

## Tertiary Education and the Challenges of Development in Contemporary Africa

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### Abstract

This paper is an examination of tertiary education in contemporary Africa and the developmental challenges facing the continent. The aim is to draw attention to the poor performance of the tertiary education sector in many countries of Africa viz a viz the developmental challenges facing the continent. The paper adopts two theoretical approaches, Normative- Survey and Functionalism. Using the two theories, it is established that there is a great disconnection between tertiary education in contemporary Africa and the socio -economic needs of the continent. This is evident in the continent's total dependence on foreign skills and aids. Africa, despite its huge human and natural resources, is the largest recipient of financial aid from other parts of the world. It is also the most afflicted by social conflicts. To revise this ugly situation, the continent needs a functional education system. An education system that could be used to achieve the developmental needs of the continent and to fulfill its socio-economic vision. To move forward, Africa must deemphasize its current regurgitation of foreign education theories and systems. The attitude to education in many countries of Africa is poor. The paper is recommending a continental body that will monitor education in each country of Africa. This body will ensure that each country of the African union complies with minimum education standards established by the union. Film could also be used to make education attractive in parts of Africa where presently there are misgivings about it.

**Keywords:** Africa, tertiary education, development, challenges.

### Introduction

There are currently an estimated 54 or 55 countries in Africa. Africa is the second largest continent in the world. With an estimated 1.1 billion people in 2009, it is also the second most populated continent in the world Olorunnisola, (2013). The continent is known by different names: *Alkebular*, (garden of Eden), *Ham* (land of dark skin people). It is also speculated that the continent got its name from a Berber tribe called *Afri*. The *Afri* are in Tunisia. The Romans gave the continent the name Africa, meaning land of the *Afri* people.

It is also assumed that life began in Africa. According to Reader (1998), "the earliest forms of life have been found in Africa and its ancient rocks are the repository of evidence from all stages in the evolution of life forms". Human civilisation also began in Ethiopia which is in Africa, Adelaja (2017). Despite this, Africa today according to Prah (2009) 'is industrially and technologically, the most backward continent in the world'. Africa is glaringly underdeveloped. Africa depends on other parts of the world for many things. Several factors are responsible for Africa's underdevelopment, a prominent one among them is the quality of Africa's education. Education, especially tertiary education, in many countries of Africa today, is substandard and counterproductive. The tertiary institutions in many countries of Africa are producing graduates every year. These graduates are yet to make positive impact on the development of the continent. Many of them, after graduation, could hardly get gainful employment.

**Statement of the problem**

The people of Africa will like to see their continent becomes developed like other continents of the world. It is for this reason huge amount of money is budgeted for education annually by the different countries of Africa. But in spite of the huge annual budgetary provisions for education, Africa has remained largely underdeveloped. No country in Africa can claim to be developed. Tertiary education as it is currently practiced cannot develop Africa. The problem facing Africa is how to design a tertiary education system that will meet the developmental needs and challenges of the continent. Tertiary education in contemporary Africa is a reproduction and replication of tertiary education from other parts of the world. The education that can develop Africa should be an education designed to meet the specific developmental challenges of Africa. It should be an education for Africa, by Africa and in Africa.

**Research Questions**

The paper is organized around the following three research questions:

- Is tertiary education contributing to the development of contemporary Africa as expected?
- What are the challenges facing tertiary education in contemporary Africa?
- How could these challenges be overcome?

**Research Objectives**

- To draw attention to the poor contribution of tertiary education to the development of contemporary Africa.
- To identify the challenges facing tertiary education in contemporary Africa.
- To suggest possible solutions to these challenges.

**Research Methodology**

- Use of bibliographic and internet resources
- Use of data and statistics from international organizations.
- Reference to the speeches of African statesmen, scholars and educationists on the state of education in contemporary Africa.

**Literature Review**

The difference between the developed and the underdeveloped parts of the world is in the quality of their education. Countries branded as first world have higher quality education than those branded as second and third worlds. According to Mandela (2003), 'education is the most powerful tool which you can use to change the world'. Education has transformed Asia from a dormant and backward part of the world to an economically active and visible part of the world. The study by the world economic forum (2015) established a strong link between education and development.

According to the study, education and development are two sides of the same coin. If well harnessed, education, the study suggests, could boost the development of the gross domestic product (GDP) of low-income countries by 28% and that of high-income countries by 16% every year.

In contemporary Africa, tertiary education is yet to bring about the anticipated social transformation and development of the continent. Despite several years of tertiary education, no country in Africa can claim to be truly developed. Using UNESCO assessment scale, eight out of the ten countries with the poorest education development index (EDI) in the world are in Africa. These countries are Niger, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Eritrea, Mali, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Comoros.

In place of scholars who should be interested in research and innovation, Tertiary education in contemporary Africa is producing *waiting scholars*. Scholars whose mental and psychological orientation is geared towards *waiting* for employment by the public sector.

Despite the increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at all levels of education in Africa, the reduction in the number of out of school children (OOSC) and the increase in the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), especially for girls, education in many countries of Africa is still grappling with challenges that are surmountable. These challenges, apart from the traditional problems of poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, now include new ones such as insecurity, violence, kidnapping, banditry and terrorism.

In view of its sociological significance to development, the challenges facing tertiary education in contemporary Africa should not be ignored. No nation, according to Falola (2014), 'can rise above the stock of its intellectual assets and the quality of its human capital'. Africa cannot develop beyond the quality of its education.

## Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical tools are used in appraising tertiary education in contemporary Africa. The first is the Normative –Survey method and the second is Functionalism as propounded by Emile –Durkheim (1858-1917).

The Normative- Survey approach to education research is popular and important. It has many features but five of them have direct relevance to the objectives of this paper. It is (1) *cross sectional* (2) *gathers data from a relatively large number of cases* (3) *not concerned with characteristics of individuals but with the generalised statistics of the whole population or a representative sample* (4) *deals with clearly defined problems* (5) *does not aspire to develop an organised body of scientific laws but provides information useful to the solution of local problems*, Sidhu (2013).

Using the Normative- Survey method, this paper will not focus on the challenges facing tertiary education in each country of Africa. With over 50 countries, this will be impossible. Instead, the paper will make a general review of tertiary education in Africa.

The second theoretical tool used is Functionalism. Functionalism is a sociological theory propounded by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). According to Durkheim, social institutions exist because of the functions they perform. Religion exists because of its function as an instrument of moral control.

Merton (1910-2003), while analysing Durkheim's Functionalism, divides it into two: *Manifest* and *Latent*. **Manifest** Functionalism, according to him, is 'the intended objectives, goals or anticipated outcomes of a social action'. **Latent** Functionalism is the 'unintended objectives, goals and outcomes of a social action'. A social institution whose existence is not producing the intended outcomes or objectives, in the opinion of Merton, is *dysfunctional*, Sidhu, (2013).

Tertiary education in many countries of contemporary Africa has become **latent** or dysfunctional. It is not producing the anticipated result of transforming Africa into a technological and economic giant. It is producing a set of people who are neither fit for the traditional African society nor adequately prepared for the challenges of modern Africa. Instead, it is producing citizens who are dissatisfied with society.

In many instances, these dissatisfied citizens have taken up arms to express their dissatisfaction. They are known as *bandits*, (*voluer*) *terrorists*, (*terroriste*) or *jihadists* (*Moudjahid*). As result of their anti-social behaviour, deaths, killings, rapes, kidnappings, abductions, have now become the common features of modern Africa.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Development

'The beginning of wisdom is a definition of terms', Socrates (Trump, 2009). There is no single universal definition of development. Development has been used as a political, economic or sociological concept. The way it is conceived differs from place to place. However, there is a near universal agreement that technological, economic and scientific changes from a lower to a higher state could be considered as development, Donnell (1997).

To Hogan (2006), a society is considered developed if it fulfills certain micro-economic conditions. These conditions include "the use of money for the exchange of goods and services, the promotion of social stratification on the basis of skills and class; and the acceptance of changes in inter-personal relationship".

In Africa, people tend to emphasise the *brick and mortar* aspects of development, Prah (2009). This *brick and mortar* approach to development always points to increase in physical infrastructures - roads, bridges, sky crappers, airports, schools, hospitals- as development. This, in the opinion of Prah, is wrong. In his opinion, the increase in the number of airports, hospitals, roads, schools is not development. Development according to prah(2009) is achieved "*when both the material and the non-material needs of individuals and groups have been adequately and progressively put in place so that the quality of life of people experience incremental advancement*"....

In the context of this paper, development is the scientific and technological transformation of a society which makes it less dependent on other societies and enables it to provide high quality life for its people. It is the effective use of the human and natural resources of a society using scientific and technical skills acquired through education.

### Education

There are also many definitions of education. The international Standard Classification of Education (1985) in Aderinoye (2004) defines education 'as an organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning'... Fafunwa (1974) defines it as "the process by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, activities and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to society". Yoloye (1980), perceives it as 'a tool for combating ignorance, poverty and disease'.

Obasanjo (2014) sees it "as the totality of all that impacts or influences one to develop one's innate ability and talents to the fullest..."

The above definitions of education are good and perfect. However, the education which is the focus of this paper is the education introduced to Africa during the colonial era and which, with little modifications, is still in place in many countries of Africa.

This education is known as western education. Before western education, many societies in Africa had a way of imparting their histories, traditions and customs to their new generations. This is what Mandela (2010) refers to as '*traditional school*'. Before western education, each society in Africa has a functional traditional school in which the young members of the society (male and female) were taught the basic values, history and customs of society. Unfortunately, these schools were deliberately destroyed during colonialism and replaced with western schools or western education system.

Even though the language of instruction differed from one colonial power to another, the goals and objectives of colonial education were the same throughout Africa. The main objective of colonial education was to destroy African traditional education. This is clear from the address of lord Macaulay to the British parliament in 1835:

*I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation... I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation. (Lord Macaulay, address to the British parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb.1835).*

In line with the explicit objective of colonialism, colonial education destroyed the self-esteem of the African people. It made them feel inferior to the white man. Walter Rodney as cited in Onyecha (1997) describes colonial education in Africa as 'education for subordination, exploitation and the creation of mental confusion.' Unfortunately, apart from few modifications, little has changed. Education in post-colonial Africa has retained its colonial features. It is still creating a people without self-esteem and a continent whose natural resources are available for exploitation. Many Africans still see themselves as inferior to the white man. In several countries of Africa today, education is conceived as the ability to speak fluently a European language or the ability to cite and quote famous European scholars. 'African leaders are happy to see their subjects write and speak the queen's English' Izsadore and Oyekunle, (2019).

### **Tertiary institutions in Africa: Typologies and classifications**

Tertiary education is the third and the final stage of formal education in contemporary Africa. In many countries of Africa, it is mostly provided by Universities, (*Universite*), (*universitat*), (*universidade*), polytechnics (*polytechnique*), (*politecnico*) and colleges of education. Tertiary education began in many countries of Africa during the colonial era. In Nigeria, it began in 1934 with the opening of the Yaba high college. This was followed by the establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948, Fafunwa (1974).

Since independence, many countries in Africa have established tertiary institutions, especially universities. A few examples are university of Ghana, Accra, the university for development studies, Tamale, Abdou Moumouni University, Niger Republic, Universite' Emi Koussi, Chad, University of Cape town, South Africa, Amadou Hampate' Ba university, Dakar. By 2020, there are an estimated one thousand, one hundred and twenty five officially recognised tertiary institutions in Africa.

Based on ownership, tertiary institutions in Africa could be classified into five broad groups. The first and the largest are public or Government owned tertiary institutions. They have the largest students' population but are often overwhelmed by problems of underfunding, strike, and corruption. The second are privately owned tertiary institutions. Their main focus is how to make profit by charging new school fees every academic session. The third are faith based tertiary institutions. They are used to promote specific religious ideologies.

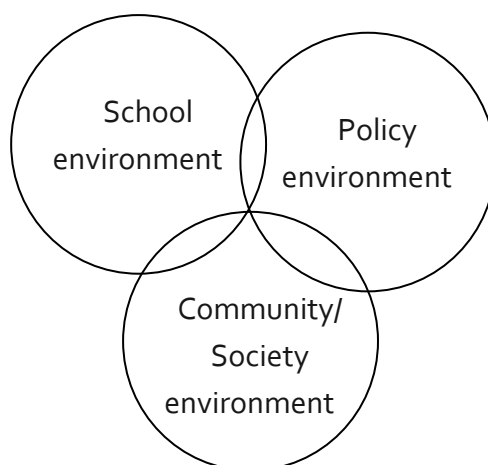
The fourth are tertiary institutions owned or affiliated to specific groups from outside the continent. They are used to promote specific philosophy or group interest. The last and equally important are illegal tertiary institutions. These are tertiary institutions which operate without approval or license from relevant authorities. Apart from their large students' population, they award fake certificates and for protection, they align with specific regional, ethnic or tribal interests. This makes cross checking their activities difficult.

### Africa's tertiary institutions and the challenges of development

The world economic forum assesses the global competitiveness of a nation's education on the basis of four indices: **Capacity, Deployment, Development** and **Know- How**. Capacity refers to the extent (formal) education is assessable to the population of a given country. Deployment evaluates the degree to which relevant skills are inculcated and taught to learners. Development is used to assess how the education of a nation is contributing to its development. Is the education contributing to the transformation and industrial development of the nation? Lastly, know-how is used to measure how deep and wide are the skills taught in a nation's schools. Are the skills appropriate, deep and wide to drive the nation to global reckoning?

Using these four indices, it is very clear that the performance of tertiary education in most countries of Africa is poor and substandard. It is not development oriented. Despite several years of tertiary education, Africa is still underdeveloped, it is not accessible to many qualified candidates, and relevant skills are not taught.

Many factors, human and non-human, are responsible for the abysmal performance of tertiary education in Africa. As could be seen from the diagram below, functional and qualitative education is a blend of three factors. These three factors, the policy, school and community environments must be properly marshaled and blended together for education to achieve its intended objectives.



*(Adapted from Cliff lecture notes)*

The contribution of these environments towards the devaluation of tertiary education in Africa is carefully reviewed. Each environment is impacting negatively on Africa's tertiary education and making its developmental objectives (if any) unattainable.

### Policy Environment

The policy environment in this paper is conceived as the decisions, actions, and steps taken by Government towards the promotion of education. In many countries of Africa, Education is on the

concurrent legislative list. This has led to differences, divergences and conflicts in policy articulation and implementation from state to state and between states and the national Government. In Nigeria, a good example is the non-compliance by some states with the national policy on free, compulsory primary education. In many countries of Africa, children of primary school age could be seen roaming about the streets during school hours.

According to Obasanjo (2014), 'the implementation of education reports had been tardy, dysfunctional, un-sustained and without coordinated and strong political will'. Every government introduces new education policy in Africa. Existing policies, no matter how good, are jettisoned, either on the basis of political or religious differences or on the pretext of financial constraints.

Within the continent, different colonial education policies have led to different education policies between independent African states. Education policies differ between Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone (Lusophono) African countries.

The goals/objectives of tertiary education are not clearly spelt out in Africa. Is it to produce a few African elites:

- Who could speak standard European languages?
- Who could exhibit foreign social traits?
- Who will pretend to be leaders but will loot and destroy their nations?

What really are the objectives of (tertiary) education in contemporary Africa?

Another critical policy factor affecting tertiary education in Africa is poor funding. Unlike in Europe where tertiary institutions are financially self-sustaining, in Africa, public tertiary institutions are made to depend totally on government for financial support. Government owned tertiary institutions in Africa are not adequately funded. After paying salaries and other personal emoluments, many public tertiary institutions are left with nothing for research and for on the job training of their staff. Without adequate financial support (Grants, Aids), no meaningful research would take place. Many public tertiary institutions are often on strike.

Under the policy environment, interference is another factor impeding the meaningful development of tertiary education in Africa. In many countries, tertiary institutions in Africa are considered autonomous. They have the mandate to regulate, moderate their activities, establish academic standards, award honorary degrees to deserving people and to recruit their own staff. In reality, this autonomy is denied.

Political control and influence are visible in the appointment of the principal officers of public tertiary institutions. Lecturers (even when unqualified), are imposed on them. Institutions that resist manipulation or resist political intervention are deliberately starved of funds. At the managerial cadre, competence, capacity and character are jettisoned. People without the right academic qualifications are often appointed to head tertiary institutions in Africa.

### **Society/Community Environment**

No education system can rise beyond the vision, expectation and anticipation of its society. 'The academic community can only be a reflection of the larger society', Asobele (2021). Societies often influence the quality, standard, vision of education through the value they attach to it. A society in which education is viewed with low esteem will condone/accept a dysfunctional education system. It will also be less perturbed by the events happening in its education sector.



The attitude to western education by the different societies and communities in Africa is divergent and conflicting. Education is highly valued and well embraced in many countries of Africa but poorly managed and administered.

In some parts of the continent, western education (*makaranta boko*) is still perceived as something forbidden (*Haram*) and is resisted by force. Apart from the perennial problem of power supply, the threat to life and personal safety are enough to thwart any meaningful academic activity. No country of Africa can be described as completely safe and secured for serious academic activity.

Another societal factor negatively affecting tertiary education in Africa is the undue emphasis on certificate acquisition in place of knowledge and skills. The possession of a certificate is seen as a sign of being educated. Many countries in Africa are afflicted by *diploma disease*. A belief that an individual is only useful or qualified for employment at the presentation of a certificate: "*Diploma disease is a term developed by Ronald Dore as a critique of the excessive reliance on the selection process in formal educational institutions ( and educational qualifications) as evidence of ability, training and merit for entry to particular occupations...*" Marshall, (1998).

Also, a major challenge is the general disdain for education in many parts of Africa. Lecturers are poorly remunerated. The salary of a councilor is higher than that of a professor. Many parents in Africa will be happier to see their sons/daughters becoming Senators, commissioners, Bankers, Lawyers, and Doctors instead of teachers, Obanya (1982).

### School Environment

In the context of this paper, school environment refers to all the processes, facilities, infrastructures (physical and non-physical), relationships (formal and informal) in a designated physical space called school which could facilitate, promote, encourage sustain or impede the effective dissemination and acquisition of knowledge. The school environment also includes all the visible and non-visible factors that could facilitate or encumber effective teaching and learning.

The school environment of many public tertiary institutions in Africa is not conducive for effective teaching and learning. Physical facilities (hostels, classrooms, e libraries) are grossly inadequate. It is not uncommon to see students in public tertiary institutions standing by windows and doors to receive lectures.

In 2004, one million prospective students were qualified for admission into Nigerian Universities, only 100,000 spaces were available, Aderinoye (2004). The hostels in many public tertiary institutions are barely habitable. They are inadequate, overcrowded, dirty and not suitable for human habitation. Many students are forced to stay off-campus because of lack of on campus accommodation.

Several public tertiary institutions in Africa has no libraries. The libraries available are stocked with outdated and irrelevant books. Many of the libraries have no internet connectivity. Students are unable to access current journals, using the internet connectively of their schools. E learning facilities are grossly inadequate. Many libraries in Africa are still analogue. A simple fire outbreak will destroy all the books they have in stock. Libraries in Africa's tertiary institutions should be digitalised. Apart from ease of accessibility, this will protect against fire outbreaks.

The social atmosphere in many tertiary institutions is not conducive for learning. It is often characterised by fear, violence, intimidation, bullying, conflict, uncertainties, rumours and perennial strikes by aggrieved unions. Students are afraid of lecturers and lecturers are afraid of students. Students have few role models. They spent considerable time chatting on different social platforms. Plagiarism from the internet, known as *copy* and *paste*, is now common in many tertiary institutions of Africa. What differs between campuses is its degree and intensity.



The academic calendar of many tertiary institutions in Africa have become unpredictable. Due to strikes, and the activities of armed groups, many schools now have irregular academic calendar. Students are kept at school beyond the normal period they should spent. At the beginning of every new academic session, students are expected to pay new school fees.

Tertiary education is gradually being priced out of the rich of the poor in Africa. This has led to the emergence of many armed groups in different parts of the continent. The available pool of untrained youth without meaningful employment or any lawful source of income is partly responsible for the unending conflicts and crises in many parts of Africa. The rich people easily mobilise them for banditry and terrorism.

To save the African youth from being further misled or converted to banditry and terrorism, there is need for a new philosophy of education in Africa. It should be a philosophy that will encapsulates the cultural, institutional, financial and structural peculiarities of the continent. Western education is designed for the socio- cultural peculiarities of the west. It cannot be used as a tool for the development of Africa. Africa must consciously look inwards and design an educational system that will address its peculiar scientific, technological and developmental challenges and needs. It should be an education compatible with the socio –cultural realities of the continent.

The strength of Africa is not in its oil and gas but in its human and intellectual resources. The human capital of Africa can only be transformed into a continental asset through meaningful education. If Africa's human resource is left untrained or is wrongly trained, it will be a disaster to the continent and to the world. Africa should aspire to place man on Mars. It could do this through functional education. Africa must realise that no investment on education is a waste. Illiteracy is costlier and more expensive than literacy. An educated person is an asset to society and an uneducated person is a liability.

### Recommendations

- There should be a continental education monitoring unit under the African union. This unit shall monitor education in each country which is a member of the African union. It shall carry out a honest assessment of the performance of the education sector in every country of the African union. Recently, in three different tertiary institutions in Africa, a female student fell into a soak away and died, another was raped and killed on campus, while the third one committed suicide as a result of frustration.
- There should be increase funding for public tertiary institutions in Africa. Special grants should be set aside for academic research. Without adequate funding, no meaningful research can take place.
- Public tertiary institutions should strengthen their internal control mechanisms. This will help to reduce corrupt practices and mitigate system abuse. They should be empowered to elect/select their principal officers. Heads of institutions appointed by people in power are more loyal to those who appointed them than to their institutions.
- In Nigeria, the Academic staff of universities (ASUU) should be commended for suggesting TETFUND. Without the intervention of TETFUND, many public tertiary institutions in Nigeria would have collapsed. Many lecturers would have not gone for both local and overseas training. There should be a TETFUND in each country of Africa to support tertiary education. There should also be a regular meeting between the various academic unions in Africa. The fate of Africa is in the hands of its intellectuals.

- Ad hoc academic programmes (part-time, consultancy, distance learning, Top up, holiday/ weekend lessons, etc) should be re-assessed with a view to strengthening their academic quality and content. In their present form, certificates are awarded to many undeserving people. Part-time has become a mockery of tertiary education in many countries of Africa.
- Public tertiary institutions in Africa should start exploring other alternative sources of funding. The present total dependence on Government for funding is not good for academic autonomy. There can be no true autonomy without financial autonomy. The present arrangement, whereby public tertiary institutions depend on Government for 90% of their capital and recurrent expenditures, in local discourse, is known as *feeding bottle* education. *Feeding bottle education*, an arrangement whereby Government provides all the financial needs of public tertiary institutions cannot be sustained. There is no future in *feeding bottle* education. It destroys autonomy, creativity, innovation, and the prudent management of available resources.
- Film could be used to counter the current negative perception of education in some parts of Africa. During the colonial era, film was used as a means of public education and enculturation (McCall, 2016). As done during the colonial era, it could be used to promote change in Africa's current perception and interpretation of education. Film (unlike printed texts) could be accessed by both the literate and the non-literate.
- Film could be produced in the different languages of Africa. According to Nikita Khrushchev of Russia as cited by Brendan Shehu (1997) "there is nothing to compare with cinema in its power to impact on human minds. The cinema is accessible to all walks of society, to all ages. It penetrates into the remotest districts and villages". With the emergence of mobile digital telephones, film could be easily shared and distributed among communities and groups (Sawadogo, 2019).

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