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## **Editorial: Education, technology in education and selected social issues in Africa**

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**Biographical notes:** James S. Etim is a Professor of Education at Winston Salem State University. He taught at University of Jos, Nigeria (1980–1989 and was Head, Department of Curriculum Studies 1984–1986). He has travelled to Africa more than ten times for research and projects. He has published 60 journal articles and book chapters and is the sole author of one book and edited or co-edited ten books. He has received two Fulbright Specialist Awards (to Nigeria and Namibia), a fellowship for projects at Ahfad University for Women, Sudan and University of Addis Ababa, and a Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Award to University of Jos.

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### **1 Introduction**

Beginning in the 1950s, many African countries began to be independent from colonial powers and today, most African countries are on paper independent. In all spheres of human endeavour in most of these countries, a lot has happened as each country pushes to provide the environment, human capital and institutions to allow for human development and proper governance. Schools, polytechnics and universities have been opened and expanded to allow for human capital development. Social services, including hospitals and community centres have been expanded and each independent country has made useful attempts at proper governance. However, a myriad of problems still exists in the areas of education, technology in education, and social issues of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, security and governance.

### **2 Education**

Great strides have been made in the expansion of education at all levels. At the primary through senior secondary school levels, because of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, other global goals and national policies, expansion of education has meant free education in many countries, including for many students in Nigeria and Ghana. According to Evans and Acosta (2020), the proportion of children completing primary school across countries has risen from 27% to 67% between 1971 and 2015 and proportion of children completing lower secondary school across countries has also risen dramatically, from 5% in 1971 to 40% in 2015 (p.3). This idea is supported by Bashir, Lockhead, Ninan and Tan when they stated that “education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa have expanded beyond recognition, enrolling tens of millions of first generation

learners in the primary grades, extending access to secondary education, and employing millions of newly recruited and trained teachers” (p.8).

However, a recent report from UNESCO’s Institute of Statistics (n.d.) on education globally indicated that “Of all regions, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14.” According to UIS data, almost 60% of youth between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school. In an analysis of schooling for learning in Africa, Bashir et al. (2018) reported that many children are out of school, learning levels are low and many children drop out of school before they complete basic education.

Many African countries have instituted free education at the primary and, at least at the junior secondary school levels [Oketch and Rolleston, (2007), p.131; Moshoeshoe, 2020]. In an evaluation of the free senior high school education in Ghana, Dwomoh et al. (2022) showed there was a “Significant decline in quality of education outcomes and academic performance. Students who attended the double-track schools performed poorly in all the core subjects compared with non-double-track schools. The challenges associated with the implementation of the policy were financial constraints, infrastructure deficit, ... lack of teaching and learning materials” (p.1). In Nigeria, problems in the implementation of primary education have been discussed by Domike and Odey (2014) and Csapo (1983). A study reported by Olowonefa (2022) showed that large numbers of drop-outs of school children, inadequate funding, ineffective supervision and lack of data for planning were critical issues in primary school administration in Nigeria. In Kenya, a study by Njeri (2023) found that primary school teachers were not fully prepared for the implementation of the new curriculum, that “infrastructure provided in contemporary secondary schools was insufficient to facilitate grade six students shifting to junior of competency-based curriculum” and that the “government rushed CBC into schools without first addressing issues such as understaffing, lack of teaching and learning materials, infrastructure; classrooms and laboratories, and an unpleasant teaching and learning atmosphere” (p.36).

At the secondary school level, Suleiman and Umejiaku (2023) pointed to inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure and inadequate number of qualified teachers (pp.780–781) as areas holding up the proper functioning of secondary schools in Nigeria (pp.55–59). In summarising the current situation on education in Sub-Sahara Africa, UNICEF and African Union Commission (n.d.) listed several challenges facing the continent-poor learning outcomes, need for qualified teachers, exclusion of children from the poorest families, and the need for more investment in the vocational and technical sub-sector (pp.3–4).

### **3 Technology in education**

Technology for teaching and learning is indispensable for student academic growth. According to OECD (2023), digital technologies can allow for more engaging and differentiated instruction responsive to the needs of all (p.4). The US Department of Education (2016) pointed to the far-reaching benefits of technology in the classroom: “Technology can be a powerful tool for transforming learning. It can help affirm and advance relationships between educators and students, reinvent our approaches to learning and collaboration, shrink long-standing equity and accessibility gaps, and adapt

learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners” (p.1). in the aftermath of COVID-19, many countries worldwide see technology integration as imperative to enhancing teaching and learning. An Editorial (2023) in the *British Journal of Educational Technology* indicated that technology integration in Africa “is fraught with digital illiteracy, inadequate or unavailable digital gadgets and infrastructure and lack of agile policy frameworks” (pp.1437–1438). In Ghana, Adarkwah (2021) reported that access to ICT resources in Ghanaian schools is still a challenge. As a result of this inadequacy of technology resources, students perceived the online learning is not effective. For many of the students, “although the online learning is a good initiative, they prefer the traditional approach as opposed to the online learning, which is fraught with a lot of challenges. The lack of social interactions, poor communication, and poor students’ outcomes were associated with the perceived ineffectiveness of the e-learning” (p.1680). IN Kenya, the situation may not be too different. According to Ochieng and Ngware (2022), teachers in high end private schools are using various forms of technology to provide instruction for students. However for students in marginalised communities, there was limited teacher capacity to use technology (p.10). In addition, there was ‘unreliable electricity connectivity’ (p.9) as a limitation not use of technology in rural and poor schools. Moreover, “Poor households would rather buy food for the family than buy internet/data bundles for learning. Learners from such households have thus been disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of access and use of EdTechs” (p.9). According to Laleye (2015), the quest for development now in Nigeria makes it imperative for learners to shift from the existing method of teaching in schools to accommodate use of various forms of technologies. “It is disheartening to note that Nigeria, with her abundance of resources – human and non-human cannot boast of being among the countries utilising technology in teaching” [Laleye, (2015), p.399]. In a recent systematic literature review on the use of technology in education in Nigeria between 2015–2023, Etim (2024) concluded the following:

“In the aftermath of COVID-19, technology use for educational purposes is increasing. This study has shown gaps in the proper and effective implementation of technology in Nigerian classrooms at all levels. First, the study has shown that there is a digital divide among teachers and students and between rural and urban schools. At all levels, many teachers lack the skills to implement several aspects of technology in their classroom. Also, many schools lack the infrastructure and the hardware to allow for the proper implementation of technology in their classrooms. Finally, the issue of epileptic supply of light is problematic for the implementation of e-learning.” (p.153)

Other broad areas in education that are of particular importance and need attention include the low enrolment of students in pre-kindergarten education, the low engagement of female students in primary and secondary education due to issues related to tradition, attitudes of parents, religion and relevant curriculum for girls finally the professional development of the teaching force to ensure effective use of relevant instructional strategies for the education of all children.

#### **4 Poverty**

Education helps reduce poverty (Etim, 2023) According to the World Bank (2023), “Almost 700 million people around the world live today in extreme poverty – they subsist

on less than \$2.15 per day, the extreme poverty line. Just over half of these people live in Sub-Saharan Africa.” The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Goal 1 aims at ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. In a report edited by Beegle and Christiansen (2019), they pointed out that poverty in Africa has fallen substantially – from 54% in 1991 to 41% in 2019 – and that low human capital and high gender inequity impede poverty reduction efforts (p.1). In Nigeria, based on information from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2023a), 63% are multi-dimensionally poor Fafana et al. (2023) in an analysis of development in several African countries concluded that “more than half (55%) of African countries are off track to halving poverty between 2015 and 2030, i.e., to meeting SDG 1” (p.296). Spada et al. (2023) in their study concluded that “the means to diminish the risk of poverty appears ‘straight-forward: go to school, get a job’” (p.11) and Shi and Qamruzzaman (2022) pointed out that as “education increases, impoverished people decrease since education equips individuals with knowledge and skills and leads to better earnings. Education directly reduces poverty by raising people’s earnings and allows access to basic needs to become simpler and decreasing human poverty” (p.12).

## **5 Unemployment, underemployment and employment of youth in Africa**

Education is supposed to ensure gainful employment and reduce poverty in any society. However, youth underemployment and unemployment is prevalent in many African countries and according to Boateng (2016) is “a major political and socioeconomic challenge in Africa despite the recent strong growth performance of many African countries” (p.413). Mailafia (2020) suggested that youth unemployment may be close to 70% in Nigeria. However, statistics from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2023b) gives underemployment at 12.2%, youth unemployment at 6.9% and youth underemployment at 18.1%. A World Bank (2020) report concluded that “Ghana is faced with 12% youth unemployment and more than 50% underemployment, both higher than overall unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan African countries.” Choi et al. (2020) opined that “the challenge of creating more, better, and inclusive jobs for African countries is not in doubt. In this daunting task for policy makers, businesses, and development partners, the digital revolution presents vast opportunities as well The task will be even more daunting in a post-COVID-19 world – though if there is a silver lining, it may be linked to broader and more effective use of digital solutions” (p.20).

## **6 Governance and security**

Issues of governance and security needs are front and centre for many governments world-wide. In Africa, many scholars (Nwizu and Alozie, 2018; Knight and Oriole, 2020; Kuwali, 2023; Crocker, 2019) have written on the tenuousness and fragility of many governments. Mbaku (n.d.) wrote that “progress on good governance has been encouraging, but challenges remain” (p.23). For Mbaku, too many countries in Africa have not yet achieved reforms that can prevent corruption, dictatorship and economic decline. He concluded that “it is unlikely that the continent will be able to successfully and effectively implement and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030 or

Agenda 2063 unless institutions are reformed to enforce good governance undergirded by the rule of law” (p.27).

This new journal is devoted to publishing papers that are informative, thought-provoking, and insightful on the various issues related to education, the arts and social issues confronting Africa. Our Vol. 1, No. 1 has five papers dealing with issues related to education and health. This maiden issue has papers from Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa. We wish to thank all the contributors to this issue and the reviewers who spent hours reviewing the papers for this issue.

Thank you.

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