

Student Protests and Learning for Sustainable Futures in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Outline

This presentation explores the issue under focus under the following themes:

1. Background and Context

- (a) 1985 introduction of the 844 system of education,
- (b) 2001 banning of corporal punishment
- (c) the new constitution of 2010 (expanded democratic space)
- (d) the proposed curriculum review

2. Issues that trigger student protests – a review

3. Rethinking Education & Learning needs for sustainable futures

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Background and Context (1)

- Kenya attained indep. in 1963 and embarked on tackling the 3 issues of Poverty, Disease, and Ignorance (illiteracy).
- For example: Primary school enrolment increased from 891,553 pupils in 1963 to 1,028,000 in 1965.
- Secondary education was also expanded accordingly to meet the needs of the increased primary school enrolment.
- For example: in 1963 there were 151 sec. sch. and by 2000/2001, the number had risen to 3,234 schools.

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Background and Context (2)

- In 1985 change of educational system from 7-6-3 to 8-4-4 (following recommendation by Mackay Report)
- Was to have summative exam at end of first 2 cycles – KCPE & KCSE (high stakes exams).
- 844 -skills-oriented but failed - poor implementation (abrupt transition, censorship of criticism, too expensive vs poor economy)-no workshops + H/Science rooms. hence remained theoretical – with all its graduates aiming at employment
- 844 was aimed at encouraging citizenry to embrace careers that drive the economy like agriculture, fishing, livestock mgt instead of service industry jobs/white collar jobs.

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Background and Context (3)

- 1992 reviewed to drop some subjects – but still too loaded – with- KCSE remaining the sole sorting mechanism for gaining entry into tertiary education - cut-throat competition - many cases of exam malpractices reported
- 2001 Corporal Punishment was out-lawed partly following the domestication of the children rights and also due to its widespread misuse (deterrent removed).
- 2010 – promulgation of the new constitution which clearly stresses observance of rights and freedoms of the citizens (including the right to protest against any injustices).
- persistent cases of cheating (e.g. in 2015 KCSE, 5101 students had their results cancelled) hence widespread destructive student protests.
- Basic Education Bill in Parliament to change 844 restructure the education system to align it to the current global trends and best practices

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Background and Context (4)

- Despite occasional reviews of the educational system, albeit in part, issues of the mgt of educational system and student welfare matters have not been adequately addressed.
- Changes in wider society happening faster than the school managers are adjusting to the realities within the larger society
- This has partly resulted in more challenges related to the whole educational system e.g. student protests.
- Currently, MoE preparing to embark on a comprehensive review of the edu. system to tailor the curriculum to meet the demands of the 21st century.

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And therefore...this presentation

- is a follow-up of the last presentation in which I exposed what I consider to be the ultimate or underlying causes of student violence in sec schools in Kenya
- in the context of this impending educ. review (in the FY 2015/2016), I seek to give suggestions on how this problem can be addressed through the schooling process for a sustainable future [within this reform dispensation].

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Issues that trigger student protests

Antecedent efforts have often presented the following as the real causes:

- a. exercise of power and authority
- b. communication breakdown,
- c. the prefect system,
- d. school rules and regulations,
- e. harsh of punishment
- f. rights and freedoms of students and
- g. KCSE (high stakes) examinations

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Underlying causes

1. Alienation of the students from their process of self-determination

- e.g. school administrators exercising power and authority in ways that students experience as oppressive e.g. denied opportunity formulation/review of school rules, communication breakdown, all through which they can pursue self-realization

- This amounts to, or at least is perceived by learners as denial of opportunities for learning to be as well as learning to do.

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2. The absurdity of the students' conditions of existence

- - The notion of 'absurd' consists in the existentialist view that there is no order, value and purpose in human life in this world (the world is so unfair).
- - e.g. cases of poor facilities such as toilet and lack of entertainment services, perceptions of a bleak future – due to the lack of job opportunities out there (esp. if they don't pass highly)-all of which they seek to transform, by acting as revolutionaries hence violence.
- - KCSE results cancellation, failure or even the very possibility of it, introduces the students to the imminent absurd conditions of existence after school e.g. become a condemned lot as failures in life.
- school/ing as a limiting/disabling/disempowering environment and one that is full of disparities and inequities that impede their self realization i.e. not enabling them to learn to be what they wish to be.

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3. Affront to students' values and freedom

- to existentialists, before birth, life is nothing and is up to us to give it the meaning we choose
 - Human beings have freedom (as an inseparable tendency) to make these choices hence an affront to this is an affront to humanity thus dehumanization – bound to be resisted e.g.:
- Values including: to be respected (as opposed to being mistreated e.g. thr humiliating means e.g. corporal punishment, access to opportunities for self expression as well as access to their rights such as entertainment + social interaction with colleagues from other schools
- ***Negation of the students' sense of entitlement to all these promotes feelings of an affront to their ontological vocation of pursuing self-realization (learning to be) but to the extent that they often respond in violent and oppressive ways, there is an implied need for learning to be with others).

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Context of reforms on nature of learning

- Increased awareness of rights and freedoms
- Students have recognized that destructive and collective actions are efficacious in winning a response from authorities hence increase in use of destructive violence to express grievances
- Raging debate over whether or not KCSE examinations should be scrapped since it has often triggered violence in schools
- Generally, a reactionary mode of school governance in which citizens' initiatives tend to be neglected until they pose direct threats to public peace
- An impending comprehensive review of the education system to 'tailor the curriculum to meet the demands of the 21st century'.

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Rethinking Education & Learning needs for sustainable futures

- Goal 4 section 4.7 of the SDGs obligates nations to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, human rights, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, among others, by 2030.
- The 4 pillars of learning as identified in Delors Report of 1996; *Learning- the Treasure within* and which has been reaffirmed by UNESCO Report of 2015; *Rethinking Education- Towards a Global Common Good*, thus:
 - i. Learning to know
 - ii. Learning to do
 - iii. Learning to be
 - iv. Learning to be with others (to live together)

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How can learning be reorganized so as to achieve SDG goal 4 sect 4.7?

It is further suggested here that as the committee embarks on this review of education, they should be guided by:

- ① a concept of student violence as entailing the means through which students seek to avoid those unbearable experiences that characterize the reality of their schooling
- ② these 4 pillars as a guide to the kind of knowledge, skills and values that must be emphasized rather than focusing too much on the structure.
- ③ as they pursue the humanistic approach to this phenomenon, the concern should be on the kinds of knowledge, skills and values that make it possible for students to adopt amicable ways of conflict resolution

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and through the public eye...

“The 8-4-4 system is not the problem, and replacing it with 2 -6-3-3-3 or reverting to the pre-1985 7-4-2-3 won’t fix the output. Stop treating the symptoms and instead tackle the cause; how we teach: emphasize practical skills and stop condemning students based on one exam”
(Daily Nation Newspaper, 30 March, 2016).

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Accordingly:

1. Learning to know[cognition]

- Basic skills inherent in basic education to enable them to benefit from educ. opportunities (cognitive).... this has happened and has been reinforced thru the high stakes exam system
(*Delors Report warns of the tendency to emphasize certain types of knowledge at the detriment of others equally essential for human dev)
- But such knowledge should include: nature and value of dialogue in conflict resolution, nature of rights and freedom, clear knowledge of school rules

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2. Learning to do

This aspect emphasizes vocational skills [economic skills]

- Kenyan ed. system -accused of being too academic and performance oriented – & not competence-based - see China + India + Bangladesh
- Need to consider assessment of competencies rather than memorized content – or else try formative/sch-based approach to assessment
- this will help learners to:
 - (a) learn to do other things that can serve as an alternative pathway to well-being in case they do not excel in SLE (economic skills)
 - (b) help deflate the pressure brought about by exam together with its unintended consequences e.g. violence

Further – need for learning to do [where do means acting]= [soft skills]

- Learners act in ways that equally portray them as oppressive – need skills to make them act responsibly
- Examples: negotiation skills, self-control (respect for human dignity)- all which have not been given genuine attention.

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3. Learning to be

- Implies the socialization function of education
- has to do with dev. of potentials to the fullest [including freedom of choice, access to rights...]hence providing enabling env. for this to happen
- Curriculum review team must create opportunities within the schooling process for learners can learn how to be free beings, capable of making their own choices and excising their autonomy and judgement but at the same time developing a stronger sense of personal responsibility

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4. Learning to be with others (to live together)

- another socialization function of education
- in such a globalizing world, edu. must seek to dev., in learners, an understanding and appreciation of others and their circumstances, beginning with those in school to those outside
- Witnessed patterns of violent protests raise questions on educ. and its capacity to shape values and attitudes for living together
- educ. should seek to dev. attitudes of interdependence e.g. involvement of learners in management [sch. Councils & involvement in review of school rules + regulations
- embracing dialogue – even though more worrying is the feeling amongst sch. admins - that it is not effective

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Conclusion

- This impending reform process presents a strategic opportunity for the MoE in Kenya not only to review the structure of the educ. system but also to align it to global trends
- this choice is imperative, after all, educational choices are largely about the kind of society we wish to live in
- The suggestions made here are just but general guidelines that must be borne in mind throughout this process and which can be further refined and operationalized thru' policy papers
- therefore, the deliberations by the committee (esp. on student protests) must not only address the students as the affected but also the role of school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders too, in an effort that engenders a process of humanization of all.

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End... Enjoy your evening!



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