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ANALYSING EDUCATION POLICIES FOR THE FUTURE: REALISING THE

VISION OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN 2030

Abstract
The future of economic development depends on people who are equipped with competencies and skills that are needed for the knowledge economy.   To ensure the sustainability of economic growth, higher education institutions are expected to open up opportunities and provide high level of education to a large number of people. Distance and online education based model has proved to be efficient in expanding access into education by providing a cost effective training to both under skilled and unskilled people. The provision of education at this scale is even more critical in African countries where there is a huge need for skilled and trained workforce to enhance economic growth and global competitiveness. If the problem of capacity for knowledge economy is not addressed, many of African countries may not realise the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – "towards an inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all". To achieve this goal, there is a need for national education policies to provide direction on how this goal can be reached. In this paper the Futures Research Methodology is employed to assist us understand probable development in education and to articulate and work towards the desired outcome. This will be done through analysing national education policies for Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa in order to identify strategies and actions that may impact on the implementation of policies in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

This growing need of reforming the education systems in order to address the need for high skilled qualified workers requires educational institutions to consider the future workers in the knowledge economy. "Education must play a role in developing a planetary vision in securing life chances, aspirations and futures for young people," (Palova, 2013, p. 731). Therefore there is an urgent need for education systems to transform in order to support the new sustainable development agenda, according to GEM Report (2016), 'education as usual' will not suffice. This report also shows that "education will not deliver its full potential to catapult the world forward unless participation rates dramatically improve, learning becomes a lifelong pursuit and education systems fully embrace sustainable development" (GEM Report, 2016). In most low income countries in Africa, the participation rate is less than 5 percent whereas in developed countries, higher education participation rates is more than 50 percent (Alsbach, et al. 2009). Many of these countries are still battling with high illiteracy rates, lowest participation rates in higher education, glaring digital divide, and massive demand for higher education and huge capacity development needs for the knowledge economy. If all these problems persist, many African countries may not realise the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal towards an inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Education and training for the knowledge economy has become a major priority in national policies. The role of policies is to respond to national economic needs and social development goals of a country.   The economic policy goal approach is built on an understanding that higher education should lay a foundation for economic productivity by providing skills and knowledge for high-quality workforce (OECD, 2003). Labour markets especially in developing countries have benefited from workers who have high levels of education. Frye (2008) argues that it is the quality of education that leads to economic benefits. Therefore higher education institutions are expected to contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the country and the student employability. By so doing, they will also be contributing to the social development goals which are concerned with providing life skills, increasing civic participation, and promoting the culture of peace and non-violence (OECD, 2003).

The recognition of higher education qualification provide the basis of preference of employment especially in the knowledge economy (Alsbach et al. 2009; Frye, 2008). The education sector has a responsibility to be in gear with 21st century challenges and aspirations through providing the right type of skills and knowledge (Munoz, et al, 2013). To achieve this sustainable development goal, according to Pavlova (2003), higher

education needs to be transformative by being more concerned with "why we are teaching than with how or what we teach" (p. 735). The "why" question challenges higher education institutions to adapt and reform in order to increase the relevance and quality of their educational input to students and the labour market (Hooker, 1997).

Since national policies are essential for providing guidelines, this study will analyse national education policies from Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa to identify strategies and actions that may impact on the implementation of policies in line with the 2030 SDG's. The challenge faced by these three countries is about reconstruction and reformation of the education sector. To achieve this goal, policy need to be formulated to address the "reconstruction programmes that combat the deterioration of the physical and human potentialities of the education" according to Jallade, et al (2001). Most national education policies are driven by the need to improve economic development and promote social cohesion. Therefore they are essential for the formulation of the educational goals of the country. To analyse these policies, Future Research Methodology will be employed to assist us understand probable development and to articulate and work towards the desired outcome. The Futures Research Methodology is "the scientific study of possible, probable and desirable future developments, the options for shaping them, and their roots in past and present" (Kosow & Gabner 2007, 181).

Policies

The desire to develop the country through growing the economy and improving the social conditions of citizens is often used to justify the investment in education reforms (Kozma, 2005). Policies are made up of predictive statements of desired outcomes which provide a vision for how the education system should and might look like in future (Jallade, et al. 2001; Pavlova, 2013). Hence, the development of government policies is often guided by legislations, regulations and the need to reform education systems in order to address needs of the country. These policies are referred to as strategic policies because they also provide ways in which goals may be reached. Therefore, the focus of this study will be on analysing strategic education policies.

The rationale for choosing strategic rather than operational policies is that the former provides a lens of where the country wants to be in future while the latter tend to focus on structures and systems that needs to be in place to support the strategic goals. While strategic education policies may focus on preparing future workforce to support economic growth of the country, operational policies may spell out the competencies and skills needed to support the strategic goal (Kozma, 2005 and Jallade et al. 2001). However, clearly formulated strategic policies may play an important operational role as a reference for action (Jallade et al. 2001).

The national education policies are strategic in nature because they are setting goals and provide a shared vision about education in a particular country. Kozma (2005) argues that without a strategic policy to provide a strong educational purpose, the higher education sector will not know what to priorities or what to focus when developing human resources for the future they hope for. Strategic policies focuses mainly on advancing education reform by ensuring that curriculum should be developed in such a way that it prepares students for the knowledge economy (OECD, 2003).

Methodology

The national education policies of Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa were chosen as units of analysis. These countries were chosen because they were unable to meet the 2015 United Nations Millennium Development Goals and they may be unlikely to reach the SDGs if they do not strategically think about the future. The Futures Research Methodology is used in this study not only to predict but to articulate developments that may impact on desired outcomes (Lang n.d). Although there are several policy analysis methods that can be followed when using the Futures Research Methodology, this study will focus on Emerging Issues Analysis which is used to determine likely issues that may develop and require a policy response (Dator, 2009; Langn n.d). This type of analysis tries to take something obvious in the present which could grow into an opportunity in the future. In the nutshell, the emerging issues analysis provides solutions to "present problems lying in future opportunities" (Dator, 2009).

The idea is to gather information about the past and the current situation in order to make prognosis of the future (Dator, 2009). These methodologies are about predictability based on the knowledge from the past and the present. However, our present knowledge may not be adequate for predicting the future because what we know

now may not be known in future (Kosow & Gabner 2007). Despite this, we still need to set goals and plan for the future.

The major challenges of education in the countries chosen is that they were unable to meet the previous United Nations Millennium Development Goals and they may be unlikely to reach the SDGs if they do not strategically think about the future. Seven national polices that dealt with issues in higher education sector were chosen for analysis. In Kenya, *The Policy Framework for University Education in Kenya (2012), and National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy for Education and Training (2006);* Rwanda: *Higher Education Policy (2008); ICT in Education Policy (2016);* South Africa*: White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014); White paper on e-Education (2004); Policy for provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the context of integration (2014).*

These documents were read several times and then analysed according to the context of the country in terms of its history and background. The idea was to pull out issues that emerged from the past and that may influence the current situation. The policy objectives were also analysed in relation to the goal that the policy wants to achieve.

Table 1: The columns illustrate the past, the present with 2 columns – the first column was concerned with the current situation and the other column focused on the policy objectives. The last one addressed the future the countries' aspire to become.

	Past	Present		Future
		Current situation	Policy objectives	
Kenya Vision 2030	Reforming the colonial education to the respond to the needs of the country	Rising enrollment Increase access while ensuring quality Enhancing equity Relevance of education to the job market Strengthening knowledge and innovation Contributes to the socio-economic development Producing high level skills and knowledge Enhance global competitiveness	Establishment of open universities and expansion of distance education Leveraging the affordances of ICT's Investment in ICT infrastructure Provide financial assistance to university students Incorporate the needs of the society Prioritise national development Increase the number of graduate researchers Employment creation	Realizing Vision 2030 To be a prosperous Knowledge economy that is internationally competitive Democratic newly industrialized nation
Rwanda Vision 2020	Higher education was not prioritized in the post-colonial period Political crisis	Increasing demand for higher education provision is a priority Relevance of higher education provision Higher education is largely undergraduate Postgraduate provision and research is underdeveloped Shortage of qualified staff to work in higher education Low participation rates, particularly girls Poorly prepared	Widen participation to enable access Target ICTs to accelerate economic growth Strengthen partnership with all sectors of education Provide ICT enhanced open and flexible learning systems Increase the provision of education through ODeL Build capacity of higher education staff Produce graduates who are competent in new knowledge and skills Industrial attachments an practical work	To transform Rwanda into a middle-income economy To build a knowledge-based and technological society

		school leavers Relevancy of higher education to the job market	Undertake research and engage in other knowledge transfer activities Supporting research and knowledge transfer for sustainable development Increase ICT penetration and usage at all educational levels	
South Africa Vision 2030	Since 1994, policies were developed to transform the education sector. Oldest distance education provision (142 years)	Increase enrollment Improving student access, success and throughput rates Focus on groups that were previously advantaged Digital divide Lack of developed infrastructure and connectivity for ICTs Capacity building for ICT use Encourage and support the generation of open electronic content resource development and distribution Distance education provides greater access at lower costs Growing convergence between distance and contact provision	A single, coordinated post – school education training system Increasing diversity of provision Increasing and improving the quality of research Expansion of distance education to complement campus based provision Development of scarce and critical skills for economic development Cooperative relationship between education and the workplace Responsive to the needs of broader societal and developmental objectives Access to ICT infrastructure and connectivity	To develop South Africa and improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people

Kenya
The policies that were drawn following the independence of Kenya in 1963, were meant to address the problem of racially divided education system. They focused mainly on promoting national unity and "inculcate in the learner the desire to serve the nation" (Simuyu, 2001). These early polices were further criticized for not responding to the labour markets. Most of the curriculum remained academic and lacked orientation towards employment. The early policies encouraged elitism and individualistic attitudes amongst learners, something that considered incompatible to the African socialist milieu (Simuyu, 2001). The number of unemployed school leavers continued to grow. The government was under pressure to change the education system to include more vocational courses with the aim of orientating youth towards self-employment.

The rising demand for higher education led to the establishment of more universities. Currently, Kenya has more than 40 public and private universities (MoE, 2012). Despite this, Kenya faces challenges of increasing demand; overcrowding, insufficient public funding, lack of infrastructure (poorly equipped laboratories and libraries; rigid management structures and a curricula that is non-responsive to present day needs of the labour market (Nyangau, 2014). Most public higher education institutions in Kenya produce graduates who are ill-equipped to compete effectively in the global economy (Odhiambo, 2011). In fact the curricula in many universities are poorly aligned to the demands of the employment needs of the knowledge economy.

The most recent Vision 2030 Kenya's strategic document aims at turning the economy into a middle-income country in twenty years. This is guided by an understanding that quality higher education is a critical important driver to economic growth (Nyangau, 2014). To reach the 2030 goal, Nyangau (2014) argues that "fundamental reforms are needed for the system to play a catalytic role in in transitioning Kenya from a subsistence economy

to a knowledge economy" (p.12-13). There are quite a number of policy documents that have been developed to address this need.

Rwanda

Since the cessation of the civil war, the government of Rwanda "has made tremendous progress in modernizing its education system" (Otara, 2013). To address this challenge, the government developed two documents, the Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy aimed at creating an educated workforce with technological skills. The idea is "to become a technology hub in Africa". The investment and focus in ICT is premised on the belief that this will ramp up the quality of the education system in the shortest possible time" (MINEDUC, 2010). Rwanda is one of few countries in Africa that has polices on ICT for Education.

Following the 1994 genocide which destroyed physical infrastructure and left the nation robbed of a generation of trained workforce, higher education is viewed as a source for citizens to develop high level competencies needed to rehabilitate the country from the threatening situation that exists in all sectors of the economy (MINEDUC, 2010). Obura (2003) and Hilker (2011) reported that about 70% of teachers were killed or jailed and more than 70% children witnessed violent injury or death. As a result, many teachers who are in classrooms are not qualified to teach and this contributes to low quality of education (Hilker, 2011). Therefore higher education is expected to fulfil the role of transforming the citizen into skilled human capital for the socio-development growth of the country (Mbabazi, 2013). In Vision 2020, the government of Rwanda sets ambitious plans to create a growing knowledge system based on skilled workforce which will operate in a knowledge based economy (Mbabazi, 2013; MINEDUC, 2010).

South Africa

The current government that came into power in 1994 inherited a deeply divided education systems created to serve different racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, the new government was faced with a mammoth task of bringing together eight education departments which followed different curricula and offered different standards of learning quality (Alias, 2003; Boughey, 2003 & Muthivhi et.al, 2014). In an attempt to address this problem, the government came up with the South African Qualifications Act which established the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) in 1995 (Boughey, 2003). These two entities were established with the intention of integrating education and training; promote lifelong learning; skills development; progression through the education system, as well as addressing issues of equity and social justice (Allais, 2003; Boughey, 2003; Hooker, 1997).

These systems were "put in place for schooling, higher education and industrial training, with the intention of lifting South Africa on to high-skills, high-growth road to economic development "(Ensor, 2003, p. 326). This was seen by the government as way to integrate an education system that was fragmented along racial lines at every level; develop curricula that addresses the needs of the country; upgrade teachers and build management structures in schools (Allias, 2003; Muthivhi, et al. 2014). Despite all these efforts, the lack of coherence and vision created by the proliferation of departments whose role is to look after different education sectors in the country exacerbated the problem. The Higher Education sector is looked after by the Department of Higher Education and Training. The schools systems are serviced by the Department of Basic Education while the Vocational Training was under the Department of Labour until recently when they were moved to the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Since the post-apartheid political dispensation, there has been a proliferation of policy and strategic documents to systematically and substantively address the problem of education (Muthivhi et al, 2014). Therefore the 2015 National Development Plan calls for building new skills and capacities that are needed for the knowledge economy. There is no doubt that there is a need to produce students who are going to add value to the economy of the country. Education institutions are challenged now more than before to accommodate students seeking higher education.

Common factors

An analysis of educational policies from the three developing countries; Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa found that these three countries have common goals of increasing the number of students in higher education; providing quality education; and creating jobs as the necessary needs of the country. It is also expected that higher education institutions will provide skills that are required for the development of the economy. The

emergence of the knowledge economy partly attributed the rapid growth of technologies has led to an increase demand for new skills and competencies. Academic and skills training has great importance and relevance in the three countries where there is a huge need for skilled and trained workforce to enhance productivity and remain competitive in the global economy (OECD, 2003). As the world changes, educational institutions are challenged to address the new realities brought on by technologies, globalisation and the labour market.

The use of ICTs in education was also considered essential for the development of all these three countries. Although ICTs has had major impact in developed nations where technology has permeated every part of their lives, there is growing need of ICTs in the developing countries. Findings from the OECD report (2003) point towards technology and innovation as important drivers of recent economic development and a determinant factor of employment growth. In analyzing the link ICT based education policies, Kozma (2005) found that policies that had a clear vision on "how the availability of new technologies could increase productivity, improve the quality of life and enrich culture" were more successful than those who did not have a clear goal (p.149). Kozma (2005) argues that well-meaning policies may not achieve what they were set out to do if there is no clear vision.

Role of Open Distance Learning

In all three countries, Open and distance education was identified as the feasible approach to improving professional and academic skills for people who are already working and those who could not access contact institutions for a variety of reasons. This ODL based model has proved to be efficient in expanding access into higher education by providing cost effective training to a large number of people. Many countries in Africa are now looking at ODL as the only route for addressing the challenge of high enrolment numbers in higher education. The main principle of openness in education is to address the fundamental right of access to education as outlined in the UNESCO's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Unlike Rwanda and Kenya, South Africa has a long history of more than 140 years of distance education in South Africa and many people have gone through. The rationale for the expansion of higher education in Africa is rooted in a view of a global knowledge economy led to an increase demand for new skills and competencies.

Conclusion

To ensure the sustainability of economic growth, higher education institutions are expected to work with other stakeholders such as business, industries, governments, and nongovernmental organizations to identify competencies needed for the knowledge economy as well as influence education policies and investments. The education policy goal approach is built on an understanding that higher education should lay a foundation for economic productivity by providing skills and knowledge for high-quality workforce. Open education institutions have the responsibility, more than ever before, to integrate sustainable economic development by producing students who are going to add value in the economy of the country.

The focus of the policies from these three countries was on economic growth and social development. The government strategies of the national economic growth, social development, and job creation in these three countries have received prominence over time. However, the countries face challenges of low levels of funding for higher education, lack of infrastructure, insufficient knowledge and skills to drive the education vision. All these strategies require major investments both financial and human. If these issues are not addressed in the next four years for Rwanda and 14 years for Kenya and South Africa, these countries may not be able reach their sustainable development goals.

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