41.54 |
| Graduates have sufficient knowledge and skills to go into self-employment. | 383 | 2.99 | 1.27 | 42.40 |
| Overall Mean Score | 384 | 2.85 | 1.22 | 43.04 |

Research findings on Table 2 indicate that the mean score for the fifteen selected indicators of self-reliance was 2.85 with a standard deviation of 1.22. This shows that respondents were neutral about the extent to which graduates of the Kenyan education system show characteristics of self-reliance. Respondents disagreed that Learners leave the education system capable of living independently ($M=2.47$, $S.D= 1.20$). Respondents also disagreed that most graduates can survive without wage employment with a mean of 2.50 and a standard deviation of 1.24. On the suggestion that most graduates prefer self-employment to wage employment, respondents were of a neutral opinion ($M=2.72$, $S.D= 1.29$). They were neutral ($M=2.73$, $S.D= 1.22$) on the suggestion that graduates have enough skills to survive in a world that faces shrinking job opportunities. Respondents were neutral ($M=2.75$, $S.D= 1.23$) about the suggestion that graduates of the education system are highly creative and versatile enough to perform many different tasks. A neutral opinion was also observed for the statements that graduates can live without relying on other people ($M=2.86$, $S.D= 1.17$) and that graduates do not continue receiving support from Parents and guardians after graduation ($M=2.87$, $S.D= 1.22$). Other statements to which respondents were neutral include “Graduates would rather create jobs for themselves rather than go out seeking for jobs (tarmacking)” ($M=2.90$, $S.D= 1.32$), “Graduates of Educational institutions can survive in any environment” ($M=2.93$, $S.D= 1.22$), “Educational institutions identify and develop learners potentialities” ($M=2.93$, $S.D= 1.24$), “Graduates of education system can work independently without supervision ($M=2.95$, $S.D= 1.21$), and “Graduates have sufficient knowledge and skills to go into self-employment” ($M=2.99$, $S.D= 1.27$).

Respondents were neutral to the statement that graduates have great confidence in their own capabilities ($M=3.01$, $S.D= 1.17$). They were also neutral on the statement that graduates have skills needed in the community ($M=3.03$, $S.D= 1.16$). On the statement that graduates of the school system have high self-esteem, respondents were neutral with a mean of 3.10 and a standard deviation of 1.17. The results on Table 14 indicate that majority of the respondents rated graduates of the Kenyan education system moderately with regard to self-reliance.

Interviews on Self-reliance

Interviews were carried out with Deans of schools of education in selected Universities and selected graduates from the universities. Their opinion on the level of self-reliance exhibited by graduates of the education system in Kenya was sought. During the interviews, it was observed that the majority of participants considered graduates of the education system in Kenya as lacking in self-reliance. Participants observed that graduates did not possess adequate skills for a life of self-employment, job creation and independence. Instead, the education system prepared its graduates for employment with the knowledge and skills imparted focusing on white collar jobs. For this reason, it was observed that the focus of education in Kenya was mainly on acquisition of certificates with the aim of enhancing student's chances for recruitment into formal employment.

Participants observed that there was a great mismatch between the skills acquired in the education system and the requirements for both the white collar job market and self-employment. Many students were channeled into courses that were too theoretical in nature that they limited the graduate's ability to survive in a world that demands more of practical vocational skills as well as entrepreneurial skills for the individuals to thrive. It was noted that this lack of skills left majority of graduates as full time job seekers in a flooded job market and this forced many into depression and desperation. Graduates observed that they had been socialized by their parents and teachers to pursue a good education for white collar jobs and that nobody prepared them for the possibility of joblessness as well as the need to survive through alternative ways.

In the interviews it was observed that the graduates of the education system lacked the spirit of thinking and working independently. Participants noted that even those graduates who were lucky to find employment in the formal sector lacked the attitude and capacity to work independently and make independent decision without supervision. It was noted that teachers and parents had subjected students in the Kenyan education system to too much supervision that many lacked the capacity to function properly without directions and assistance from others. This negatively influenced their capacity to exhibit self-reliance at the personal level and even at their places of work. Participant suggested that the spirit of thinking and working independently needs to be embraced and developed in children not only through the education system but also at the family level if self-reliance is to be achieved.

There was agreement in the opinion of the interviewees and the respondents in the survey that most graduates were not able to survive without wage employment. Participants observed that many graduates continued to seek financial and material assistance from their parents and other members of society long after graduation. A participant opined that many parents continued to pay rent and upkeep for their graduate children who were engaged in job seeking as many lacked the attitude and skills to employ themselves in the informal sector. These findings are in harmony with other studies on self-reliance in the Kenyan education system. Shiundu and Amulando (1992) writing on Kenya's 8-4-4 system of education argued that its graduates are half baked academics and skilful dependants who cannot be effective in terms of satisfying either demands of market place or the expectations of those being educated.

Respondents were requested to suggest any challenges facing the Kenyan education system that may hinder promotion of self-reliance. The responses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Challenges facing Kenyan Education that may Hinder Promotion of Self-reliance

| Suggestion | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Exam oriented curriculum/system, emphasis on grades rather than competencies | 15.3% |
| Exam malpractices and cheating | 4.2% |
| Inappropriate curriculum, content does not reflect situation in societies, rigid or shallow curriculum | 10.2% |
| Inappropriate teaching methods | 5.9% |
| Curriculum oriented towards white collar jobs | 5.1% |
| Curriculum emphasizes theory rather than practical skills, education is too theoretical | 20.3% |
| Education focuses on attainment of certificates | 3.4% |
| Inadequate learning resources/instructional materials, facilities, infrastructure | 15.3% |
| Inadequate teachers/personnel | 7.6% |
| Inadequate exposure to technical skills and real life situations, poor linkage to skills industry, poor nurturing of talents | 12.7% |

Results presented on Table 50 indicate that majority of the respondents (20.3%) suggested the fact that curriculum emphasizes theory rather than practical skills or that education is too theoretical as one of the key challenges facing Kenyan education and which may hinder promotion of self-reliance. Exam-oriented curriculum/system where emphasis is on grades rather than competencies was suggested by 15.3% of the respondents. Another 15.3% of the respondents pointed at inadequate learning resources/instructional materials, facilities and infrastructure as another major challenge facing the Kenyan education system and which could hinder self-reliance among students. Inadequate exposure to technical skills and real life situations, poor linkage to skills industry and poor nurturing of students was cited by 12.7% of the respondents. Other challenges identified by respondents include “Inappropriate curriculum, content does not reflect situation in societies, rigid or shallow curriculum”(10.2%), “Inadequate teachers/personnel” (7.6%), “Inappropriate teaching methods” (5.9%), and “Curriculum oriented towards white collar jobs” (5.1%). A few respondents (4.2%) identified exam malpractices and cheating while other identified the fact that education focuses on attainment of certificates (3.4%) as other possible challenges in the education system that may hinder self-reliance among students in Kenya.

Respondents were requested to suggest African indigenous education practices that could be integrated into the Kenyan education system to promote self-reliance among students. Their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: African Indigenous Education Practices that may Promote Self-reliance

| Suggestion | % |
|---|-------|
| Including local agricultural activities in curriculum/Enhancing agriculture education | 8.4% |
| Focusing on learners talents and interest, early identification of potentialities, Focus on creativity | 14.5% |
| Learning through apprenticeship, observation, mentorship, On job training, involvement of experts with hands on skills | 18.1% |
| Focusing on practical skills/work rather than theory, subjects that enhance creativity, inclusion of technical subjects | 37.3% |
| Communal approach to teaching, community involvement, community specific knowledge, training based on community needs | 13.3% |
| Hands on approach to learning, focus on solving day to day problems | 8.4% |

Results on Table 4 reveal that majority of the respondents (37.3%) suggested that focusing on practical skills/work rather than theory, including subjects that enhance creativity and technical subjects in the curriculum as an African indigenous education practice that may promote self-reliance. Learning through apprenticeship, observation, mentorship, on job training, involvement of experts with hands on skills was suggested by 18.1% of the respondents. 14.5% of the respondents suggested focusing on learner's talents and interest, early identification of potentialities, and focus on creativity as another practice from indigenous African education that may promote self-reliance. Communal approach to teaching, community involvement, community specific knowledge, and training based on community needs was proposed by 13.3% of the respondents. Other practices suggested by respondents as capable of promoting self-reliance include hands on approach to learning, focus on solving day to day problems (8.4%) and Including local agricultural activities in curriculum/Enhancing agriculture education (8.4%).

Conclusions

Judging from the findings resulting from the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study, the results reveal some vital facts upon which the conclusions are based. It was found that the Kenyan education system only prepares students for self-reliance to a moderate extent. It was found that the curriculum in Kenya emphasized theory rather than practical skills. It was suggested that inclusion of aspects of indigenous African education such as learning through apprenticeship, observation, mentorship, on job training and involvement of experts with hands on skills would be useful for promoting self-reliance among students.

Recommendation

The study recommends that there is need for curriculum developers to explore ways of developing and designing locally and regionally relevant curricula where focus is on instilling practical skills, attitudes and competencies relevant for survival in the learner's immediate environment and to ground them firmly in their own cultures before introducing them to knowledge from other areas and cultures.

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