

African Education and Globalization: Critical Perspectives.

Ali A. Abdi, Korbla P. Puplambu
and George J. Sefa Dei (Eds.).

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This book is a collection of 11 essays written by renowned scholars and experienced individuals in the field of African education. They examine current issues of globalization and its effects on the education system in Africa from historical, cultural, indigenous, and socioeconomic perspectives. For those who wish to understand the difficulties and complex issues that Africa faces in the 21st century, this book is a good beginning and an eye opener.

The first section of the book deals with the theoretical implications of globalization on education and social development in Africa. For the last three decades, many African countries have suffered major crises resulting in high levels of unemployment, poverty, and lack of social development, all of which have been worsened by the AIDS pandemic. The authors, such as Abdi, boldly argue that the condition of Africa is not due to lack of policies, but rather policy failure in education and social development. The authors call for a reexamination and recasting of educational goals, a "counter hegemonic framework" in this era of globalization. The colonizing process has erased African culture and has deprived the African people of their Indigenous knowledges and continues to do so in the form of globalization and neocolonialism. This erasure has brought about a decline in employment, education, and social development, and an increase in poverty and personal risks to the African people. It is time to re-culture Africa, and re-indigenize African schooling, knowledges, and methodologies.

Dei and Asgarzadeh are candid in their discussion of the effects of colonization, the expansion of capitalist globalization with the rise of transnational and multinational organizations on Indigenous peoples across the globe as they continue to "live under the threat of annihilation, eradication and assimilation." They call for all Indigenous people to come together, stand against imperialism, and more importantly, forge alliances with each other in reviving, sharing, and recognizing that Indigenous knowledges are important sources of wisdoms that are relevant to social and economic development in all parts of the world, including Africa.

Two chapters by Puplambu and Tettey focus on the problems of higher education in Africa. Puplambu describes the dire consequences of the commodification of knowledge and academic capitalism that Africa is now facing. The problem of higher education is intensified in Africa by the lack of monetary resources and a mass exodus of professionals and intellectuals. The

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objectives of the multinationals to put profit before the good of the society are creating dilemmas for African governments. They wonder how to balance the needs of society with the need for funds to run tertiary institutions. Multinational companies want to fund and carry out studies in areas that are not necessarily in the best interest of the larger society. But the need for money is so great that governments allow such studies to take place. Science and technology receive more attention than the social sciences, much to the detriment of the continent.

Tettey furthers the argument that the burgeoning of e-learning is also bringing more problems in higher education. Although the world may be more open to the students, few have access to the right equipment and connections to benefit from e-learning. Those who do are also those who can afford higher education abroad. Moreover, African tertiary institutions are not given the opportunity to participate in the delivery of these courses due to lack of infrastructure, leaving the content devoid of African voices and contexts. Course content tends to be Eurocentric and does not allow the students and intellectuals to discuss and share the problems pertaining to Africa. Moreover, bogus institutions have even been offering fraudulent degrees and credentials to unsuspecting students eager to gain an education. Courses offered have strong vocational purposes and foci, not the critical liberal social sciences that can empower Africa.

Okeke explains the plight of African women caught between their roles in the indigenous societies as subordinate to men and their need to become full participants in nation-building. Although the states have recognized the need for women to be equal partners, they have given only lip service. Opportunities for secondary and tertiary education are lacking for women, and the gender, economic, and rural/urban divides need to be equalized.

This first section provides a good overview of theories of what is happening with African education and development. However, the second section gives a dose of reality when authors discuss the problems faced by specific countries. They walk us through their histories and development of education from the precolonial to postcolonial times and the present. We see the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) as total failures in providing what is truly needed for Africa. It is a bitter pill to swallow that humankind will take advantage of the weaker states in order to remain in a privileged position. I share the authors' fears about where the present world conflicts will lead us, but I am also hopeful that the South is realizing that it needs to stand up, find its own solutions, and not be dependent on the policies of the North to rescue it. The South has a lot to offer the world, and it is about time it showed its wisdom and followed its own drumbeat.

Chapters 7 to 11 walk us through the dilemmas, development histories, and challenges to education in Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. All these countries have their own challenges, and the essays present their own unique perspectives. Although taking care not to suggest that all these countries share the same concerns, the authors highlight a common strand that ties them together, that is, the strand of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) set up by the IMF and the World Bank and their consequences.

All the authors of the second section speak about the negative consequences that SAPs have brought about in education and social development. Consequences include privatization of schools, higher fees for even the basic primary education, higher dropout rate of students through primary and secondary education, tertiary education that offers more vocational training, and the training of young people for lower-paying jobs rather than offering them liberal and critical education. Governments have been forced to reduce their funding to education, health care, and social services as a condition for the World Bank and IMF to assist them in building their economy. Yet after at least one decade of following these policies, economic growth has not arrived in these countries, but in fact they are in greater debt than before they joined the program. The SAPs have not assisted in building the country; they have made matters worse by having their welfare and education systems eroded, increased debts, higher poverty, and privatization leading to less employment for their people. Shizha is forthright in saying,

SAPs are a means of maintaining unequal global socioeconomic relations between the North and the South ... only to serve the interests of international and national bourgeoisie ... They have little to do with meeting the needs of the majority for food, shelter, jobs ... and education. (p. 198)

SAPs have not proven effective, even though the IMF and WB continue to emphasize their benefits. They place fiscal targets above human development. This is a major thread in the chapters dealing with specific countries. Other than economic growth, no other benefits of SAPs were mentioned in the book.

The authors emphasize that beyond that the common thread of SAPs, the situation in each country is unique. For example, there are particular ethnic, political, and language problems in Ethiopia. The large amounts of money donated to Ethiopia for famine relief have left the country in a state of cultural passivity where people have become dependent on handouts and are not using their own personal agencies to improve their situations. The political atmosphere in that country is repressive to the majority of the people, but it is the donor countries, countries that support the IMF and WB, that have installed this repressive government. Yet the government there is being told to become a democracy.

South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Swaziland have their own challenges. I liked how Folson looks at the correlation between education and economic growth, the relationship between education and work in Ghana. This shows that critical thinking about the relationships between jobs, education, and economy is occurring and the hope in finding the right solution for Africa is underway. People are moving beyond the blame game to finding concrete solutions. The same can be said about Swaziland. Kwansah-Aidoo and Djokoto look at the effectiveness of the Swaziland school system: teacher evaluations, student repetition, and dropout rates, analyzing the relationship between output of education to the investments made in education. The authors make many suggestions about improving the system to enable the country to participate fully in the global market. As a means of comparison, it would also be interesting to know how the other countries discussed have fared in the global market.

This book brings to light many issues that are hindering Africa's growth, and the editors have done an excellent job in selecting the specific authors and topics to bring these issues to the forefront for readers. I enjoyed reading this book, especially the second section as it brought out the lived realities of African countries, making the theories more pertinent. I share the authors' concerns and questions about African education and globalization, recognizing that the road ahead is difficult and that the challenges are many and varied.