

THE WRONG TEACHING THAT ERODED AFRICA'S PROSPERITY

Education is a vital prerequisite in the development of any society on earth. There are two types of education; the informal and formal education.

The formal one mainly originated from Central Egypt around 3400-2000 B.C. But the academic form of curricular education was founded by the pagan Greek philosopher, Plato, between 427 and 347 B.C. This pagan system of education evolved very fast. By the sixth century, the only schools were the monastic schools for the training of monks and cathedral schools for the training of priests.

In 1819, Thomas Jefferson founded the first state university, the University of Virginia. This started the present materialistic education in America which was separated from the religious-based one.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Big businesses later on invaded the education system with huge financial contributions with a condition of providing technical, scientific and professional courses to train needed people to be servants of these big companies. That's why education became more a system of training young people to learn the art of earning a living, other than teaching them the art of living.

THE MODERN FORMAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA

During the colonial era, the colonial masters didn't have interest in educating the indigenous Africans. They were interested in extracting the continent's natural wealth, hence the need to keep the locals ignorant.

Islamic schools were then set up in North Africa but were small and limited to only Muslims. Later on, European missionaries established schools in the coastal areas of West Africa but they collapsed after a short time.

Then the Christian missionaries who arrived in greater numbers in the early 1800s made a serious effort to educate the Africans. But the aim of the missionary schools was to produce literate individuals who would take over minor positions in local churches. These schools served few Africans because they were only in coastal towns.

When the Europe's African colonies became more prosperous, more and more Europeans came to settle and work in Africa. The settlers demanded schools for their children. And at that time, the European officials also saw that their mega prosperity in Africa would depend on having a trained local workforce that would contribute greatly in the economies of their colonies. This led to establishment of government-sponsored schools all over Africa.

The schools opened at the time were mainly primary schools to train rural students agricultural skills while urban students were trained skills needed to work in crafts or as laborers in industries. There were few secondary schools for Africans and they mainly aimed

at training teachers or preparing individuals for lower level professional jobs such as nurses, railroad engineers or clerical workers. A few most gifted students might be trained for minor positions in the local government.

European administrators saw education as a way to make Africans more useful to their colonial system and enrichment, not to offer Africans opportunities for advancement and independence. That's why the European children had different well-funded schools to train them for appropriate career paths.

Before all these, Africa, as the rest of the world, was training children mainly practical life skills through the informal education which dates back to the emergence of mankind. These life skills included hunting, farming (mainly animal rearing), iron smiting and general life expectations such as respect and so on.

The introduction of the then novel modern formal education suppressed the informal one because it took Africa by surprise followed by excitement. It seemed a gold without mining, or a baby without pregnancy. Soon its gospel was preached in the whole continent leading to continuous soar in the school enrollment over decades till to date.

Let's now take a close look at the impacts of this modern formal education on the prosperity of Africa.

The modern formal education has numerous inevitable positive impacts on the continent's prosperity. Some of which include; increased level of literacy, improved connectivity with the rest of the world, improved economy due to mechanization of agriculture, industrialization, improved health care, to mention but a few.

WHERE HAVE WE GONE WRONG THEN?

Taking into account all the positive impacts of formal education, I would like to focus on the misinformation that we routinely give our young generations about education and future that is continuously stagnating the Africa's growth.

When formal education was introduced in Africa, the module and target was to train enough people to serve the community in different capacities e.g. teaching other people, preaching the word of God, reading and interpreting information for the then illiterate African communities, treating the sick, working in industries and so on. The colonial masters would later provide jobs for the trained people, hence, the emergence of the term, '**White Collar Jobs**' (WCJs). This means that the Africans already had their jobs, but the dirty collar ones such as hunting, farming etc. as we mentioned earlier.

Some Africans at the time learnt practical work such as building and carpentry to help the missionaries in the construction of churches, hospitals and schools. So, the curriculum that time was designed to solve the above problems and indeed, for the first few Africans who attained formal education that time, the **WCJs** in low-level positions were in plenty.

The first few one-eyed Africans (the employed) among the blind were the only outstanding people in the then poverty-stricken African communities in terms of appearance, wealth, intelligence, power and respect. This ignited the Africans' haste for formal education. And for decades, the trend continued with abundance of **WJCs**.

As I always say, the only direction of safety normally experiences stampedes. There was a stampede in the formal education since it appeared to be the only direction of safety. This would later lead to continuous widening of the lacuna in the scarcity of **WCJs**. And currently, 'unemployment' and 'joblessness' are no longer in any way new terms to that graduate in either the urban or rural setting, and neither are they to that illiterate grandmother back in the deepest part of your village of origin. Only that she knows them in that true African language.

This reminds me of the game we played in our childhood. It's called **Hide and Seek**. It's until now that I've come to pick a lesson from that interesting game. One person would close their eyes and wait for others to run and hide. They would then call him or her to go and search for them. The first person to be found would be the next to close his or her eyes.

As people ran to hide, the blindfolded person would listen to the direction of footsteps. The majority of players would run to one direction they deemed safest. So, the person seeking them would also run towards the direction the footsteps took, and being one of the players, the blindfolded one also knew the safest side where almost everyone would probably think of hiding in. That made it unsafe instead.

Conversely, there were some wise children who would not run far. They would use the sound peoples' feet made to enter stealthily like a cat and hide behind nearby scanty grass. The seeker would run after the majority footsteps not knowing there was a prey just a hand-stretch away. So, the remaining one in the nearby riskier place became safer than the ones in the thought safest place. Unfortunately, the children with such reasoning were about one percent or less in the games.

That game represents the real-life situation with which we are faced today. People still cling to the majority reasoning that solved the problems of our great grandparents. We believe the same approaches will solve the problems of today and tomorrow. I'm very sorry, they will not!

We are still stuck in the past, preaching the gospel of **WCJs**. Right from parents, teachers, neighbours, political, traditional and church leaders up to the career guiders most of whom I call career mis guiders due to the obsolete information they give our young generations in the name of guiding them. All these joint forces tell the young ones to study and be health workers, now we have overflow of unemployed health workers all over Africa. They tell them to become teachers, we now have uncountable jobless teachers. The same extends to social workers, bankers, accountants, plumbers, name them. All these are redundant unexploited labour forces yet very many other valuable fields lack skilled labour.

Universities all over Africa graduate hundreds of thousands of job seekers yearly yet the **WCJ** market is already overwhelmed by flooded labour force. Therefore, since majority are running to the believed safest place (**WCJs**), Mr. Unemployment runs and finds them there, just like in the hide and seek game. On the other hand, the ones who think like the few wise children in the hide and seek, remain safe in the self-employment in the undervalued sectors such as agriculture and other practical-skill works.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

First and most importantly, we should develop independent situational acumen without merely following the public opinion. That will help us to evaluate a situation carefully other than making a decision basing on ubiquitous beliefs.

We should always update our approaches to solving problems basing on the current and future expected situations other than clinging to a certain approach because it yielded some time back. What worked yesterday may not work today, and what works today may not work tomorrow. Learn from comedians. You can't repeat something funny several times and expect it to continue attracting more laughter like it did in the first joke. No, it can't!

We had some ignorant farmers and I don't know if we still have them, who would plant one type of crops in a particular garden every season because at one point they received a great harvest of that crop from the same garden. When the harvest starts dropping and the neighbour is harvesting heavily due to crop rotation, they start accusing the neighbour of witchcraft. They claim that the neighbour is bewitching their gardens, instead of finding out what is wrong about their farming methods.

In the same vain, we shouldn't blame the government for the joblessness of ourselves and children. Instead we should evaluate our **WCJs** approach that we've used for decades. We need to focus our approaches on self-employment and job creation. That doesn't exonerate our governments which also have the responsibility of guiding the community in the right direction that solves the problems of today.

The curriculum developers should consider designing a curriculum that emphasizes practical skills and independence other than servant-based one. That doesn't mean we should abolish the job seeking education completely but much emphasis is needed on the self-employment and job creation. And the curriculum also needs to be updated where need be at any time to suit the fast-changing world.

We should develop financial literacy among the young generations to stabilize the future economy of Africa. Our population is always taught to save money but less or no emphasis is put on investment. This has a very negative impact on the Africa's development.

We should make our children appreciate those undervalued sectors like farming, carpentry, tailoring, construction and others. These are the best and most lucrative sectors today yet we don't convince our children to appreciate them. I will write about these projects fully

one at a time in the next articles. The children should be made to visit and understand how valuable these projects are.

They have to look at the luxurious sofas they sit in, the nice cupboards they use, the nice beds they sleep in, etc. and know how much carpenters make out of them. They should imagine how much a tailor or seamstress earns; after making uniforms for a school or even more, after selling the expensive suits people wear, etc. They should imagine how much a farmer with a hundred pigs earns after selling each at a given amount. They should be able to imagine how much a poultry farmer who sells hundreds of trays in a day earns in a month. What about a builder who has contracts of building flats of hundreds of millions. Then the metal fabricator who makes thousands of beds for different schools, sells those expensive doors, windows, or gates, the play materials, etc. The baker selling tons of bread to homes daily. These are the basic financial literacy that we are supposed to teach the young generations of Africa.

We need to use the experience of the impact the COVID-19 has had on the job-based economy of Africa. The high risk of joblessness and total poverty post the pandemic. Others even starved to death. On the other hand, the well-established self-employed people remained safer than majority of the job seekers who became the first most vulnerable victims of the economic crisis. These should teach us to change our minds and strategies.

It takes the whole community to raise a child. Therefore, all stakeholders have to join hands and play their part in changing the education system of Africa from being job-based to being wealth creation-based. And let our children's creativity in any way be nurtured so that they can invent important things that help Africa and the whole world other than making them think invention is for the Western countries. These plus many more that you know can change Africa into the one we all desire to live in.

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