

Annex 14

HIGHLIGHTS ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGE FOR CURRICULUM RELEVANCE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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- The success of any education system depends not only on the nature of its aims, but also its content or curriculum, especially its relevance, which refers to applicability of what is learnt to a particular environment and life situation.
- Critics of the colonial inherited education have often attacked it for being theoretical and failing to address the immediate needs of the learner. This is an area where indigenous African education would inject in more relevance as it was based on the immediate environment of the learner.
- The question of relevance has generally been raised with regard to all levels of the education system, but with a stronger focus at the primary level, which provides opportunities for a greater part of the population.
- With the achievement of independence, issues of content and its relevance were given less attention due to a greater preoccupation with education for human resource development. This left the control of content and its relevance to the institutions of the North.
- The question of content relevance has largely been left at the rhetorical level right from the Addis Ababa Conference of 1961 and other numerous conferences to the Dakar Framework of Action for Education for All of 2000.
- At a more practical level, curricula reform to reflect the African setting has not taken place. Instead Western curricula values have continued to strengthened and solidified at all levels of the education systems.
- The Kenyan context has not been different from the rest of the African countries. Right from the Education Commission Report of 1964 (Ominde Report) through the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech Report) of 1999, there have been many calls for primary school teaching to be less dependant on classroom rote learning and become realistically associated with pupils' everyday experiences.
- Despite enunciations by many official documents, very little emphasis is given to the study of the immediate environment or activities that pupils would undertake in their future lives. Although some remarkable efforts have made to integrate dance, music and drama at both primary and secondary school levels, this has not

been largely done for teaching purposes, but for entertainment and competition to scoop trophies in drama and music festivals.

- The emphasis during instruction and assessment still remains focused on the acquisition of factual knowledge and rote learning, with no attention to comprehension, practical application of knowledge and skills, problem-solving, reflection and evaluation.
- The present approach to teaching and learning puts many primary school leavers at a serious disadvantage, as they do not acquire either adequate numeracy and literacy skills for survival in their future settings, a situation that leads to a massive waste of scarce resources.
- This situation therefore calls for a new ecological and environmental curricula that teaches the knowledge and skills as well as attitudes and values that are essential for students to function effectively in the environments in which they are likely to perform now and in future.
- In the design of such curricula, the philosophical foundations of African indigenous education is bound to provide a very valuable basis for relevant and environmental based curricula.
- Such a philosophical foundation includes the key guiding principles of **functionalism** namely, that the education provided is strictly utilitarian for the immediate induction into society; **preparationalism** by which children are prepared to become useful members of the community; **communualism** by which children are socialized with loyalty to the society as opposed to individualism; **wholesticism** which is largely a doctrine of multiple or multi-faceted learning and **perennialism**, which entailed preservation of knowledge, skills and values tested to be of particular importance to society.
- Despite the onslaught of the so-called forces of modernization indigenous African education has not completely disappeared. In many communities elements of it are still intact, among them such elements as folk tales songs, dances play activities and games. These can be integrated in the teaching approaches of the primary schools as well as the participation by communities in the educational processes. This calls for curricula design that involves all stakeholders.
- It needs to be emphasized that such curricula changes are most likely to experience strong opposition from the elite and even the communities themselves on the grounds that they are designed to provide inferior education; the orientation of teachers to new curricula and the perennial impediment of the use of foreign languages.
- The continued use of foreign languages seems to emerge as the key problem in the reform of African education systems. It is now on record that the external

forces that persistently call for the reduced role of the state in education and liberalization, like the IMF, World Bank are the same ones that have not only advocated the strengthening of colonial languages, but provided material support for such an end.

- English, French, Spanish, Portuguese are in reality foreign languages and their use actually devalues indigenous languages, culture and the knowledge of African countries. The effect of their use as media of instruction is that children who are not proficient in them do not also benefit from education. The domination of publishing houses by foreign firms have spelt doom to genuine reforms in African education.
- Genuine educational reforms in Africa have also been hampered through educational programmes initiated in the North allegedly to enhance the so-called “quality education”. Such programmes are in response to the World Bank’s assertion that academic standards in African countries are low in reference to test-scores earned by African pupils and students in tests designed in the West, especially by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).