

Nyerere's influence on education

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Ignorance was the biggest enemy developing countries had to fight

Mwalimu Nyerere's ideas and policy initiatives on education seem to have been influenced by the situation he found at the time he took over leadership of his country. At the time of independence, Tanganyika had three separate systems of education; one for Europeans, one for Asians and one for Africans. Budgetary provision was made separately, the largest share going to European schools, and African schools getting the smallest.

In terms of environment, all European children managed to get primary and secondary education locally or abroad because their population was small. This was also the case with the Asian children; most of them managed to attain secondary education within the country or in India.

The situation was totally different in the African system of education. In this system only a small percentage of all school-age children were enrolled in primary schools and less than one per cent were actually enrolled in secondary schools because of inadequate capacity. By 1961 there were less than 30 secondary schools which were supposed to provide opportunities for secondary education for children from all the nine provinces of Tanganyika with a population of seven million people.

The picture becomes more gloomy when one considers the transition from secondary to higher education. Tanzania could not compete with its neighbours – Kenya and Uganda; for while each of them was sending over 100 students to Makerere University College, Tanzania was only able to send an average of 50 students each year for all the fields Makerere was offering at the time. That is why at independence Mwalimu Nyerere complained that the human resource base inherited by his government was not adequate to man all the positions which hitherto had been occupied by expatriates. Thus, something had to be done to rectify the situation. His idea of what needed to be done is reflected in the emphasis he placed on the importance and the role of education in the country's development; the reforms he initiated in the country's education policy aimed at: integration of the education system; the desire to provide education for all, if that was possible; and the special emphasis he placed on adult education. These points are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The importance of education in the country's development

Mwalimu Nyerere identified three enemies of development in young independent African countries, namely; poverty, ignorance and disease. In his view, ignorance was the biggest enemy developing countries had to fight for three main reasons. First, because it enslaves people's minds, making it very difficult for them to reason things out. For them any calamity or failure to achieve one's goal is attributable to the will of God or to the work of witch doctors, when in fact the situation could have been saved had they considered seriously what might have caused the problem. Thus, education empowers people to be independent thinkers and to reason things out before making any decision.

Second, without education people cannot participate fully in the implementation of policies which affect their lives because they do not understand. For example, implementation of development plans will only succeed if the people have a clear understanding of what they are all about and what their own role is in implementing them. Mwalimu explained this point very well in 1969 when he introduced the Second Five Year Plan to the people¹. He said that while it was important to expand primary and secondary education in order to provide more access to education for our children, it was equally important to educate the adults because educated adults would have an immediate impact on the country's development, whereas the education of the children will only have an impact 5, 10 or even 15 years later. This view was expressed at a time when about 80 per cent of the people in Tanzania were illiterate. Thus, providing education to all the people was not only seen as a human right, it was a necessity if the country was to develop. In other words, investing in the children's education is in fact investing for the future.

Mwalimu's advocacy of education for all was to be picked up by the United Nations years later when member-countries came up with laudable resolutions to make the objective of providing education for all a reality. There is no doubt that Mwalimu's ideas articulated in the late 1960s and middle 1970s contributed to the organisation and the outcome of the Jomtien Conference in 1990.

Education Policy Reform

To redress the imbalance in the provision of educational

Mwalimu believed that learning was a lifelong process

opportunity in the country, Mwalimu's government introduced a reform in the education system of the time. It integrated the three parallel systems of education mentioned earlier (the European, Asian and African systems) into one system. Voluntary agency schools were all placed under the control of government which opened their doors to all children irrespective of race, religion or place of origin. The move provided an opportunity to segments of the society which hitherto had been disadvantaged on the basis of religion. It is on record that when Mwalimu Nyerere began to advocate for the independence of Tanganyika the All Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (AMNUT) submitted a memorandum to the colonial government calling for the delay of independence until Muslims in the country had attained more education². This was seen as a threat to the forging of national unity, and therefore it had to be addressed immediately.

In the first decade of independence efforts were made to increase enrolment in secondary schools by building new schools and expanding the capacity of the existing ones. However, critics have pointed out that the move to take over voluntary agency schools was unnecessary for the problem at hand could have been solved by issuing regulations. They claimed that the move did make the country lag far behind the other East African countries, because at the time of takeover, some of the voluntary agencies were already in the process of building new schools, others were thinking of starting university colleges, but the initiative stopped because of the takeover of the schools they already had. However, there are also those who, accept the criticisms but argue

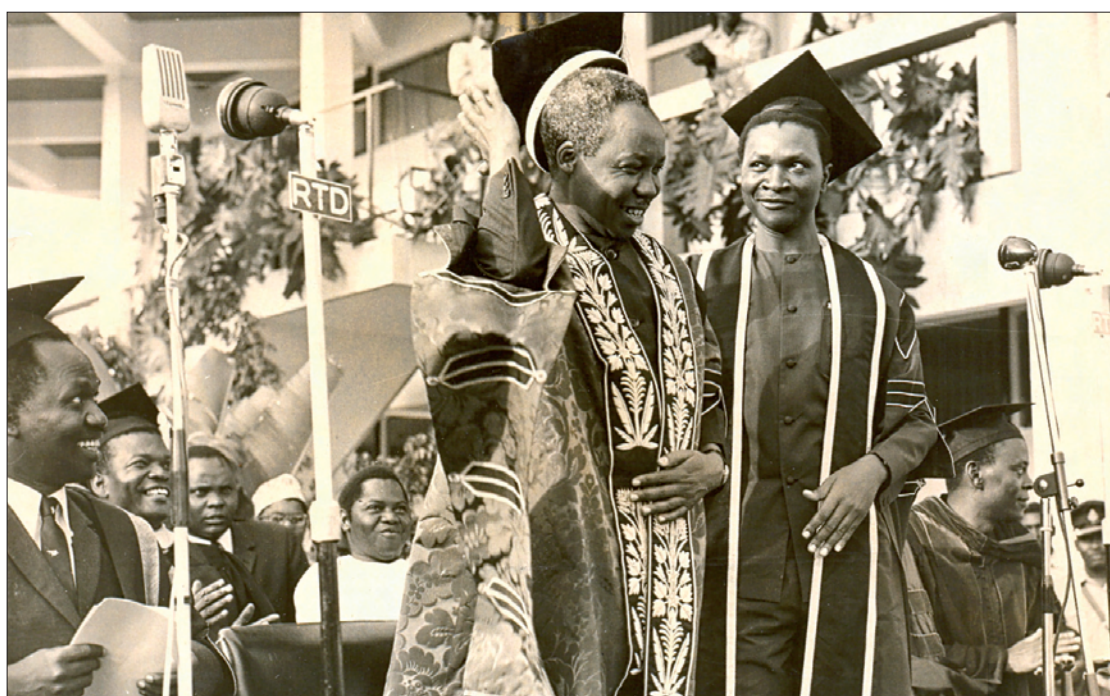
that the move was necessary and timely because it helped in cementing national unity in the early years of the country's independence. Besides, this was a logical decision considering the fact that Mwalimu was always in the forefront in the fight against discrimination, whatever form it takes. It would have been absurd to see it flourishing in his own country. Unfortunately, the past 10 years have witnessed the return of racial discrimination; it is creeping in quietly through the establishment of schools under the disguise 'seminaries'. The schools are built by religious organisations where members are of the same race. The schools do not admit children of other races even if they belong to the same religion.

The Policy of Education for Self-Reliance

The policy of Education for Self-Reliance is a landmark in the history of education in Tanzania³. It poses important questions which educationists have to think about seriously. In the treatise Mwalimu presents a critical analysis of what the goals and purposes of any education system should serve in the society. He then discusses the malfunctions and failures of the education system focusing on the provision of education during the colonial period⁴. Thus, the policy should be seen as Mwalimu's contribution to the philosophy of education at the global level.

Mwalimu emphasises the need to ensure that the education provided in any system should:

- Be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the people;
- Ensure equitable access for all segments of society and paying special attention to disadvantaged groups;
- Inculcate in the people the positive attitude of service



Mwalimu at a past graduation ceremony at the University of Dar es Salaam. On his left is former Vice Chancellor of the University Mr Pius Msekwa who is now Vice Chairman of the ruling CCM party

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to the community;

- Enable people to analyse problems critically and come up with alternative solutions; and
- Induce in the people the attitude of human equality and the spirit of fighting against the practice of the exploitation of the weak by the strong, especially in the economic field.

Education for Self-Reliance requires that each level of education should be terminal, especially at the secondary and higher education levels. This implies that the learners at each level should come out of the institution equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to enable them to find gainful employment or be self-employed. Schools, colleges, institutes and universities are expected to be production centres as well so that the education gained is put into use immediately earn an income to meet some of the running costs of the institution.

The idea of terminality of education at the primary and secondary levels, and turning education institutions into production centres was not well received by the people for different reasons. For the primary and secondary levels it was taken as an impediment to the achievement of the primary goal which was to teach for passing examinations, the ultimate goal being to join the university. On the other hand, the educationists were critical of the policy because it was going to lower the quality of education. The University dons viewed the policy as a way of detracting them from fulfilling their primary functions of teaching, doing research, consultancy and rendering service. Thus, although schools undertook production activities, such activities were not economically viable. Many of the schools stopped their economic activities after only a few years trial. Universities did not even start until recently when they realised that income generation was a must for them since government funding is no more sufficient to support their activities.

However, when one looks at what is happening now in the universities in Africa and indeed all over the world, one cannot avoid feeling that Mwalimu's ideas about relevance, equity of access, service to the society, and so on, have been understood and embraced by universities. We see now that universities are constantly reviewing their programmes with the participation of stakeholders to ensure that the needs of the society are taken care of. Practically all universities in the East African Region have introduced programmes on entrepreneurship to enable their students to acquire skills which will be useful to them in their life.

Creating a Learning Society

Mwalimu believed that learning was a lifelong process. As knowledge is being generated all the time people have to go on learning to keep abreast of the new developments.

He compared education to a hill. The higher one climbs the better becomes the view of the horizon. Thus, as one moves higher in the education system one's knowledge and understanding of things as well as the capacity to think also grow. It is imperative therefore, to have a complete education system which includes adult education in its own right. According to Mwalimu, the aim should be to create a learning society, and adult education will enable Tanzania to achieve this goal.

To put the idea into practice the government created an organisational structure similar to that of primary and secondary education from the national level down to the divisional level. Non-Governmental Organisations, voluntary agencies, government departments and companies alike were encouraged to organise adult education or workers' education programmes for literacy or general development. And to make sure that adult education was a complete sub-system, Mwalimu proposed in 1978 that Tanzania should consider the possibility of establishing a university which would provide university education through the distance teaching approach based on the UK Open University model. The proposal was approved and acted upon by the government and in 1992 the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was established.

Mwalimu held the view that the introduction of distance teaching and learning approach would present more opportunities to adults who take the adult education route to higher education. It would also help the country reduce the inequality of access to higher education between men and women. And finally, it was hoped that the University would play a leading role in continuing education by providing short and long modular courses to various categories of people – farmers, teachers, youth, business people, and so on. Some of the courses would be for professional development; others would provide general knowledge to the people, thereby promoting the concept of lifelong learning and of having a learning society. Unfortunately, the University has had a slow growth for the fear that speedy growth would usher in the provision of poor-quality education. As a result the University has yet to play the leadership role that was expected from it in providing lifelong learning.

Conclusion

There is no doubt at all that Mwalimu Nyerere was a great thinker and philosopher whose preoccupation was to find answers to the question of how to make the people of Tanzania accept the fact that people cannot be developed by others. They can only be helped to develop themselves. Although money was seen as an essential input for people's development, it was considered as secondary, for given to an ignorant person who does not know what planning and investing for the future is,

it will simply be used on things that are not important. For Mwalimu, education was the most important input necessary in people's development. The policies which Mwalimu initiated in education were aimed at making the people in general understand their individual roles for their own development in particular, and the development of the country in general.

Unfortunately, the people were slow in accepting Mwalimu's ideas, and sometimes they simply dismissed them arguing that they would not work. Where people received the policies enthusiastically there was usually a hidden agenda to prove that the policy would not work. In implementing education for self-reliance for example, there were urban schools that acquired land for agricultural activities 10 or 20 kilometres outside the town. Carrying out farming activity in such cases became costly because of the long journeys to and from the farms. Besides, the economic return was poor because villagers in the neighbourhood harvested almost everything for their own use. That was enough evidence for the schools to show that the policy would not work.

So far no study has been made in the region on the impact of Mwalimu's influence on education in the various countries. But there is no doubt that it has made considerable impact as evidenced by constant reference to Mwalimu's philosophy of education as expounded in the document entitled *Education for Self-Reliance*, on the one hand, and as expressed by the desire of other nations to come and learn about Tanzania's education system, on the other hand.

Mwalimu was a popular personality among university intellectuals. He liked what he called "exposures" which availed him of the opportunity to discuss serious issues with them. Mwalimu received invitations from

universities in different countries to address university communities. He won the hearts of many admirers because of his simplicity, honesty and dedication to serving the people. But above all they admired him for his scholarship; and for supporting academic freedom. Despite his busy schedule he found time to read widely, write extensively, translate Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* into Swahili and put the Swahili translations of the four gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John into poetry form. All that has been written on this paper demonstrates that Mwalimu Nyerere put into practice the promise he made as a member of TANU which states: "I shall educate myself to the best of my ability and use my education for the benefit of all the people" (my own translation)⁵

In conclusion I think it would be fair to say that while St. Thomas Moore was regarded as a "Man of all Seasons", certainly Mwalimu Nyerere deserves to be considered as "The Teacher of all times" for he will live in the memory of many people because of his unwavering commitment to serve not only Tanzanians, but the entire world community. **F**

¹ Nyerere J.K. (1969) *Address to the National Assembly Introducing the 2nd Five year Plan, Dar es Salaam Government Press.*

² Omari, C.K. (1995) *The Management of Tribal and Religious Diversity in Colin Legum and Geoffrey Mmari (eds) Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere. Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam.*

³ Nyerere J.K. (1967), *Education for Self-Reliance, Dar es Salaam Government Press.*

⁴ Ishumi, A.G. and Maliyamkono (1995) *Education for Self-Reliance in Colin Legum and Geoffrey Mmari, Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere. Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam.*

⁵ Quoted from Ibrahim M. Kaduma (2004) *Maadili ya Taifa na Hatima ya Tanzania. Vuga Press, Soni Tanzania.*

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Mwalimu's past-time activity: inspecting a rural farm