

Education as a Mechanism of Control: Examining the Impact of Memorization-Based Curriculum on Critical Thinking and Autonomy in Africa

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Abstract: This paper aims to determine how education as a method of control manifests itself in African contexts, and this will be based on a focus on memorization-based curriculums commonly practiced in these regions. Starting from colonialism, this teaching approach relied more on productiveness rather than productivity through rigorous thinking than encouraging independent, creative, and efficient African learners. Therefore, the paper posits that reliance on memorization elicits a system dependence rather than self-directiveness and hinders locally fostered progression. Due to this narrowed-down procedure that centers on content delivery to the development of aids, the education system limits the scholarly freedom of students by merely training them to be obedient citizens and not creative minds. As such, this paper posits that more African nations should pursue curricula that promote analysis, context-based problem solving, and cultural identification towards increased national autonomy. On the importance of education reform, it urges a new education model appropriate to Africa's cultural and development potentialities, shifting from mechanized controls toward freeing education.

Keywords: Education, Control, Curriculum, Colonial Influence & Critical Thinking.

Introduction

Education can improve people's status in society and become creative and independent. Nevertheless, in African countries, colonial patterns still condition educational systems, and thus, learners are trained to memorize rather than think and create. This model inherited from colonialistic systems sees students as mere vessels to be filled with fixed information rather than as the active seekers of knowledge that our architecture of learning and training requires. Therefore, this model not only impacts individual learners but stems from societal autonomy reduction that results from the limitation of the ability of African societies to produce leaders, innovators, and problem-solving entities for locally felt needs and self-organized development.

Rote learning hinders the acquisition of creativity and critical reasoning skills, which are relevant skills needed to solve the complex and phenomenal issues in most African countries today. Thus, memorization, which helps to master knowledge quickly, does not involve critical thinking and does not allow learners to use knowledge in practice in real-life situations. Consequently, African students may be able to know more and more but need more skills in the modern, knowledge-based world that constantly requires individuals to learn how to think flexibly and creatively.

This paper aims to provide a historical analysis of the social effects and current consequences of a memorization-oriented educational paradigm with particular reference to African countries. By elucidating how this approach is used as an epistemological and sociopolitical regulation instrument, the study underscores the virtues of the educational changes required for relevant and meaningful critical practice. This paper is an attempt to positively use scholarly ink to call for change towards a new nature of

education in African schools by embarking on decolonizing African education to produce successful academic learners and future empowered leaders, innovators, and developers for the continent.

Literature Review

Colonial Roots of African Education Systems

The education systems were introduced in Africa by colonial masters mainly to produce an obedient workforce for colonial business ventures. Rodney (1972), in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, argues that colonial education was never meant to produce critical and independent minds but rather to produce orderly subordinates who would serve the colonial master's needs.¹ These systems emphasized fact regurgitation that only endorsed European espousal of colonization and the resultant colonial hierarchies, thereby miseducating the African student to subjugate to the colonization mentality of the Europeans. Out of this came a process of curriculum erosion that turned memory into an essential part of curricula across African nations, focusing more on the transmission of knowledge rather than the production of it or facilitated critical thinking.

Thus, extending this argument, in the book *Citizen and Subject*, written by Mamdani (1996), the author describes how the European colonial authorities in Africa developed a model of education and aimed at producing the "subject" rather than the "citizen" who would be willing to reason about the processes of

¹ Rodney (1972), *Psychological aspect of Education*:

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governing and society.² The remnants of these systems are felt in the African post-colonial education systems, which, up to date, “produce” individuals whose education is more inclined towards passing examinations whereby the more you memorize what the authorities recommend, you will be the kind of person that will not question authority but will accept it. This suppression of agreement, dissent, and supremacy of Reason means that the formulation of critical consciousness as the pre-requisite for socio-political and economic transformation is in jeopardy.

The Impact of Memorization on Cognitive Development and Autonomy

That kind of learning does not encourage the development of cognitive Academia, which, in essence, involves the ability to learn and think, solve problems, and create new knowledge on one’s own. Tabulawa (1997) establishes that education systems that promote memorization produce passive learners, who expect knowledge to be received and be a fixed, unchangeable truth.³ This limits the kind of analysis the students can do and their ability to apply their knowledge and challenge paradigms. In the same way, Tabulawa says that it compromises the students’ power and makes them perpetually dependent on foreign epistemological systems.

Decolonizing the Mind by Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes the effects of a curriculum where the center is on passing records instead of discovery.⁴ According to Ngugi, the memorization model of education trains the learners to embrace outside world esteem rather than the inner self-esteem regarding their culture and the enlightened mind. Through the mechanistic devaluation of indigenous knowledge and skills and keeping to an emphasis on foreign knowledge acquisition, the memorization-based curriculum not only effaces indigenously African ways of knowing, but it also disenfranchises African learners from their cultural roots. This type of education makes a person feel that he or she lacks knowledge, the more so that there is little chance they will think about or challenge foreign leaders impacting their societies.

Comparative Analysis with Critical Thinking-Based Education Models

Education processes within mechanical environments that demand memorization function as vehicles for subject-producing compliance by discouraging critical thinking. Buy (2004), in the Ideology and Curriculum volume, maintains that curricula are always ideological because dominant authorities only ensure that curricula reflect their ideas. Thus, a memorization-based curriculum in Africa reproduces colonial power relations by producing an intellectual Somalia that external political economizing entities can easily control.

Tikly goes further and states that education functions as a ‘new imperialism’ that subtly perpetuates neo-colonialism. To this effect, Tikly posits that a Western-style curriculum that encourages mere book learning is unhelpful to African emancipation as it does not help foster an ‘African paradigm’ that can help the societies independently problem-solve. Through its encouragement of rote

memorization of Western knowledge, these systems guarantee that African graduates are epistemologically and economically bonded to foreign episteme. It results in the continued subordination of African nation-states to the West for problem-solving solutions, thus undermining efforts to resolve development issues.

The Push for Decolonizing African Education

Cross-cultural research suggests that ‘cultures that promote students’ critical thinking and partner the student with the educational process are superior in their ability to nurture independence and creativity. Sahlberg (2011),⁵ in Finnish Lessons, describes the Finnish education model as one in which increased student voice, including initiative, openness, and critical attitude, is fostered from the start. Education in Finland does not permit memorization; it only requires the learner’s ability to ask questions, think, and invent. Applying this approach has fashioned a generation of Finnish students capable of solving problems, creating, and finding solutions to global issues.

On the other hand, African students trained mainly through memorization do not possess the necessary skills to be relevant in a knowledge-based economy.⁶ By making theories and research, the authors have proposed that African countries must shift their educational paradigm from memorizing and reproducing knowledge to critical thinking to develop economic independence and sustainable development. Suppose these systems of education are not reformed. In that case, African countries may well continue to produce school leavers who cannot think ‘outside the box’ to use one cliché for another, who cannot challenge the processes they find surrounding them, and, as a result, stifle their nation’s socio-economic development.

Challenges to Educational Reform

This study identified a rise in scholars' calls for the decolonization of education in Africa. Decolonization means shifting from foreign teaching paradigms; Ali and Jibril argue for African-centered teaching-learning theories and strategies.⁷ Letsekha suggested that decolonizing education is all about a conceptual change that embraces local knowledge and helps students critically transform their socio-political context.⁸ Only through culturally informed approaches to the practice of education can African education develop an African epistemology of pride and confidence to solve local and global problems.

Some writers have called for reforms in classroom practice that involve decreasing the use of repetition in favor of reasoning, cooperation, and problem-solving. Thus, Tabulawa recommended that African educators promote a student activity approach that facilitates questions, discussions, and critical thinking. These reforms are likely to necessitate changes in the preparation and qualification of teachers, in the generation of curriculum, and

⁵ Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.

⁶ Bloom, D. E., Canning, D., & Chan, K. (2014). Higher education and economic growth in Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*.

⁷ ;Ali and Jibril (2019). *Modernization of Education, ethics of Education*, p25-45

⁸ Letsekha (2019). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. New york: ST john

² Mamdani (1996). *Curriculum development techniques*. Education. ST Theresa publications

³ Tabulawa (2015). *Africanisation of higher education*. Harare: UNESCO

⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2015). *Philosophical role of Education in young minds*. Education.

patterns of testing.⁹ However, such shifts are crucial for the growth of the education system that propounds learner-centered thinking for the continental spearheads of Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Several barriers arise with attempts to reform education to focus on memorization: Resource constraints, past cultures and practices in education, and policy actors who benefit from these systems. Osaki notes that insufficient funding and large learner class sizes give the teachers a hard time practicing an activity-oriented approach, thus making rote learning the most feasible option.¹⁰ Besides, policymakers may not support educational reforms that make people more responsible for critically engaging in affairs of state because an enlightened populace is dangerous for their hold on power.

Moreover, non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies contribute a lot to African education systems by imposing Western education systems that may not suit African Culture or economic structures. Tikly argues that far too many international donors are misleading reforms while claiming to improve African nation schools; moreover, African nations must be permitted the freedom to redesign their education systems effectively in response to the global market demands.¹¹

Methodology

This study, however, incorporated a qualitative research approach by critically analyzing curriculum development and its impacts on autonomy within the African context. The study also brought out a chronological analysis of establishing and enforcing the effectiveness of memorization-based curricula in the continent.¹² To that end, the work explored how the utilized educational models of such curricula in this form originated and developed while revealing those implying that such curricula were, however, used as tools of control by colonial powers, governments, or educational authorities. Some of the findings from this analysis included how memorization had become the order of the day to the detriment of critical thinking, creativity, and innovative problem-solving, thus suppressing students' ability to think expansively and freely as individuals. Because the work focused more on understanding the application of this learning over time, the study looked at what this did to not only the person's mental growth but to the growth of culture and society. Thus, the present research provided insights into the systematic understanding of how, in African education schemes, curriculum manifestation co-aligned with power relations. It stymied the development of autonomous, critical, independent subjects.

Discussion

The issue of educators' and educationalists' use of education in achieving African self-reliance is leadership and relevant, given

⁹ (2015). Africanisation of higher education. Harare: UNESCO

Tabulawa, R. (1997). Pedagogical classroom practice and the social context: The case of Botswana. *International Journal of Educational Development*.

¹⁰ Osaki (2000). *Curriculum development*: Chicago Press

¹¹ Tikly (2011), *Aim of Education*. The role of education in the house, page 69

¹² Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.

that memorization was well established in most African learning institutions. These are typical examples of memoriter curricula, where students are forced to cram large amounts of information within their brains without adequately understanding the content or even acquiring problem-solving skills. This approach neglects the freedom of learners and teachers.¹³ It can be highly regressive in its continuation of colonial impacts, where education systems in use across the colonial world were meant to keep Indigenous populations subservient to colonial rulers, not free and self-governing.

Another disadvantage of a memorization-based system of education is that the ability to encourage creativity and independence is subservient to conformity to set standards. Students are prepared to reproduce given knowledge just as they are prepared to compare, question, or create something new. This approach suppresses learning and inhibits the growth of higher-order thinking skills necessary for African countries' economic, social, and political emancipation.¹⁴

Also, the memorization model's dominant role led to academic performance and success; success is evaluated through examinations rather than real-life performance and application that relate to the context of society. That way, students have no interaction between what they learn in school and the situation in the community.¹⁵ In this way, education becomes a form of power to shape the conforming subject that can know a great deal in theory yet remain unable to apply this knowledge to benefit his or her society in practice.

It also perpetuates inequality since it rewards good memorizers, thus locking out those who may need to perform better in such systems or may have a differently structured brain.¹⁶ It puts in place a self-serving framework geared towards achieving a set benchmark rather than providing an environment that seeks to develop different talents and address the key issues that define African nation-states, including poverty, infrastructural backwardness, and poor governance, among others.

It is high time that Africa reclaimed its sovereignty by enhancing the education systems that are embedded more in trivia quests. Instead, it encourages student civilization, skills, dexterity, innovation, and creativity. This could mean the adoption of Indigenous knowledge systems, an over-reliance on field-based knowledge, and curriculum relevance of African socio-economies. A society prepared through such an education system would encourage creativity and independence of thought and produce a society of individuals capable of transforming their societies and nations from the colonial masters' cultures of dependency.

Results

The memory-cum-rote learning practiced in many African systems has implications for autonomy and critical thinking. This is more

¹³ Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

¹⁴ Tikly, L. (2004). *Education and the new imperialism*. Comparative Education.

¹⁵ Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.

¹⁶ Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

so given that this learning approach without requiring understanding is typical of colonial educational systems aimed at ensuring predetermined curtailment of critical thinking.¹⁷ Only information retention is encouraged without critical analysis and reflection, so students' opportunities to challenge and create are limited – two steps toward autonomy.

According to scholars, this solidifies compliance rather than creativity and thinking skills among the learners.¹⁸ In Africa, for example, educational systems that existed and were developed were influenced by colonial powers, thereby copying these colonial models of education with a mere emphasis on rote learning that has continued to perpetuate repressive top-down education systems. These systems tend to take tiny account of culture or individuality and continue to enforce the standardization of a normative approach rather than promoting individual thought.

Besides, many present discussions are devoted to the problems of transitioning to curricula that foster competence, critical thinking, creativity, and flexibility—the essentials for one's independence and innovativeness.¹⁹ As opposed to rote learning, an educational schema that promotes questions, discovery, and know-how can help the learner interact more effectively with context, hence developing higher levels of learned helplessness and counter power to this_ control.²⁰

Still, memorization-based education is beneficial in the short term, especially regarding standardized tests, but hinders long-term individual and societal emancipation.²¹ For African students to be empowered, educational improvements must begin to encourage them to actively reason through the information given to them with the skills they need for change from within.

Conclusion

The practice of memorization, which forms the basis of many African educational systems, is an extension of colonial educational policies that aim to produce docile subjects for the African people. European colonialist education was used to a large extent to subdue reason and liberation-minded educational developments among African people in favor of 'civilizing' Africans to accept imposed European structures and modes of learning as opposed to homegrown African learning processes and methodological dispositions. The education systems brought in the colonial period were not intended to disseminate power among the African people; they were instruments of keeping law and order, supporting the colonial order and chaining the African dreams within the framework of what the colonial masters wished to see among the colonized. In most African countries that have attained their independence for a while, the colonial patterns of education

remained dominant, and changes that have been made here could be more tokenism than revolution.

African independence did see some changes to the education systems, but memorization continued into the present. Education inherited from colonial masters is redundant and undermines students' creativity; there is little critical thinking. It encourages rote, book learning, where students are expected to learn by rote and then be able to replicate what is being taught without making efforts to use knowledge in any meaningful way. The absence of such engagement with content hinders innovation and innovation-solving – two pertinent values in society and in addressing African issues. Subsequently, students are well-equipped for careers they may not be called upon to solve the African continent's intricate challenges such as poverty, political disorders, and social injustice.

Moreover, the fact that we still have systems that foster memorization only plays into the systematic exclusion of African culture and knowledge systems, hence the continual imposition of the West's standards and way of living. This approach of substituting indigenous knowledge discounts the African identity and equally robs the student of a chance to learn their roots. The insight that traditional African knowledge systems offer into the environment, social organization, and ways of entrepreneurial human interactions presents possibilities for an African-centered approach to confronting the educational issues of the continent. However, these systems are not included in most curricula, thus maintaining a context of education that imports knowledge in a Western paradigm.

Therefore, the above-established trends and challenges call for significant overhauls to the African education systems to guarantee actual and practical systems of power and women's emancipation. These ideas shift from 'parrot fashion learning' to information-acquisition mode with integrated critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving-based curricula imperative. It would enable students to acquire desirable intellectual resources for solving problems, making decisions, and contributing to society. Also, Indigenous knowledge and local epistemological frameworks need to be included in the curriculum. In this way, African education can allow the profound cultural values of its societies and students to learn from and trigger further collective creativity within the native and traditional context along with the diffusion of new outside knowledge. The changes suggested would destabilize the colonial influence that is still felt today and give African students a chance to forge a new and more accessible, individual, and creative path for themselves.

Thus, 'the change of education in Africa' is not just the evolution of academic qualitative improvement but is linked with African people's effort to gain cultural and intellectual liberation. Now, it is high time African Education focused on how to develop critical thinking, creativity, and efforts to incorporate indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems into African Education. This can transform future generations and become a formidable force to transform African Society.

Recommendations

To address the limitations of a memorization-based curriculum and foster greater African autonomy, the following recommendation can be observed:

1. Embrace Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving: Future education in Africa should, therefore, move from the usual

¹⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey.

¹⁸ Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

¹⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey.

²⁰ Letsekha, T. (2013). *Revisiting the debate on the Africanisation of higher education: An appeal for a conceptual shift*. *Alternation*.

²¹ Bloom, D. E., Canning, D., & Chan, K. (2014). *Higher education and economic growth in Africa*. *International Journal of Educational Development*

practices of rote learning and memorization to creativity, thinking, and analysis. By implementing this shift, students could become active knowledge constructors, challenging and discussing assumptions and developing relevant local-global problem solutions.

2. Incorporate Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Education in Africa requires incorporating indigenous knowledge, languages, and traditions. This would affirm the African cultural selves and expose students to a range of ways to embrace themselves fully. By acknowledging and valuing local knowledge, students might increase their identification with the local culture and, at the same time, gain an understanding of other paradigms.

3. Curriculum Diversification: Educators should, therefore, strive to develop a curriculum that will meet the needs and realities of African societies. This approach eliminates the culture of using a single framework to address the issues with student, region, and culture-enabled creation of regional-specific theories supporting the student's state.

4. Teacher Training and Support: Teachers cannot just presuppose knowledge and facts that students should acquire; they have to be prepared for teaching by means of questions. Critical thinking and training courses regarding 'advanced teaching techniques' such as differentiated and student-centered learning procedures give teachers ideas on how to eliminate more traditional teaching methods that largely involve memorization.

5. Use of Technology and Interactive Learning: Current technology and other engaging teaching techniques should be adopted to improve teaching productivity. One can use technology tools like websites and games or models and group projects so that students can learn to be more creative, participate more actively, and assume responsibility for their learning.

By adopting these suggestions, African education can, therefore, be liberated from its colonial influence and enable students to become positive change agents in their societies and within the larger society.

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