

THE NEGLECTED FACTOR: REDIRECTING INVESTMENTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Africa is home to 54 countries with over 700 million people, yet there are fewer than 300 universities and colleges across the continent. This paper critically examines the current condition of higher education in Africa and proposes redirecting investments in Africa to higher education to assist in developing leaders across the continent for social, economic and political freedom. By building an argument that the very

machinery for the development of human capital has been neglected in Africa, this paper focuses on the following: the current condition of higher education in Africa, the lack of access to higher education in Africa, higher education and leadership development in Africa, and the way forward to promote higher education in Africa.

Key Words: *Leadership, Africa, Ghana, Higher Education, Leadership Development*

INTRODUCTION

Despite declaring “the year of higher education” in Africa in the 1960’s and the declaration by Kwame Nkrumah that the intellectual spotlight of national life reflects the social, economic, cultural and political aspirations of the people, the continent of Africa still awaits the realization of these statements (Banya & Elu, 2001). Though institutions of higher education in Africa bear the name “university,” most fall short of meeting global standards for institutions of higher learning. Students sleep and attend lectures in overcrowded rooms and lecture halls (Banya & Elu, 2001), library shelves are bare without relevant books, and science laboratories lack essential equipment for experiments (Teferra & Altback, 2004). Today, less than three percent of all Africans have access to higher education after the completion of secondary school (& Altback, 2004). While the budget of single universities in several industrialized nations surpasses the entire national budget for higher education in many African countries; likewise the overall spending for higher education on the entire continent of Africa is significantly less than endowment funds of some of the largest and most prestigious universities in the western world (& Altback, 2004). Nevertheless, amid the many challenges higher educational institutions in Africa face in the twenty-first century, higher education still remains the primary means for developing human capital and future leaders for the continent. Higher education continues to be a globally recognized authority for sustainable development across the globe, and Africa is no exception (Abu & Ogehenekohwo, 2010).

For Africa to succeed economically, ethnically, and politically, it must have strong post secondary segments and scholastic institutions that are central in order to create a desired future. Whether African countries advance and become more industrialized will depend on developing and training people and the organization of human movement. Though capital investments, natural resources, and foreign and worldwide trade are relevant in the process of economic augmentation in Africa, none of the above is as important as the development of Africa’s own

manpower (Banya & Elu, 2001). Thus, developing higher educational institutions across the continent deserves the utmost attention.

The Neglected Factor

African countries are far behind their Asian counterparts who gained independence during the same period. There is a noticeable disparity between the two regions within their industrialization and economic growth rates (Kwadwo, Okrah & Adabor, 2010). The very core machinery responsible providing and developing the economic, social, political and human capital across the continent of Africa has been neglected for over 50 years (Banya & Elu, 2010). Since higher education is the sole preparer of leaders who administer governmental bureaucracies, political parties, economic agencies, and private sector industries who contribute towards sustainable development (Abu & Ogehenekohwo, 2010), one would assume higher education would be a top priority for national governments across Africa as well as major bilateral donor organizations. Furthermore, the current challenge of higher education in Africa has not been adequately covered in the applicable literature (Banya & Elu, 2010). Unfortunately, major donors like the World Bank, the British Government, and the Rockefeller Foundation have decided to cut back their support and investment in higher education in Africa for several reasons, notably: African higher education is seen as elitist focused and the desire to reduce dependency on Western organizations for monetary support for higher education in Africa (Banya & Elu, 2010). The above, therefore, calls for a diligent analysis of the reasons behind Africa's failure to keep up with the rest of the industrialized world (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). The one key missing factor in this case is the overall lack of adequate investment in higher education by national governments, bilateral donor agencies and other global agencies that focus on higher education.

The Current Conditions of Higher Education in Africa

The condition of universities in Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa is deplorable—lack of books, facilities, adequate living conditions for resident students, and more. Although these conditions have persisted since the 1970's, they have not been addressed. Yet, young Africans continue to pursue higher education in most parts of Africa (Lebeau, 2008). Existing universities across the continent are struggling with ineffective, inadequate, and highly bureaucratic structures that often hinder smooth operations of these institutions. University staff and faculty lack the required qualifications, the appropriate training and preparation, and remuneration to deliver in their areas of specialization. Most of these universities still rely on unproductive, inefficient, and outdated management and administrative infrastructure (Teferra & Altback, 2004). These universities are characterized by congested classrooms and hostels, limited computer access, and little or no access to relevant equipment, supplies and materials (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). Not surprisingly, these conditions make it difficult for students and faculty to perform.

Access to Higher Education in Africa

The challenge of access to higher education is significantly evident across the continent of Africa. In virtually all African countries, demand for access to higher education is growing rapidly, straining the resources of already-overburdened higher educational institutions (Teferra & Altback, 2004). Most of the issues triggering the lack of access are an absence of amenities due to the high demand for higher education across the continent (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). Case in point; Ghana has a population of over 24 million people with six public universities, one major private university, and seventeen university colleges. The percent of Ghanaians enrolled in higher education is less than 3%, while in its Malawi 0.5% and in Tanzania it's as low as 0.3%. In Ghana, The University of Science and Technology was able to accommodate only 6,868 applicants out of 17,438 representing 39.38% of the applications received in 2007. In the same year, the University of Ghana admitted just 7,500 applicants of the 16,000 who applied for admission, which represented 46.9% and the University of Cape Coast admitted 3,908 students out of the 13,000 applicants representing a 30% acceptance rate in Ghana (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). Millions of talented and gifted young men and women cannot progress towards a bright future due the lack of higher educational opportunities across the continent. The future of Ghana and Africa lies in the hands of these young men and women who are denied access to higher education.

Higher Education and Leadership Development in Africa

The need for leadership development across the continent of Africa has never been so urgent, a need that can be addressed through higher educational institutions. For Africa to compete effectively in a world that is increasingly dominated by knowledge and information (Teferra & Altback, 2004), the continent has no option but to deliberately, tirelessly, and forcefully overhaul its current and potential institutions of higher education so that universities can be raised to a standard where they can compete globally. This calls for a considerable amount of national African and university budgets to be committed to designing institutions of higher learning that address building capacity, support innovative behavior and a spirit of entrepreneurship, which ultimately facilitates the development of needed ethical leaders across the continent (Abu & Ogehenekohwo, 2010). Most African universities still adopt teaching and learning methods that encourage rote memorization and repetition and are devoid of a culture of critical and analytical thinking. This trend must be changed if the goal is to produce leaders and elites to manage governmental bureaucracies, political systems, economic agencies and private sector industries. Universities in Africa must become a haven for developing well-trained and effective leaders with strong decision-making skills. This demands relevant curricula and faculty and staff who are prepared to devote time and resources to training and equipping a new generation of leaders across the continent of Africa (Abu & Ogehenekohwo, 2010).

Every country's economic growth depends on its human capital, its relevant knowledge which is primarily developed during the highest level of education university education (Gyimah-Brempong, Paddison & Mitiku, 2006). Moreover, quality higher education can lead to the creation of relevant knowledge and a better understanding of the existing problems in most parts of Africa when addressing long-term solutions for the benefit of the entire African continent. Eventually, this will lead to innovation, invention, creativity, development and the creation of welfare, which African lacks currently (Abu & Ogehenekohwo, 2010).

The Way Forward for African Higher Education

Much has been said about the lack of support for higher education by multinational and bilateral agencies and private foundations in Africa due to recent changes that were implemented by the World Bank calling for investments in African higher education to be shifted towards lower levels of education (Banya & Elu, 2001). Unquestionably, the need for higher education in Africa cannot be taken for granted, bearing in mind the return on investment, the impact on social and economic growth, the improvement of the political infrastructure, and the creation of information and knowledge wealth (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). But the question still remains: who must be responsible for improving higher education in African countries? The task of educating Africans must obviously reside with the people of Africa and the African governments. African governments must deliberately focus on improving higher educational infrastructure such as libraries, computer laboratories, classrooms, and accommodation for students (Okrah & Adabor). Financial resources must be channeled toward enhancing current institutions of higher education rather than remaining vulnerable to embezzlement by university officials (Teferra & Altback, 2004). Thus, the way forward for African higher education is by redirecting financial investments, putting funds towards revamping all existing higher educational institutions and the founding and development of new ones that meet expected global standards for universities. Both political and university leaders must re-define themselves as leaders so they are willing to lead a life of servant leadership for the purpose of meeting the growing need for higher education to enhance effective leadership development in African today.

The local and global church must assume a significant role in the development and maintenance of quality higher educational institutions across Africa. The church has a major role to play developing and training future leaders in Africa. Africa is plagued with corruption and misappropriation of national funds, and therefore the church's role in developing leaders with sound moral principles is vital (Ringenberg, 2006). The church must promote the development and founding of new institutions of higher education (Okrah & Adabor, 2010). With the recent shift in policy by the World Bank and other bilateral agencies, existing African universities and national governments must seek to partner with the aforementioned organizations for support in order to better the conditions of higher education in Africa today.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To say the need for higher education across the continent of Africa is serious is an understatement. The issue at hand is damaging to the future of the entire continent of Africa. The current social, economic, and political crisis within parts of Africa can be reduced drastically through the development of required human resources. Therefore, how Africa trains its leaders, directly affects the future of its people. Current institutions of higher education must answer the call and overhaul their system and operations. At the same time, governments, bilateral agencies, churches and other international donor agencies that focus on higher education must redirect significant levels of their investment towards higher education to assist in the process of impacting Africa's future. This paper has only touched a "tip of the iceberg." There is a need for more research to be conducted, and papers and articles written and published regarding the need for higher education in Africa. The time to change a lack of higher education in Africa is NOW.

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