

Influence of Political and Cultural Factors on Education in Kenya: Approaches to Build Competencies

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Abstract

Education has received considerable attention worldwide; however, its low success rate in Kenya both in terms of quality and quantity warrants further investigation. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of political and cultural factors on education. The political factor constitutes government resource support, internet and policy on quality of teachers whereas the cultural factor focuses on early marriages, polygamy and female genital mutilations. Drawing on the theory of source-position-performance, source of education should be promoted through various approaches. In the paper we propose a couple of approaches to build capability.

Key words: social, culture, education and capability

Introduction

Africa experienced a massive growth of enrolment at all levels of education during the second half of the 20th century, especially since the 1970s. In fact, on average for Sub-Saharan Africa, gross enrolment rates at the primary level doubled from 40% in 1960 to almost 80% in 1995, with secondary level increasing eightfold, from 3.4% to 27%, during the same period (World Bank, 1999 *Annual Report*). The growth of education for females was even more impressive than for males and remains one of the highest worldwide (Sender 1999). Education stimulates economic growth and improves people's lives through many channels, namely: by increasing the efficiency of the labor force and thus increasing an individual's earning potential, by fostering democracy (Barro 1998) and thus creating better conditions for good governance, by improving health and reducing fertility, by enhancing equality (Aghion, Caroli and García-Peñalosa 1999). According to Mundi (2008), education is a fundamental human right for all people for improving quality of life and is also an essential tool of social and human development. According to UNICEF (2007), by 2005- 2006 as many as 93 million children were without access to education. The study continued to say that more than three quarters of all children out of school worldwide live in sub-Saharan Africa

and Asia. UNESCO (2005) argues that the level of a country's education is one of the key indicators of its level of development. Accordingly, African countries still encounter several hurdles in their quest to develop the education sector. Some of the hurdles include: culture, gender disparities, and poor quality (World Bank, 2000). Yet, the United Nations (UN) and World Bank have emphasized education particularly that of girls as being a sure way of yielding some of the highest returns of all development investments through elimination of hunger, poverty and gender disparities (UNDP, 2005) The EFA and the MDGs initiatives target development and poverty eradication through realization of access to quality education by 2015. However, it has been revealed that these goals fall far short of fulfillment, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2010). Furthermore, it is argued that even though there has been a significant increase in girls' enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa, this has been mainly at the primary level (World Bank, 2009). It is further reported that 30% out of the 71 million adolescents out of school in the world are in the Sub-Saharan Africa and most of them are girls [ibid] No wonder, the period between 2010 and 2020 has tactfully been declared a decade of the African Woman (Barasa, 2007). This initiative is to further entice girls in Africa to access more education. In Kenya, the government has committed herself to conform to educational sector development through several initiatives which include: constituting education commissions and task forces charged with curriculum restructure, (Achoka, 2003), provision of Free Primary Education (RoK, 1998), provision of Free Secondary Education (Malenya, 2008), legislation through the Children's Act (RoK, 2001) and the Constitution of Kenya (RoK, 2010).

Political factors

Education is extremely expensive and it needs government support and resources such as electricity, computers, internet access, etc. (Fuchs & Horak, 2008). In Kenya electricity costs in manufacturing and for domestic use are so high that they are generally said to be among the highest

in the world (Economic Survey, 2013). Although information technology (IT) professionals may consider optimizing the use of bandwidth, anti-virus software installation, and traceable usages, among others, the bandwidth is still expensive in Africa due to the lack of infrastructure and due to the weakening of local currency, making import of technology further expensive. Another possible reason for such reluctance may be the fact that people leave their home countries after receiving their education to work in more developed countries (Vinokur, 2006).

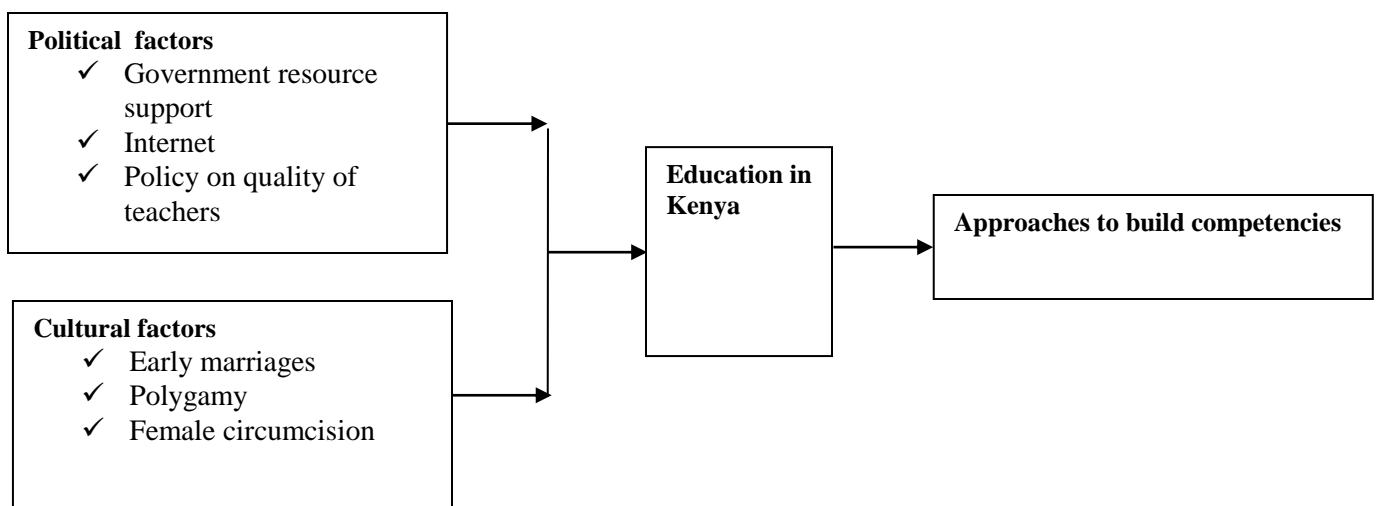
Africa lacks the broadband Internet. An eight-country study discovered the need for high bandwidths and low-cost telecommunications by setting up more government educational institutions (Venter, 2003). Africa has one percent of the world average of bandwidth per capita (Juma & Moyer, 2008). Most African institutions can only afford an average of 1.554 mbps (megabits per second), which is too low for even a small university given its users. The Internet Telecommunications Union report (2007) suggests that only about ten percent of communities have a wired telephone line, and only one percent of communities have access to the Internet.

Trained teachers are critical to education (Volery & Lord, 2000). Attracting high-quality teachers to schools in developing countries is an increasingly difficult task. The number of qualified teachers is particularly small in sub-Saharan Africa and the salary of the teachers are also often too low. Therefore, the schools are forced to hire unqualified and ineffective teachers who may not even show up sometimes in schools (Lazaru, 2005).

Cultural factors

According to Manali (2011), culture is seen as a system of social control, wherein people shape their standards and

behavior. Goodman (2009) argues that culture comprises of the distinctive habits of a people in that it performs both a unifying and, more importantly, a directive role and that it involves the cultivation of a people towards a common end. The genus of culture can be derived from this: the distinctive habits of a given people. However, people have many different habits. Specifically, culture refers to those habits which bind a group of people together into a single group for a common end and this marks the specific difference. In the developing nations such as Afghanistan, India, Ethiopia, Gambia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, the literature indicates that cultural challenges persist and act against academic excellence in education. These cultural challenges include: early marriages, family preference to educate boys instead of girls, and family obligations such as helping their mothers to participate in household chores (Kimaru, 2007). The developing world therefore has the challenge of overcoming negative culture in order to effectively improve students education. Sichinga (2005) investigated the major cause of low enrolment of Yao children in Malawian schools. The findings indicated the major causes as early marriages, domestic chores, poverty, lack of exposure, community's (such as Muslim culture) negative attitude towards education and lack of educated people serving as role models in society. Traditional initiation rites such as circumcision, payment of bride price and early marriages have been identified as some of the causes of dropping out of school and poor enrolment. A survey carried by world vision (2010) in East Pokot and Baringo East districts in Rift valley shows that challenges against girls enrolment in the area are mainly Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early marriages as well as polygamy. All these activities are culturally oriented and they negatively affect education. However, culture also plays a major role in development of curriculum.



There is low enrolment rate at secondary level especially in marginal areas such as Tharaka South Sub-County. This might have been contributed by factors like poverty levels, inadequate education facilities, social cultural factors including Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages (Ngware, Onsomu, Muthaka, & Manda, 2007). According to Shiundu and Omulando(1992), in planning and development of curriculum it is important to analyze the kind of knowledge, skills and competence that youths in society will need so that they can cope with tasks and roles in that society and the problems prevalent in the society.

Approaches to build competencies

Introduction of learning management systems

Recent advent of Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as blackboard, eCollege, and Web CT, in the undergraduate setting has made it easy to provide online user education, that is, web-based augmentation to traditional (face-to-face) classroom instruction (Rutter & Matthews, 2002). This hybrid or mixed delivery approach lets instructors combine the advantages of online class learning with the benefits of face-to-face interaction with relatively limited technological sophistication on their part (Edling, 2000). Preliminary reports suggest that the hybrid approach holds significant benefits for students and instructors, regardless of their level of technological expertise (Black, 2001; Van de Ven, 2002) and regardless of whether the classroom is hard-wired for live Internet access (Bento & Bento, 2000). Although teaching hybrid courses may increase time demands and, in some cases, result in a loss of control, many faculty enjoy this approach because it allows for significant flexibility and benefits in instruction. A hybrid approach may improve the efficiency of classroom management, especially for large classes (Papo, 2001), increase the degree of student-led learning (Saunders & Klemming, 2003), improve student morale and overall satisfaction of the learning experience (Byers, 2001), enhance information skills acquisition and student achievement (Kendall, 2001; Novitzki, 2000).

Classroom community

Effective instructors have come to realize that building a sense of community is necessary for successful learning outcomes (Gunawardena, 1994; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; McLellan, 1999; Wegerif, 1998; Wiesenber & Hutton, 1996). Many instructors build a sense of connectedness and social presence in online courses through verbal and nonverbal (textual) immediacy behaviors (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Vrasidas & McIsaac, 1999), which, in turn, may be experienced vicariously by students in the learning process (LaRose & Whitten, 2000). Additionally, this may enhance students' opportunities for content-related exchanges.

Conclusion

This paper has identified, examined and discussed influence of social and cultural factors on education in Kenya. A theoretical review has been made on existing literature relevant to conventional approaches to strategy relation to education and cultural factors. The authors have identified and examined social cultural factors that have continued to affect education and recommend strategies that can build capabilities. Among the key strategic capabilities identified, examined and discussed are learning management systems and class room community. Given the rapid change of business environments, the authors recommend that specific studies be conducted on the thematic area to give it an in depth view.

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