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A POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to discuss about precolonial and colonial education and the development of the education systems in the postcolonial Africa. The paper will deal with the questions whether there were any education systems in precolonial Africa and motives for introducing the colonial education systems. Further the relation of the colonial education systems with the needs of the local society, the postcolonial education systems and their future will be analysed.

Methodology: Postcolonial perspective is a theoretical frame for the study. A desk-research was conducted to identify and select the relevant literature. Content analysis was used as a method to understand, analyse and interpret the literature.

Findings: The results of the literature review show that there were socialization mechanisms before colonialism in African societies. Education introduced in its modern form by missionaries was supposed to serve mainly religious purposes and to train low level functionaries by colonial states. Instead of focusing on local realities education was used to teach the glories of the colonial countries, spread their language and culture as well as introduce a new way of life by condemning all that was native. After independence the inherited colonial education systems continued isolating the masses who had no access to the colonial languages.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: Findings of this study shows some limitations in African education systems. It is necessary that education policy makers and other concerned stakeholders' to increase the use of local languages to reach the society at large, to focus on contents relevant to their contexts, to provide both theoretical and skill-based education useful for development of society and to aim towards educating productive, conscious, critical and democratic citizens.

Keywords: *Precolonial, colonial, postcolonial, Africa, education systems.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The colonization of Africa by Europeans reached its peak when in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, some European countries gathered and gave themselves the right to share the continent (Craven, 2015). Belgium, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain were main actors in the conference and were as well the countries that later occupied larger parts of the continent. The lion share was taken by France and Great Britain. The 70 to 80 years following the Berlin conference was a time of suffering for the colonized countries. Due to the suffering caused by occupying forces, the struggle for independence grew stronger.

The colonial masters administered the colonies by creating their own decrees and when these were not respected, violence was practiced. They exploited the labour of the local population as domestic workers, farm workers, industry workers and assistants in different fields. The local labour force was paid a minimum wage sufficient only for survival (Alemuzung, 2010; Matunhu, 2011). The colonizers took land by force, controlled and exploited other valuable natural resources of the colonized countries. These natural resources were robbed from the colonies and transported to the metropolitan countries. The raw materials were processed in industries in Europe and the products were used for home land consumptions and were also sold to the people in the colonies (Matunhu, 2011). This situation remained even after independence. Two African writers described the situation in short as follows: *“The economy remained disarticulated and vertically integrated into Western industrial economies. Independence saw African leaders taking over political powers from colonial rulers without appropriating economic powers. While Africans controlled political power, Europeans controlled economic power.”* (Nwanosike & Onyiije, 2011, 46)

Interest for raw materials, less educated and cheap labour that made it easy for economic exploitation was accompanied by imposing cultural and religious dominance upon the local people. Cultural and religious practices of the people in the colonies were condemned and considered as inferior. Many missionaries saw the local languages as an important instrument for direct contact with the converts and potential converts. They learned the languages in order to translate the bible and other religious text and to produce instruction materials (Meyer, 2002; Cocks, 2010).

Missionaries played a vital role in condemning local religious practices, prized and preached the religion of the colonial ruling elite. Religious practice of the colonized was considered as “savage” and “superstition” (Cooper, 2002). Missionaries also played a vital role in imposing cultural influence of the west on the colonized people. This dominance and imposing of the colonial countries’ culture was motivated and justified by the “white man’s burden” or the “civilizing mission” that they gave to themselves (Bigon, 2018).

Quite a lot of resources are needed to study the situation of education during the different phases of colonialism in the continent. One difficult part is the fact that the colonial educational policies were different from colonizer to colonizer (Labé, Dembélé, Sirois, Motivans and Bruneforth, 2013). It is equally difficult to investigate the policy of the colonial countries’ education policy for their colonies and its implications for education development after independence. The missionaries that expanded western education in some parts of the continent came from different

colonizing countries as well as from different denominations of Christianity. Most of all, the historical, political, social and economic contexts of the colonies were also different. Instead of widely cover and deeply digging into the details in the education system of each and every country in the continent, this article attempts to use some examples that will help readers to get a general overview of the education systems in the past and present-day Africa.

General trends of the colonial education and effects of the inherited education systems on the present-day education in Africa will be themes for discussion. In addition to revisiting the legacy they left and what happened in the education systems after independence, it is equally important to reflect upon future prospect for these educational systems. The following questions will be used to actualize the purpose of the study: Were there education systems in precolonial Africa? What were the motives for introducing the colonial education systems in the continent? Were these educational systems related to African realities? What happened to colonial education systems after the countries' independence? What could be the focus for future educational systems in Africa?

2.0 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Postcolonial theory is a theory that is used to explain the effects of colonialism on cultural, historical, social, political and economic life of the people in the former European colonies and their descents forcefully removed from their original homes. The theory was built mainly on the works of Fanon (1963/2001), Memmi (1965/2003), Said (1978) and Aschcroft (1989). Significant contributions were also made by authors such as Bhabha (1994), Spivak (1988), Mbembe (2001) and Loomba (2005). There are many researchers who are not mentioned in this study who are using the post-colonial perspective in their studies on effects of colonialism on specific countries, regions and globally.

This work will use as its point of departure the postcolonial perspective. The perspective will be suitable for the study, as most of the education systems in the contemporary Africa are products of the colonial past. African education systems are influenced by hegemonic ideal of the European education systems.

By using one of the postcolonial theoreticians Ania Loomba, I will define relevant concepts for this study. Loomba defines in her book *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* (2005) colonialism as "...the conquest and control of other people's land and goods..." (Loomba, 2005:8). She then proceeds to clarifying postcolonialism as follows:

It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as a contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African- Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as "postcolonial" subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures. It also allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and dominant Western culture... (Loomba, 2005, p.16).

According to Loomba the colonial powers did not leave their colonies without further influence. Systematic control over their former colonies continued through a neo-colonial relation. Indirect control was on different sectors, the economic, social, cultural and educational. Loomba explains the relation between postcolonialism and neo-colonialism as, "... A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent at the same time..." (Ibid. p.12).

In addition to Loomba's explanation, Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, present postcolonialism as follows:

*Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms of such as **the post-colonial (S)state**, 'post-colonial' had clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization.*

...The term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies (Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 186).

Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia (2006) state in their article on postcolonialism and education, by citing Fanon and Young emphasize that postcolonialism should be used to understand the oppression going on after the end of the actual colonization. They bring up Fanon's focus on the psychological effects of colonialism on the African intellectual(s) after the end of physical colonization of the continent.

While emphasizing the significant contribution of this theory, it is also important to recognize the critics against it. The major critic is its rejecting of the Euro-centric views of universalism of knowledge produced in Europe. It is even implicated and criticized for rejecting the Marxist universalism that is found on the analysis of similarities and differences on economic, class and gender-based operations (Dhawan, 2018; Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2017; Xie, 1997).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether there were any education systems in precolonial Africa, motives for introducing the colonial education systems and relations to the needs of the local society, the postcolonial education systems and their future. Due to availability of previous studies on the subject, field research for this study was not undertaken.

A desk-research was conducted to identify and select literature. Literature accessible on pre-colonialism, colonialism and postcolonialism was used to approach the education systems. Books and academic articles available from different journals and databases were consulted. These materials on precolonial, colonial and postcolonial perspectives on education in Africa were used to understand the past, the present and in an attempt to foresee the future.

Texts in this article were organized in the way that matched the purpose of the study. They provided knowledge of the past, the present and possible way forward. Motives for the colonial

education systems, whether they are rooted on the needs of the colonized and their impact on the present education systems were focus for the texts used in this article.

As a supplement to literature, did experiences shared by Ethiopians who attended school during a brief occupation of the country by Fascist Italy (1936-1941) help my understanding of the subject. Work visits to many African countries (at least 15) that suffered under colonialism also gave me usable knowledge that has been relevant for this work.

Content analysis was used to understand, analyse and interpret what the authors meant in what they were discussing in their works (Bryman, 2016; Cho & Lee, 2014; Krippendorff, 2004). Texts on education in Africa in this study are from different periods and from various specific contexts. Even if these texts were written under different conditions, their focus was on education in Africa. Their content was analysed in relation to the purpose of the study.

4.0 EDUCATION IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

Before the arrival of the colonial powers, Africans in different communities had a system of socialization for children and youth. The indigenous socialization systems prepared children and young people to be full-fledged members of their communities. Training was given to the young generation by adults on economic activities such as farming, animal husbandry, and hunting. Getting knowledge and practicing norms and values of their communities were parts of their upbringing.

Kwame Nkrumah (1941) writes in an article titled “Primitive Education in Africa” about the socialisation of a child in precolonial Africa. He writes on the preparation of the child from early age to adulthood as follows:

From the cradle until the age of five, the child received no direct education, the methods of nursing and handling the child were based on certain fundamental primitive philosophies of education. He had to be carefully watched, observed, and cared for so that bad habits and influences could not operate. It was believed that if early training were ignored, the child would grow to be maladjusted, and thus become a tribal misfit, a useless personality to himself and to the tribe to which he belonged. (Nkrumah, 1941:89).

While Nkrumah focused on the male child and the discipline, how the child is expected to grow up, he discussed later in the text about girls’ and boys’ socialization by their mothers and fathers respectively after the age of six. What he writes is similar to the experiences of many African communities. He also bringing’s up an interesting training for a boy which could be valid even for girls. He writes, “...On the farm the boy’s father taught him the names of various herbs, distinguishing between medicinal and edible herbs. The child learned to differentiate them. Boys who showed proficiency in detecting herbs generally became native doctors and priests.” (Nkrumah, 1941:89-90).

The precolonial socialization systems were based mainly on sharing practical skills inherited from previous generations. The elder generation passed their skills, knowledge and experiences to the new generation. As mentioned earlier this socialization was gender based, and boys were

trained by their fathers and other male figures in their communities, while girls learned their skills to manage the household from their mothers and additional skills from women in their communities.

Woolman mentions in his discussion of the pre-colonial education that the education took place “*in the context of family, community, clan and cultural group*”. He emphasizes that it was based on “learning by doing”, on the needs of the community and it was transmitted through “*observation, imitation and participation*”. According to him “...*The content included all of the activities, rituals, and skills required to sustain the cultures and life of the family and community...*” (Woolman, 2001:31). In an article dealing with public policy, physical education and sport, Chepyator-Thomson (2014) writes,

It can be surmised that sports and games in pre-colonial African societies helped to ‘strengthen language skills, listening skills, and judgment skills (Lyoka 2007, 353) and assisted in the inculcation of cultural and social skills, which allowed children and youth to be adequately prepared for adulthood (Chepyator-Thomson, 2014:513).

Socialization discussed above focuses on preserving the necessary skills and knowledge for continuation of the family and the community as a unity. Through socialization, skills and knowledge were reproduced from generation to generation. These skills and knowledge were local and gained as previously mentioned through “*learning by doing*”.

The precolonial socialization systems were in general limited to communities and were based on local needs. There were, however, also in precolonial Africa advanced systems similar to modern education systems that we see today around the world. Giving some examples on these may help to understand the complexities of socialization and education systems in the precolonial Africa.

The Egyptian civilization developed from local education systems and enabled Egyptians to develop alphabets, complex symbolic systems, building skills and religious rituals. The great engineering skills needed to build the pyramids and other buildings of their time were born from local experiences, knowledge and education systems existing before the arrival of the European colonizers (Diop, 1974).

Ethiopia as another example, was, before the arrival of the Italian occupiers, using a well-developed church education system which had been in place for more than two millenniums. The education was given by church scholars through a locally developed alphabet and a numerical system. This education included reading, writing, church music, philosophy, interpretation and analysis of religious literature. The education followed successive stages starting with simple literacy and ending with advanced knowledge of music, poems and interpretation and analysis of texts (Milkias, 1976).

In West Africa, in Mali, there were in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries Islamic universities. These universities played a major role in spreading Islam to the rest of the continent. In addition to their religious roles, they were centres for intellectual activities of their time (Shuriye and Ibrahim, 2013).

While there are sufficient facts for the existence of precolonial socialization and education in Africa, there are those who deliberately deny it and distort any historical facts existing during this period. Fanon writes on this relating it to colonialism.

...Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (Fanon, 2001:169).

Socialization and education systems in precolonial Africa has not been sufficiently researched. Available knowledge is mainly produced by western writers with their own interest and motives. Some of these writings are full of contempt for the local communities and prepared to justify the occupation of Africa by the colonial powers. During the last century Africans and the diaspora of African dissents did start to challenge the attempts to dispossess the continent its history (Cooper, 2002). This disfiguring of the reality of the continent will continue to be challenged by future generations of Africans who will take a subject position and will write and rewrite the precolonial history and education systems of the continent.

5.0 THE COLONIAL EDUCATION AND THE AFRICAN REALITY

During the colonial era, formally institutionalized education was introduced mainly by missionaries. The main motive of the missionaries for introducing education was to enable people of the colony to read religious scripts. The missionaries were also out to convert the natives to Christianity (Cooper, 2002; Meyer, 2002).

In their discussion of the education system in Lesotho, Muzvidziwa and Seotsanyana present the following:

The primary focus of the finest school was the acquisition of literacy and the study of the bible, the spiritual values and teaching of the church, including religious observances and participation in Christian community. European cultural values were also emphasised, the adoption of a biblical name, the use of European clothing, eating, and living habits (Muzvidziwa & Seotsanyana, 2002:2).

Converting people to Christianity was based on missionaries' belief of the superiority of their religion over the religion of the local people. The local people were encouraged to leave their heathen exercise and to follow the religion of the "civilised world". They were taught to believe their beliefs were wrong (Meyer, 2002).

Education by missionaries and the colonial governments did not take into consideration the realities of the colonies and the needs of the local population. As mentioned earlier the system was mainly used to train some administrative assistants and low skilled labourers who could work in the colonial economic sectors.

Education focusing on social, economic and political development of the colonies was not on the agenda for the colonial education system. Even if there were clear needs of improving the agricultural, animal husbandry, the trade and other sectors of the society, the focus of the colonial

masters was exploiting the resources of the colonies. The focus on exploitation of resources was to satisfy the needs of raw materials of European industries (Matunhu, 2011).

Coleson says, "...*The education system that was imported, according to the British and educated Africans was that of the English Public School with its classical emphasis and aristocratic traditions. This meant of course that science, technical training, to trade, and common labour were neglected or by implication were stigmatized as inferior.*" (Coleson, 1955:174). Tikly (2001) cites Cowen, who refers to the colonial education in Africa as a "*distortion*" of the modern European education.

Introduction of this limited and theory focused education was not meant to benefit the colonized people. In addition to neglect of practical skills training, there was a conscious plan not to allow advanced technological skills to people of the colonies (Pankhurst, 1972). Walter Rodney's explanation of the situation in Congo can be used as an example for deliberate denial of further education for the subjects in the colonies. According to him the Belgian government and the Catholic church's reasoning for not allowing secondary school education for the people of Congo was, "...*The African "native" was to be gradually civilized. To give him secondary education was like asking a young child to chew meat when he should be eating porridge...*" (Rodney, 1989:268).

Rodney further brings up some examples of the focus of colonial education systems. According to him the British used in the content of lessons given in schools in their colonies a glorification of their royal family. The French put their effort into imposing their language and cultural values to upcoming elites for these to forget their own culture and assimilate into the French. The Portuguese also promoted a policy of separating the elite and the ordinary people. They emphasized that the assimilados/civilisados are elites closer to the Portuguese culture compared to the ordinary natives (Rodney, 1989).

Imposing the colonial masters' languages on the population was an additional condition to strengthen their hegemony. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writes the following on how English language was forced upon students:

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became more than a language: it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscription such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford...." (Wa Thiong'o, 2005:11).

It was clear the colonial powers were promoting their language and cultural heritage. While promoting their own languages, cultures and history, they were at the same time emphasising the

inferiority of the native languages, cultures and history (Said, 1993). If we take as an example Italians during their brief occupation of Ethiopia (1936 to 1941), in addition to teaching their language to those they were planning to recruit for minor services, they also propagated about the Roman civilization and the great Italian leaders. There were restrictions not to mention internal conflicts of any kind within Italy nor their historical conflicts before the formation of an independent Italy (Pankhurst, 1972).

The occupier was both a fascist regime and a colonizing power. Some Ethiopians who completed their 8th grade before the occupation were told to go back to 4th grade during this period for two possible reasons. Firstly, students were told their education in English was worth nothing under Italian occupation. Secondly, natives were not allowed to attend education beyond 4th grade. According to sources Pankhurst used, the educated elites were undesired by the fascist-Italian regime. He writes:

Action against the Ethiopian intelligentsia was conceived even before the occupation of Addis Ababa. Two days earlier, on 3 May 1936, the Duce telegraphed orders for the summary execution of the so-called Young Ethiopians, who had been mainly educated at universities in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East... (Pankhurst,1972:373).

Not allowing advanced knowledge for the local population was common in other colonies too. In some colonies the local population was restricted to get education that would allow them to work in some professions but not in others. In the extreme case of the bad combination of fascism and colonialism like in Ethiopia, there was an attempt to completely eliminate the whole elite of the country.

Rodney, summarizes the colonial education system by saying, “...colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment.” (Rodney 1989:264).

6.0 THE POST-COLONIAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

When colonialism was defeated and the most of colonial powers left the continent in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, they left behind their educational systems. There were several reasons for that. Firstly, the colonisers who lost direct control over these countries continued their legacy through the education system that would allow them to intervene in the future development direction of their formal colonies. Secondly, most of the African elites who fought for independence were educated in the West and believed in the education system introduced by the colonisers. Due to this, they modified it but kept the structure and content as they were. Thirdly, even if in some countries the new governments believed in having another suitable education system, they lacked alternatives, the necessary manpower as well as sufficient financial and material resources needed for implementing their reform ideas. Fourthly, and a very relevant issue even today, is the language problem. As in African countries many languages are spoken, it wasn't easy to prepare learners to participate in the education systems through their own mother tongues.

Even if it is not a specific focus for this study, it must be mentioned how huge the language problem was and needs attention and a deep understanding to tackle. Phillipson cites Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who says that ninety per cent of the population in the continent speak African languages. He further indicates the language problem by saying, "...*English-medium education in post-colonial education systems is likely to produce an elite which is progressively alienated from the rest of the population...*" (Phillipson, 1996:166). According to Tikly (1999) the globalization of the colonial languages undermines the use of indigenous languages in the education systems.

According to Mkuti (1999), in a similar way to Kenya, the use of indigenous languages in schools was forbidden in colonial Mozambique. He cites a pupil who was punished for speaking his mother tongue instead of Portuguese in school. He also mentions how a colleague was reprimanded by the school principal for using an indigenous language to explain a concept while he was teaching in Portuguese. He further gives an explanation by a colleague who told him that if a person is to be taken seriously in a meeting with officials, she/he should speak Portuguese rather than an indigenous language.

In some African countries we can see further complications of the language question. If we continue with Mozambique as an example, Bantu languages and the colonial lingua franca Portuguese were used (Lopes, 1998). The majority of the population speaks Bantu languages. While still Portuguese is the official language, English is gradually introduced (Lopes, 1998) due to its relevance for communicating with the neighbouring countries, former British colonies and also for international communication.

7.0 A FUTURE FOR EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Most of the education systems in African are not based on the reality of the continent neither are they contributing sufficiently to the development of the countries. It is of great importance that the education systems take into consideration the indigenous knowledge systems (Shizha, 2013) and integrate them into the ordinary education. It is also vital to focus on the needs of the local communities and to work towards alleviating their day to day problems. To achieve the goal of transforming the society, education systems must strive to move from theory burdened education towards skill-based education. It needs also to be based on the reality of the countries and provide work opportunities for the educated young people.

The colonial education systems' deliberate devaluation and isolation of the indigenous African languages needs to be dealt with. The future education systems should intensify the use of local languages for the early year learners to maintain cultural identities, good communication and gain pedagogical advantage of learning subject matters (Dialo, 2011).

Nekhwevha (1999) writes following on the problem of not using languages that are understood by the population:

Indeed it can be argued that no country ever achieved high level of economic and cultural development where a large number of its citizens were compelled to communicate in their second and/or third languages. Unless Africans hasten to develop their language for scientific and technological communication these

languages might be marginalised forever from the discourse of development in Africa. This of course will have direct consequences for the future of Africa... (Nekhwevha, 1999:503).

As it is indicated above, the languages of communication, science, technology and other fields are second languages for the local people. The political, economic and social realities of the countries are dealt with in different medias by using foreign languages. It is only those who speak these foreign languages that can get access to what agenda is on discussion and participate in the dialogue or the debate. Due to this problem the majority of the population in the continent is isolated from these processes.

Education systems in Africa are partly challenged by problems related to languages. Multilingualism will contribute to the process of self-reliance and decolonization of the education systems in in the continent (Mbembe, 2016). To fulfil the demand for development and progress of their societies the education systems need an inventory of indigenous knowledge, identification of the problems their education systems are facing and also be a part of the process of alleviating them.

8.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the pre-colonial Africa there were indigenous socialisation systems. They were developed through time to transfer knowledge and skills to the young generation. These knowledge and skills were needed for the survival of individuals, groups and the communities at large (Nkrumah, 1941).

The colonial expansion was followed by introduction of formal education by missionaries under the premises of preaching Christianity. In addition to teaching religion, education was used as a tool to undermine the local way of life. Some of the converts were introduced to what was considered as a new and superior life style, while they were supposed to accept their subordinate positions in relation to the white missionaries. Meyer (2002), discusses on how local converts in Ghana were deliberately controlled by German missionaries. The converts were given a title of “*assistant*”, they were also given inferior education compared with the missionaries and they were kept away from the position of running the mission. There were missionaries who complained about “assistants” educated in Germany that challenged the missionaries with their “insufficient” knowledge. Due to these experiences, the missionaries recommended that the assistants should not attend advanced education. According to the principle of the mission, they should be “*cultivated*” as plants, grow where they were without moving (Meyer, 2002).

In addition to religious and cultural dominance, colonial masters’ languages were introduced through formal education and expanded. English, French, Portuguese and Spanish were used by elites of the colonies as official languages. These four languages are spoken in the former colonies even after independence. Due to political, economic and technological advantageous positions of its speakers, English has spread widely and has emerged as a dominant language compared to the other three languages (McArthur, 1999).

As a part of the religious, cultural and general spiritual dominance, colonial powers introduced education systems serving their purposes. Education systems were introduced on a low level and used to advance only to the knowledge to read and write and they were devoid of practical training. Even if it gradually changed, the education systems inherited this low level of education when the colonial powers were forced to leave the continent. But the effect of the low level, theory oriented and reality detached colonial education inherited, African education systems are still remaining with limited progress.

Education systems under colonialism were not focused on the needs of the people. The priority for the education systems was to produce semi-educated manual labourers and some administrative assistants. The education systems focused on theoretical more than practical subjects (Coleson, 1955). In general people's social, political, and economic needs were given less attention or totally ignored.

Elites, who got their education under colonialism within their own countries or the colonizers metropolis, took over the rule of their countries in the postcolonial period. With the blessing and support of the former colonisers, the new rulers kept the colonial education systems with some minor modifications. These elites believed in the European type of education which helped them to gain power and grab the lion's share of the country's material wealth.

Further discussion on postcolonialism and education led Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia (2006) to the following comments.

Postcolonialism's contentions surrounding the relationship between knowledge and power are linked directly to education, both as an institution where people are inculcated into hegemonic systems of reasoning and as a site where it is possible to resist dominant discursive practices. In this way, education has a systematically ambivalent relation to postcolonialism. On the one hand, it is an object of postcolonial critiques regarding its complicity with Eurocentric discourses and practices. On the other hand, it is only through education that it is possible to reveal and resist colonialism's continuing hold on our imagination. Education is also a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary processes of globalization intersect... (Lingard and Lavia, 2006:257).

The ambivalent relation to colonial education policies emerges from the ways education was planned and implemented during colonial rules in Africa. As it is indicated in the quotation above the policies were hegemonic and Eurocentric. The focus of the education system was on training the local people as cheap labour and obedient servants. Length of school attendance and subjects' natives were allowed to take were determined by the colonisers. The natives were not allowed to go beyond what prepared them to be manual labourers or assistants to colonial administrators (Pankhurst, 1972).

Although limited, the opportunities to education were helpful in different ways. It helped increasing literacy rate, both reading and writing. Gradually it also opened people's eyes and allowed them to understand their own and fellow native's life under subjugation by colonialism. Some started reflecting deeply on their human rights and restrictions imposed upon them by

colonial masters. Intellectuals and freedom movement leaders of the 1960s and 1970s were young people who had attended education during the colonial era.

The masses of the population in these countries did not gain access to education due to lack of knowledge of the colonial languages that were used in the education systems. When few got access, their education had an inferior quality. In addition to using a foreign language, education in these countries were far from dealing with the day to day reality of the population.

For Ngugi, “*Education is a means of knowledge about ourselves*” (Mbembe, 2016:35). The colonial and postcolonial education were rather Eurocentric than looking closer to African countries realities. That is why today there are voices demanding major intervention for improvements in the education systems.

African education systems should aim towards educating productive, conscious, critical and democratic citizens. Some of the following measures could be helpful in an effort for improvement: to increase the use of local languages to reach a larger group of the population, to produce adequate texts and teaching materials with the focus on local contents, to emphasize skills based education to enable employment of the young generation in the production and service sectors in the countries, and to provide knowledge that can integrate national, regional, continental and international experiences.

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