
Expanding the horizons of Transformation of Higher Education in Africa

Introduction

In Africa, education in general and higher education in particular remains fundamentally dominated by an epistemological paradigm that may not be relevant to the continent's prevailing circumstances, challenges and aspirations. The dominance of this knowledge paradigm has curiously survived the tide of "independence", though illusory, that has swept across Africa. In light of the persisting dominance of the West's epistemological paradigm over that of the indigenous people of Africa, there has been a call for the transformation of higher education in Africa. This translates to the fundamental change of the higher education curriculum and the institutional structures that sustains the present mono-focal nature of higher education curriculum. The purpose has been to create the necessary conditions for the co-existence of the once demeaned epistemological paradigm of the indigenous people of Africa and other paradigms.

I take such a measure as crucial in reversing the epistemic injustice

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that has been caused by the foisting of the West's epistemological paradigm to the contestable status of the only authentic paradigm that qualifies to inform the higher education curriculum in Africa. However, I have some reservations with its chances of success in rescuing Africa from problems that it is currently facing, particularly the problem of dependency. In light of limitations of transformation as presently understood in the sphere of higher education in Africa, I propose that the transformation agenda in Africa go beyond simply changing the higher education curriculum so that it is informed by diverse epistemological paradigms (Meneses, 2016: 9), including that of the indigenous people of Africa. This would allow a focus on transforming these knowledge paradigms so that they

impart, in the learners creative and innovative agency that could help rescue African countries from the spectre of dependency on other geopolitical centres. The horizons of transformation of higher education in Africa ought to be expanded to include aligning it to the challenges and aspirations of the continent. In other words, transformed education ought to speak to the conditions of the continent with the idea of finding answers to them.

Transformation in Africa and its Pitfalls

The condition of the African continent, especially after partially emerging from the colonial past is such that any changes that are to be implemented in order to decolonise it ought to lead to a fundamental change to the *status quo*. This means that such changes ought to overturn the present condition of Africa such that the continent would take a new and emancipatory trajectory going forward. This trajectory would lead to the authentic liberation of the continent from the burden of dependency.

Yet, from my own observation, with respect to the curriculum, transformation in Africa has simply been projected as implying the change in the composition of the curriculum content so that it draws its content from diverse epistemological paradigms including that of the indigenous people of Africa. This has been touted as a worthy corrective to the exclusive dominance of the education curriculum in Africa by the Western epistemological paradigm.

It is worth noting that this change to the education curriculum in Africa has been resisted by those who felt that the foisting of the Western epistemological paradigm to the position of exclusive dominance of the education curriculum in Africa is necessary for reasons such as the maintenance of educational “standards” in Africa. The resistance to the transformation of the educational curriculum Africa is largely unconvincing. Basically, transformation is still an idea that is yet to be actualised in some African countries. Even in those African countries where those who are connected in some way to those who have created or sustained the dominance of the education curriculum by one epistemological paradigm have physically departed from positions of direct control of events, talk of authentic decolonisation is still somewhat largely lethargic. Nevertheless, my interest in this piece is not whether this noble idea has fully attained the results that it desires.

My interest lies with the futility of this exercise when one takes into consideration that Western education, at least as it has been introduced to this continent at the inception of colonial rule, has been considered as bereft of the creative and innovative qualities that would potentially empower

learners to emancipate Africa from its dependency on other geopolitical centres such as the Western world. To my knowledge, transformation in Africa, thus far, seems to have been averse or somewhat unconcerned with the imperative to emerge from substantial dependency on other geopolitical centres to a position of significant self-determination in matters concern the continent and its circumstances. In my view, the transformation of the education curriculum that is simply motivated by the desire to overcome the dominance of the curriculum by one epistemological paradigm and instead diversify the paradigms from which the curriculum content is derived, may not deliver the authentic liberation of the African continent that is desired. There lies the pitfall of transformation as presently conceived in Africa.

Expanding the horizons of Transformation

In the light of the identified pitfall of transformation in Africa, I suggest that its horizons ought to be expanded so that it surpasses the mere broadening of the paradigms of knowledge from which the content of the curriculum is derived. The transformed curriculum ought to liberate the indigenous people of Africa from dependency on other geopolitical centres when it comes to finding solutions to the problems that the continent finds itself facing. In other words, the proposed transformation ought to make a practical difference to the prevailing circumstances in Africa by ensuring that it gives agency to the indigenous people of Africa so that they become the prime movers and instigators of the development agenda of the continent. I take this as necessary especially given the fact that the education that

the colonised countries in Africa adopted at independence did not seem to reawaken the creative and innovative potential of the learners, but actually tended to prepare the dominated people for inferior roles in the development of their own countries. Herein resides the challenge with such an education. It cannot be entrusted to liberate the indigenous people of Africa from dependency which is largely associated with colonial education. It may need to be internally transformed, then, if it is to speak to the imperative for creative and innovative agency that is required for Africa to authentically emerge from the spectre of dependency. This is necessary to rid the continent of its tendency to suppress the creative and innovative potential of its recipients. Similarly, other knowledge paradigms that ought to inform the education curriculum, such as that of the indigenous people of Africa requires a construction in such a way that they are disposed to create and nurture the creative potential of the indigenous people of Africa so that they would take a lead in finding solutions to the problems and challenges that continent faces from time to time. The issue here is to find a lasting corrective to Africa’s enduring problem of dependency.

Concluding Remarks

In this essay, I have argued that simply replacing an education curriculum that is dominated by the Western epistemological paradigm with one whose content is informed by diverse epistemological paradigms including that of the indigenous people of Africa may not necessarily deliver the authentic liberation that is intended. In my view, authentic liberation of the education curriculum in Africa ought to surpass acceptance of the reality



of the diversity of epistemological paradigms so that the knowledges that inform it are disposed towards awakening and nurturing the creative and innovative potential of the learners. The point emphasised here is that the dependency of African countries could possibly be reversed by way of ensuring that they actively take a lead in finding solutions to the problems and chal-

lenges that they face. The *end* of transformation of education in Africa, then, ought not to be defined by simply celebrating and accepting that diverse epistemo-logical paradigms ought to inform the transformed curriculum but should ensure that the knowledge imparted to the learners *works*. The curriculum should be able to suggest workable solutions to the problems

and challenges that African countries are confronted with in present times.

References

- Meneses, M. P. (2016), Beyond the Two Cultures Paradigm: The Humanities in the CODESRIA Project. In: *CODESRIA Bulletin*, Nos 3 & 4, pp. 7-10.