

## Research Paper



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## THE EVOLUTION OF GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN RWANDA- AN ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he education system in Rwanda was highly informal before colonialism and before the coming of European missionaries in Rwanda. Educational reforms took place that was prompted by the concerns over Human Resource development. The eminent reality of agriculture and natural resources scarcity and rural youth unemployment was becoming unbearable. This paper attempts to analyse the growth of education in Rwanda and importance of employment generation for development.

**KEY WORDS:** Education system, Rwanda, TVET, Youth skills

### INTRODUCTION

Education can be defined as a system that has a developmental effect on the cognizance, character or physical ability of an individual (Burcu, 2012). In its technical sense, education is viewed as a process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another, Burcu (P.89). A World Bank study cited by Hawrylenko views education as key in preventing conflict and is of utmost importance in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation process (World Bank, 2005, Hawrylenko, 2010).

### EDUCATION SYSTEM BEFORE COLONIAL PERIOD IN RWANDA

The education system in Rwanda was highly informal before colonialism and before the coming of European missionaries in Rwanda. The elders were responsible for teaching their children moral and social values demonstrated in stories, dance and other means of imparting knowledge on the young. When catholic missionaries came to Rwanda, many schools and church sprung up throughout the country. The first school was introduced in 1900; Germans and Belgians colonizers taking the lead in the education system. They participated most especially in funding the designing of the curriculum.

The Germans colonized Rwanda first, nonetheless, they lost the colony by end of the First World War, and as such had no influence on Rwanda's educational system. In 1919 the League of Nations gave Belgium the territory and it was from here that they took over the administration of

schools. But generally, formal education was best left to the missionaries to manage. In the 1800s white fathers established a school near the palace; where the King of Rwanda resided. And by the end of the First World War almost twelve schools had been established. Within the periods of 1919 to 1943, Belgian Presbyterians, seventh day Adventist, Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals and Methodists had come to Rwanda as well. Never less, the Catholics continued with their prominent role in education.

The Catholic Church set the educational policies with the aim of developing an African Christian Society. The white fathers wanted to teach Rwandans high quality education because they were trying to create an African Clergy. In other words, the education at the time met the needs of the missionaries and colonizers at the expense of the community. However, other schools were put up by the colonial government themselves. Between 1923-1925 they established four government schools. The schools were responsible for training clerks, aides and other low level posts in the government. However, sooner than later, the schools were found expensive and they closed down. The Belgian administration devised ways of controlling the church. The schools were transformed as government schools but managed by missionaries. The Belgians offered them incentives such as contracts and subsidies.

After 1945, Rwanda became a United Nations trusteeship. The UN raised strong arguments about Belgians colonial schools; that they were too influenced by religion. Further criticisms were also raised especially the lack of



provision of access to higher education for Rwandans. The Belgians response included initiating improvements in teacher qualifications, teaching materials and inspections but remained adamant in widening access to higher education.

### AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Rwanda received independence in 1962. At this time Rwanda had seized forty secondary schools and six seminaries and thirty-four ecoles libres subsidies. Majority of these schools were owned by religious churches. Nonetheless, the constitution of 1962 professed that primary schools must be free and all children were obliged to attend. In 1963 the new government established a national university. With minor reforms in curriculum and secondary and university training, the formal education system became the responsibility of the new government.

After independence and during the second republic in 1973-1994 the military regime introduced "iringaniza" or (quotas). This policy was derived from an article of public law and administrated the transition from primary to secondary school. Basing on this policy pupils were selected to join secondary schools based on the marks, and the points received after examination, continuous assessments, regional quotas, ethnic quotas and gender quotas.

Again, in 1979, yet another educational reform took place that was prompted by the concerns over Human Resource development. The eminent reality of agriculture and natural resources scarcity and rural youth unemployment was becoming unbearable. Therefore the reforms were meant to "modernize, offer skills and make education democratic" Teaching in Kinyarwanda; local language and Rwandese culture was emphasized. The reforms also wanted to remove double shift schooling but unfortunately this was unsuccessful. The post-independence era was problematic in terms of the school vacancies available for students to proceed from primary to secondary education. In 1990, less than ten percent were lucky to join secondary schools. The rest were eliminated because of lack of vacancies in schools.

In 1991, the seventh and eighth grades were moved from the primary to the secondly level. This introduced a bigger number of space between the level of education of those who had access to secondary schools and those who did not. Primary education was free and obligatory, but had hidden costs that parents had to incur. These were some fees, uniform and other indirect costs; which to a poor man could hinder him/her to send their children to school.

### POST THE GENOCIDE (After 1994)

During the war and Genocide, precisely on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1994, the president of Rwanda; Habyarimana's plane was crashed down with gun shots. What followed immediately after was mass killings of the ethnic group Tutsi which left an approximate of 1,000,000 people dead. Two million people had fled to the neighboring countries including Burundi, the Congo, Tanzania and Uganda. Another one million people were displaced internally. This left women and children as heads of the families. Girls and women were left pregnant from rape. Just before the war, there were 1,836 schools in the country but during the war 65% were reported to have been damaged. Just 648 schools were functional after the war, while 1188 needed urgent repair. Some of the school buildings acted as "Home" for the refugees who were returning from Burundi and the Congo, as well as the military forces and displaced people. To make matters worse all of the schools had been looted and robbed.

In Rwanda, teachers were respected professionals and during the war they became a target for killers. Regrettably, teachers themselves were perpetrators of the Genocide. Some teachers were involved in assassination of fellow teachers and pupils alike. The pupils were also not innocent in the act. In the end, what was left was a total mess of the educational System.

But, the ministry reopened primary schools in September in 1994 and secondary classes for the twelfth grade in the next month such that the students could get certificates for classes they finished before the Genocide started in April. The new government put up laws in the educational policy that prohibited any kind of discrimination and abolished ethnic and identity cards that showed the regions where teachers and students originated. While the new government concentrated on the process of rebuilding the school system, donors provided school supplies and money for the training of teachers.

Moreover, the Ministry of education has identified three goals in order to achieve its mission of contributing to the development of human capital for the socio-economic development of Rwanda. The goals include (1) promoting access to education at all levels, (2) improving the quality of education and training and (3) strengthening the relevance of education and training to meet labour market demands.

Education equity is emphasized across all the three goals to ensure that disadvantaged students, such as girls, the poor and the disabled have access to meaningful learning opportunities. The education sector works tirelessly to improve access to education and ensures coverage and the quality of twelve-year basic education and school readiness programmes.

The ministry of education gives priority to skills development to improve the quality and relevance of education so that the students are better equipped with the requirements of the diverse labour market. Rwandan educational system also puts emphasis on the development of core literacy and numeracy skills in basic education and the improvement of technical and vocational education and training and higher education provision. Rwanda education sector also puts much emphasis on a skills-based science and technology as well as making sure that the teachers are well educated and motivated.

### STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN RWANDA

The education system in Rwanda consists of four major levels.

1. Pre-Primary
2. Primary
3. Secondary
4. Higher education which contains an important TVET stream at both secondary and higher education levels.

Rwanda education system also has non-formal education, or adult education (ABE). Rwanda initiated compulsory schooling known as nine year basic education (9YBE). All the (9YBE) is covered by the government under the universal education scheme. Pre-primary education is conducted in the nursery schools and takes children between the ages of 4 to 6. Primary education stretches for six years and takes children aged 7 to 12 years of age. At end of the primary education, pupils undertake national examinations to ascertain the pupil's suitability to be promoted to the lower secondary school. The secondary education in Rwanda takes 6 years with students at age 13 and finishing at age 18. However, secondary level is divided into two parts vis a vis

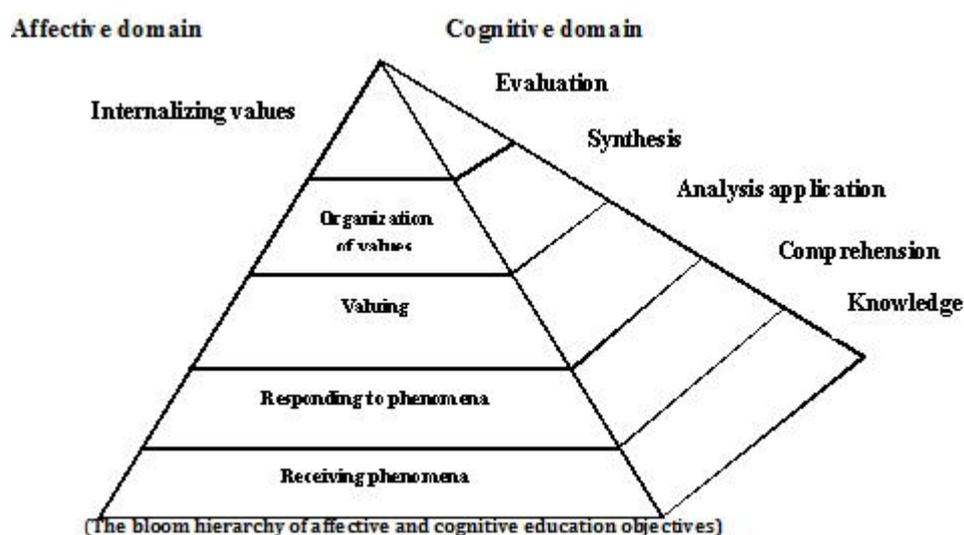
lower secondary 7- 9 and upper secondary (8, 9, and 10) altogether taking six years.

At the end of lower secondary again, students write examinations before they can proceed to the upper secondary. Upon completion of upper secondary examination are given and graduation follows that determines eligibility for students to join higher education. At the upper secondary level students have the choice of either progressing to secondary schools, or enrolling in Technical Schools (TSS) or joining Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) where they would receive training as primary school teachers. Technical vocation education and training (TVET) is provided via the Technical Secondary Schools (TSSs), Vocational Centres (VTCs) and Integrated Polytechnic Regional Centres (IPRSs). Within the tertiary level, students can follow their studies in a wide variety of academic routes or choose to join technical or vocational fields. The undergraduate degrees take up to four to finish.

## CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN RWANDA

Although teachers have major influence on the lives of students, Rwanda seems to give small attention to it, as Rwanda tries to reform its educational systems. Generally, the information on practices in the classrooms before the Genocide; is not easy to find. Today, the classes in Rwanda are characterized by a teacher-focused, didactic lesson. A classification given by Bloom (1964) indicates a system of levels of pedagogy that is universal to all classroom. The shift entails a set of cognitive objectives and affective objectives.

In Rwanda, it is mainly stressed that imparting knowledge, remembering what was taught and understanding it, and possibly the application of it is all that is required. These levels are easy to assess and they are mainly the ones usually used by school teachers.



Teachers, parents and students alike, do believe that they are the essence of schooling. However, the other standards of pedagogy see teachers and students work together at the synthesis and evaluation levels of the cognitive domain at the same time, apply, comprehend and recall the information. Moreover, particular attention must be given to the development of affective domain of an individual as well as the cognitive. This kind of pedagogy is important in order for Rwanda to foster, open mindedness, solidarity, tolerance and acceptance. Thus, Rwanda should move away from the present status of teaching which puts heavy weights on teacher-centred instruction and minimal student participation.

### TVET EDUCATION IN RWANDA

TVET education fosters entrepreneurship and permits young people to enter the labour market and promote job creation. As such young business people end up hiring fellow youth and young people are active in high-growth sectors ( Amoroset al,2013). Education and training are key determinants of success in the labour market and strong predictors of non-vulnerable jobs among youth (Sparreboom and Staneva 2014.)

It is true that education and training pays off, the investment is realized more when education and training is linked to the labour market needs. The trainings which focus on bridging the skills applicable for jobs include general academic skills, technical skills and soft or behavioural skills. The education system focuses on providing academic skills,

job-related technical skills are generally offered after general education or through vocational secondary or tertiary education. There are countries which offer technical or vocational training to young people in addition to formal academic education. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) refers to the formal provision of training to individuals before they enter the workforce. Work skills training to individuals before they enter the workforce. Work skills training is also directed at youth (and others) who are already in the workforce, but are unemployed. Firms often provide training on the job to new employees with regard to soft skills, such skill are increasingly included as part of programs for work skills developed particularly in programs for unemployed and disadvantaged youth, and are also increasingly integrated into standard school curriculum. Skills can also be translated through a range of other means including approaches outside of formal training systems.

As stated by Rachel Hayman in 'the Contribution of Post-Basic Education and Training (PBET) to Poverty Reduction in Rwanda: balancing short-term goals and long-term visions in the face of capacity constraint TVET is considered as a mechanism for poverty alleviation. The main purpose of TVET is to make people self-employable: Skills development in Rwandan policy-making received limited attention until the early 2000s, although the establishment of the Human Resources and Institutional Capacity Development Agency (HIDA) as a full legal entity in 2004

represents progress towards a broad policy Makuza, (2003). The Government of Rwanda has committed to tackling skills development at all levels from adult literacy to post-graduate training for professionals in the interest of both poverty reduction and economic development. These surfaces in the draft ESSP update where time-lines are set for policies on literacy, vocational training and open distance learning.

For many, Technical vocational education and training (TVET) is often alleged as the answer to a successful opening of opportunities for youth who do not have the skills, capital or even the drive to continue with tertiary education. Quintini and Martin 2006, OECD 2010a, Middleton et al. 1993 all argued that that TVET offers valuable skills that helps the youth to get ready to join the labour market. Therefore the issue of people having skills that do not match those of the labour market would be eliminated as has been the problem linked with unemployment in Africa and other third world countries. However, the importance of TVET defers from country to country everywhere in the world. In comparison to general education, TVET has gained prominence generally in European countries and Scandinavian countries. Technical vocational education and training is generally categorized in three ways; school based, dual apprenticeship system combining school training with a firm-based method.

In the developing world, TVET is not as developed as in the developed nations irrespective of the efforts made to implement it. Foster 1965; King and Martin 2002) noted that attempts to expand vocational schooling in sub-Saharan Africa from the 1960s onwards failed due to structural dysfunctions of the local labour markets. This was because the labour market was still too narrow to create enough demand for jobs. For those who joined the labour market from TVET, they experienced lower wages than their counter parts from traditional tertiary institutions. Therefore, there were no apparent encouragements to make investments in vocational education. But, the huge decrease of the public sector in the past periods and the growth of the formal educational competitions at the primary and secondary level have created a vast young labour force well furnished with simple skills but unable to find work in their home countries (Haltiwanger, Singh 1999). As a result many less developed countries have pursued educational policies that fully prepares their youth to compete in international labour markets (King, McGrath and Rose, 2007).

Traditionally, TVET may have been perceived as an answer for the youth who are academically challenged and cannot continue up the academic ladder or who are too poor to afford tuition fees for higher education. TVET was seen as being a solution for the youth who had lost hope in their future. Neumann and Ziderman (1999) asserted that many countries offer technical and vocational education option in obligatory schooling observed as a substitute for students with poor grades and or the vulnerable youths as well as a security measure for those young people who would drop out of school and for those who are not motivated to carry on with higher education.

By virtue of the fact that TVET is closely linked to work related experiences, it is expected that TVET should act as a motivator for the young people to stay in school. It has also been argued that vocational education reduces the risk of parents influencing their children on what profession to take. This will further increase the intergenerational mobility and involvement in a vocational track may permit youth originating from a working – class background to track educational accomplishment past the compulsory level, thereby permitting young people an opportunity to achieve skilled than unskilled employment.

Generally most countries would have two streams from which they track their students. These are the vocational and academic pathways from which students follow. There has not been clear advantages to this particular tracking pathway; because many view vocational qualifications as a reduced option for people who may later on wish to join tertiary education. Although technical likelihood of transferring to academic education may occur, tracking students early in school would result into differing stages of abilities and capabilities.

## CONCLUSION

The system of education is the one where schools and training centers take an active and vital part. Accordingly, World Bank (2001) stated that schools all over the world are requested to set up the youth for the right skills for jobs. Formal education will customarily increase the chances of employment outcomes for young people. Literacy and Numeracy offers the basis on which higher levels of technical skills and employment competences can be built upon. Education and training are key determinants of success in the labour market and strong predictors of employable jobs among youth. It is true that education and training pays off, the investment is realized more when education and training is linked to the labour market needs.

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