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**Nkrumah's and Nyerere's Educational Visions – What Can
Contemporary Africa Learn From Them? ***

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Abstract

Purpose: This study assesses the educational visions of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere and what contemporary Africa can learn from their thoughts and visions.

Methodology: A selective literature review was conducted of historical and contemporary academic texts of Nkrumah and Nyerere and other writers.

Findings: The results show that Nkrumah and Nyerere emphasised the need for further educational development in their own and other countries in Africa. They also stressed relating education to the local reality and the relevance of adopting usable knowledge and experiences from other parts of the world. The instrumentality of education to change the life of the masses was given a vital place in their work. For Nkrumah and Nyerere, education should aim to create equity among the population instead of contributing to the rise of an elite class that prioritises its interests rather than the interests of society at large. They stressed that education should not be too theoretical at the expense of practical activities.

A unique contribution to theory, practice and policy. The views and actions of Nkrumah and Nyerere have received criticism, but their visions are still relevant for contemporary Africa and beyond. I argue that those who are researching decolonisation and reform in education in African countries should consider reviewing the thoughts and visions of these pioneers. Their visions can lead to a better theoretical understanding to develop sustainable policies and practices that will alleviate the problems facing the individual countries as well as the continent.

Keywords: *Contemporary Africa, Decolonisation, Education, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Pan-Africanism, Visions*

INTRODUCTION

Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere are two popular figures that are well known by their generation. The two leaders' popularity is based on their struggle for independence for their own countries and the support they provided for the independence struggle of other African countries. Both are also known for identifying themselves as socialists. The following table provides a biographical summary of Nkrumah and Nyerere.

Name	Kwame Nkrumah	Julius Nyerere
Country of birth	Ghana	Tanzania
Year of birth	1909	1922
Early profession	Teacher	Teacher
Ideology	Scientific Socialism	Ujamaa ('Familyhood')
Principles for struggle	Pan Africanism	Pan Africanism
Time in power as president	1952–1966	1960–1985
Lost/left power	Coup d'état, in 1966	Resigned in 1985
Died	1972 (63 years old)	1999 (77 years old)

Table 1. Biographical summary of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere (I used different sources to compile the biographical summaries of the two leaders).

Nkrumah and Nyerere in their lifetime were involved in the fight for liberation from colonialism and in post-independence for the construction of their respective countries. Their struggle was for political, economic and social development of their countries. As they were both pan-Africanists, their battle was not limited to their countries. Nkrumah and Nyerere also supported the liberation of other countries in the continent, which were suffering under apartheid and colonialism.

The men were born at a time when most of the countries in the African continent were suffering under European colonial rule. They both initially attended Catholic mission schools before proceeding to higher education. Both were, at some point in their career, employed as teachers before they left their countries for further education. In addition, both are known for their writings, which included their educational visions for their countries and the continent (Benjamin, 2021).

Nkrumah

Nkrumah first attended the Government Training College in Ghana before he undertook his studies in economics and sociology at Lincoln University and education at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States (Biney, 2007). He later attended courses in anthropology and philosophy in England at the London School of Economics (Biney, 2007).

While at Achimota College in Ghana, Nkrumah met James Kweggir Aggrey, who was a Deputy Principal of the college who influenced Nkrumah towards nationalistic thinking (Biney, 2007; Frehiwot, 2011). In the United States, Nkrumah was exposed to and influenced by Black intellectual movements and their leaders, such as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois. After he returned from the United States, and during his stay in England, he was involved in the pan-African movement and mentored by the known pan-Africanist thinker and activist George Padmore (Biney, 2007).

Nyerere

Nyerere first attended teacher education in Makerere College in Uganda before he left for further studies in history and education at Edinburgh University in the United Kingdom (Malenga, 2001). In Edinburgh, he was exposed to Fabian socialism, which influenced his thoughts about the future of communal societies in Africa (Malenga, 2001). He was also influenced by the thoughts of John Stuart Mill and pan-Africanism (Chachage & Chachage, 2004).

Socialist views

Both Nkrumah and Nyerere favoured a socialist mixed economy instead of the capitalist free market. Nkrumah advocated scientific socialism, while Nyerere put his focus on African socialism. Nyerere promoted African socialism using the approach known as ujamaa ('familyhood') as a core way of organising the Tanzanian farmers by considering the local norms and values of the society.

The main reason for their preference of the socialist ideology over the idea of the free market could lie in the reality of their countries as well as the continent. In their countries, as well as in the continent, communal living and cooperation were common in all fields of life. The influence of the then socialist bloc, mainly the socialist superpower of the Soviet Union, on Nkrumah and Nyerere could be considered when discussing their preference for socialism instead of a free market. Although he was interested in the socialist Eastern Bloc countries, Nkrumah was one of the founders of the non-aligned movement (Biney, 2007), with the preference of not aligning with either the Eastern socialist or Western capitalist blocks.

Capitalist systems of the West were also not appreciated by Nyerere. According to Major and Mulvihill (2009), Nyerere did not favour the economic and social systems the colonialists introduced to Africa. The capitalist idea of excessive individualism and competition was viewed by Nyerere as the basis for creating hostility between groups as well as inequality between members of society.

Focus of this article

Nkrumah's and Nyerere's thoughts and their engagements within and beyond their countries have been the subject of extensive scholarly work. Many writers globally have addressed their rise, their active life in actualising their visions, and who have also criticised their limitations. The writers have their own motivations to write in positive or negative terms about Nkrumah and Nyerere, but to conduct an analysis of these motives is beyond the scope of this article.

Findings: Nkrumah and Nyerere's Educational Perspectives and Contributions

This article focuses on Nkrumah and Nyerere's educational thoughts and practices. Specifically, it investigates their thoughts on what the aim of education is, how education should or ought to be undertaken and who should be educated. Nkrumah and Nyerere's critique of the colonial educational system is discussed as well as what contemporary Africa could learn from their critique when decolonising education for further development.

This article employs Nkrumah and Nyerere's writings as well as works by other academicians about their educational thoughts and visions. In the works of Nkrumah and Nyerere, one can find their vision on the role education could play in changing the lives of individuals, the masses and all sectors of society. Education, according to them, should not be used to generate a selfish, elite group at the expense of society at large. Instead, the welfare of society should be in focus. The major emphasis in their discussions on the role of education is that it

should be relevant and related to the life of people while recognising the value of usable knowledge produced anywhere outside their society.

The role of education for the development of the individual and society

Even if it is stipulated that Nkrumah and Nyerere's thoughts on education is on the macro level, they also recognised the role of education for the individual and the role of educated individuals in society at large. According to both of them, education is expected to benefit the individual as well as the society at large. The individual can develop intellectual capacity and benefit personally from attending formal education. Beyond benefiting the individual, Nkrumah and Nyerere believed that education benefits the society in which the individual is a part (Nkrumah, 1941; Nyerere, 1985).

While recognising the effect of education on developing the individuals in different dimensions, more than the contribution of education for individual well-being, the final goals are expressed to be creating a good relationship with the society and putting in focus the development of society. Beyond recognising the importance of education for individuals, Nyerere warned against elitism.

Nyerere acknowledges that individuals having the opportunity to attend higher education could lead to self-reliance. However, this opportunity or privilege of attending higher education should not lead to selfishness. Instead, the educated should assume responsibility for their community and consider how to improve the lives of members of their community (Lema et al., 2004).

Nyerere is implying the privileges higher education can bring on an individual basis, as well as the individual benefit higher education can offer. At the same time, he is warning against self-centredness and reminding the educated audience that their success is gained through the provision of the poor taxpayers. According to Nyerere, intellectuals are expected to pay back to society by their engagement in their field of specialisation, which could be as agronomists, teachers, doctors, engineers and various other professions. (Lema et al., 2004).

In addition to considering individuals' responsibility to society, both Nkrumah and Nyerere also highlighted society's expectations from the school and the educational system as a whole:

Any system of education worth its salt should be made consistent with the changing needs of the community in which the individual personality finds expression.... The activities of these schools should be made to relate to the life of the people so as to equip and fit them to meet their varied life demands. (Nkrumah, 1943, p. 36)

Formal education in any country is bound to be – and from society's point of view is intended to be – an element in maintaining or developing the social, political, and economic culture of that society. (Nyerere 1985, p. 45)

According to these two leaders, education at various levels should respond to the demands and contribute to the development of society. This view could imply that their two countries were under colonial rule for some time and that Nkrumah and Nyerere demanded another way of running their countries' education systems after independence. Education, in that case, was supposed to support the development of the different sectors of society.

Education practice and theory

For the two leaders, the importance of both theoretical and practical components of education was clear. Nkrumah (1943) writes, 'The old conception of education as being exclusively

academic still dominates the colonial school program of Africa' (p. 36). Similar to many other African countries, Tanzania is an agrarian country and Nyerere's educational works focused on this sector. His examples of the relevance of relating theory and practice were drawn from the agricultural sector. He discusses the need for the students to work on the farm and the need for taking advantage of the farmers practical and experience-based knowledge. He promoted the idea of using farmers as supervisors in the farming schools. By this, he advocated the integration of practical experiences and theoretical knowledge given at school.

Nyerere pinpointed the major economic sectors of contemporary Tanzania as farming and animal husbandry, expressing the need for environmental protection through terracing. Beyond giving us ideas on the economy and the need for environmental protection, Nyerere opened up the need for including many actors in these sectors. He clearly illustrated the need for pupils to be connected to farming, and that farmers in addition to their farming work should be able to transmit their knowledge and experience as teachers (Nyerere, 1967).

While Nyerere considered the need for improving the sector by enriching practice with theory and vice versa, he was well aware of the importance and the difficulties, 'to break down the notion that only book learning is worthy of respect' (Nyerere, 1967, p. 248). In addition to the practice of farming, animal husbandry and terracing, he also explained the possibility of theoretically understanding these agricultural and environmental activities to develop them and practically implement them. Nyerere wanted to address the bias of giving more value to theoretical learning at the expense of practical work (Nyerere, 1967).

Education with a focus on the reality of society

A major focus of these two leaders is that education should be related to the life of the people the system is serving. It should not be based on the 'ideals of the metropolitan countries' (Nkrumah, 1970, p. 70) imposed on the former colonies as a neo-colonial mechanism of indirect control. Nkrumah further remarked that schools are providing knowledge about former colonisers. Instead, he recommended education to focus on the local society, as he believed that education should be related to the needs and demands of the society it is serving.

Nyerere believed that the education of children should bring them closer to their community. He writes:

But it is no use our educational system stressing values and knowledge appropriate to the past or to the citizens in other countries; it is wrong if it even contributes to the continuation of those inequalities and privileges which still exist in our society because of our inheritance. Let our students be educated to be members and servants of the kind of just and egalitarian future to which this country aspires. (Nyerere, 1967, p. 255)

Here, Nyerere draws a picture of an education system he visualised for his country. First, it should help students to integrate into their society, through which the students will gain individual benefits because of their education as well as accept responsibility to serve society. Second, the education system should not stress 'values and knowledge' appropriate for the past and other countries. This view indicates that the values and knowledge of colonial countries are inappropriate for an independent nation. At the same time, glorification of the lifestyle and history of the colonial country must be replaced by historical, political, economic and social knowledge of the country in which the education is provided. Third, Nyerere wanted the education system to cease reproducing inequalities within the population and stop the system of keeping privilege to the few. Finally, related to this objective, he visualised the

need for the education system to prepare students towards, a 'just and egalitarian' society, which the country looks forward to building.

Knowledge produced outside one's own country or continent

Both Nkrumah and Nyerere heavily stressed the relevance of local knowledge. While emphasising the local knowledge, they were also open to knowledge and experiences that are relevant to their transformational and developmental goals.

Both recognised the relevance of knowledge from the past and present and knowledge from anywhere. Nkrumah is positive to the critical incorporation of 'the best in Western culture' to African education as well as relevant knowledge from different disciplines of natural and social sciences such as education, sociology and anthropology. However, they both expressed their fear of thoughts coming from abroad might undermine or even destroy relevant and useable traditional knowledge and practices. According to Nkrumah, the acceptance might lead to the 'destruction of the best in Indigenous African culture' (Nkrumah, 1943, p. 38).

Nkrumah and Nyerere were aware of the colonial distortion of African reality. They were made aware of this misrepresentation through their life experiences in their home countries, Western countries, as well as through their education and reading. But they also recognised positive elements of the knowledge and experiences from the West. They did not categorically reject what is foreign to their societies.

Nkrumah and Nyerere viewed by others

Nkrumah: Cultural connection to conceptual decolonisation

Some writers, such as Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016), have described Nkrumah's focus on education as directed to achieving a goal of reducing poverty and advancing the economic development and prosperity of Ghana, which could later be extended to other African countries. Nkrumah's thoughts on education, theories in different fields of life, and philosophy (consciencism) continue to be subjects for discussion, further study and research.

According to Martin Odei Ajei (2018), there were developments in Nkrumah's perspectives on education over time. As Odei Ajei writes, 'Whereas his earlier work emphasises a necessary connection between education and culture, the later Nkrumah goes further to develop a philosophical orientation for conceptual decolonisation' (p. 1). Regarding the change in Nkrumah's overall perspective through time, Okadigbo commented that the pre-1965 Nkrumah emphasised nonviolent actions, while the post-1965 Nkrumah endorsed violent revolution as a means for change (Okadigbo 1985, as cited in Ani, 2014). Both Ani (2014) and Odei Ajei (2018) explain the change of position by Nkrumah, yet they do not provide sufficient reasons for his move from his original positions to his new ones.

Nkrumah's educational as well as his general philosophies are subjects of debate, development and criticism. Among his critics, Ali Mazrui (1966) was at the forefront. Mazrui wrote an article titled, 'The Leninist Czar' which was published in *Transition*, a magazine of art, culture and politics of Makerere University College in Uganda. The article was published after Nkrumah lost his power by military coup d'état and it accused him of implementing a Leninist-style revolution and for being a dictator during his time in power. Following Mazrui's article, another damaging critical article was written in the same magazine by Russell Warren Howe, a British journalist, implicated for having a connection with the CIA. He was an Africa correspondent for some American publications, and while Nkrumah was in power, he was deported from Ghana (West, 2015). The writings about Nkrumah lead to a wide discussion and criticism of Mazrui as a neo-colonialist intellectual and extended later to

exposing *Transition* magazine as funded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was sponsored by the CIA (West, 2015).

Despite criticism of Nkrumah's ideas and thoughts, his transformative ideas are given more emphasis by contemporary African institutions. The African Union, in its Agenda 2063, decided to include some of Nkrumah's pan-Africanist thinking that he emphasised in the early 1960s, such as expanding education in the continent as well as politically and economically integrating and uniting Africa (Odei Ajei, 2018).

Nyerere: Self-reliance to liberation

Nyerere's understanding of the problem of education in Tanzania, which could be applicable for the African continent, is summarised as follows:

Nyerere notes four limitations that are evident in Tanzania's education and are common to many of African countries today. First, education inherited from the colonialists is elitist in nature such that it is designed to meet the interests and needs of a very small proportion of citizens and thus fails to produce an egalitarian society. Second, the education has a tendency of uprooting its recipients from their native societies thus creating no link between them and the society. Third, education tends to emphasise on book-knowledge where education only stresses on knowledge acquired through theory and not life experiences. Lastly, education does not combine school learning with work. (Mukhungulu et al., 2017, p. 179)

To address the challenges facing the education system and transform society, Nyerere's initial focus was on education for self-reliance, which is expressed in different ways. As a way of self-reliance, Nyerere emphasised the need for individuals to have the qualities of an enquiring mind, learning from others, rejecting or adapting to their own needs and having basic confidence as a free and equal member of society (Ahmed et al., 2014). This even extends to another expectation of self-reliance from learners in the form of producing food, clothing, furniture and other products to fulfil their needs (Mukhungulu et al., 2017). Thoughts of self-reliance when viewed at a societal level are expressed in three main principles of Nyerere's African socialism, namely that there is no exploitation and everyone works, shares products and displays equality and respect for human dignity (Ibunga, 2016; Mukhungulu et al., 2017).

Mulenga (2001) provides a further implication of this concept, 'Education for Self-Reliance stands as a major body idea that best reflects Nyerere's deep and subtle appreciation and commitment to education as a means of bringing about social change' (Mulenga, 2001, p. 468). After introducing the concept of education for self-reliance, Nyerere 'reflected upon this view and modified it into education for liberation' (Nasongo & Musungu, 2009, p. 113). Nyerere's conception of liberation includes freedom 'from economic and cultural dependency on foreign nations' (Mukhungulu et al., 2017, pp 179–180).

What education for liberation meant for the learner is further elaborated and paraphrased as 'Education has to increase man's physical and mental freedom to increase control over themselves, their own lives and the environment in which they live. Education has to liberate both the mind and the body of man' (Nasongo & Musungu, 2009, p. 113). These two authors also expressed the concept that Nyerere developed in 1967, 'education for liberation', includes his earlier concept from 1960, 'education for self-reliance'.

While there are many positive views on Nyerere's performance in the field of education, there are also critiques against his thoughts, plans and practical implementations of education. One

major critique aimed at Nyerere was the failure to understand the postcolonial experience of the African people. Among them is the combination of the Arab-Islamic influence, the disposition to Western culture and the traditional African culture (Muideen, 2017). Another vital critique is the gap between the theory of socialism and its implementation. According to Muideen (2017), socialism in the whole continent ‘enjoyed theoretical formulation but suffered practical failure’ and this is no different for Tanzania, where Nyerere used ‘elitist colouration’ (Muideen, 2017, pp. 268–269).

The failure of the implementation of education for self-reliance or liberation, according to critics, included among other issues, a top-down decision-making process, wrongly interpreting and implementing concepts and lacking mechanisms for feedback as well as a plan for reflection and improvement (Ahmed et al., 2014). In 1974, Nyerere himself once wondered why the country could not see results in the field of education. He also doubted whether the education policy the country adopted was the right type or if the implementation of the policy had simply not yet succeeded (Kassam, 2000).

In general, there are criticisms directed specifically to Nkrumah and Nyerere, but there are also critiques common to both of them. For example, they are criticised for considering their thoughts as ‘absolute truth’ and for not tolerating other perspectives that did not support their views (Ude, 2018). Criticisms are also directed at them for their preferring socialism as the best alternative for the development of Africa, and by preferring this ideology, Nkrumah and Nyerere neglected the African philosophy of life. They are also criticised for romanticising pre-colonial Africa and for not sufficiently discussing the diversity in pre-colonial African societies (Žák, 2016).

Discussion and Conclusion: Connection to Contemporary Contexts

Nkrumah and Nyerere attended Catholic mission schools at the start of their education, and later, they were both teachers at the beginning of their careers. They were also exposed to education and life outside the continent of Africa, were involved in the struggle for the independence of their countries, and later became the first presidents of independent Ghana and Tanzania, respectively.

Both leaders were socialists who were influenced by different groups and belonged to the pan-African movement. As pan-Africanists, they played a vital role in establishing the Organisation of African Unity (the present African Union) in 1963 and promoting the independence of many countries on the continent.

Nkrumah was 13 years older than Nyerere, and Ghana became independent four years before Tanzania (Ghana in 1957 and Tanzania in 1961). Due to his socialist ideology and close relationship with the countries in the East, Nkrumah was not a favourite of the Western capitalist countries. Even if it is difficult to confirm, it is reputed that the West supported the Ghanaian military force that overthrew him in his absence in 1966. After the coup d’état, he lived in exile until he died in 1972.

Nyerere stayed in power until 1985, at which point he left his presidential post and remained as party leader up until 1990. He was able to see some change in his country. He also recognised some of his mistakes in applying his project of the ujamaa. Nyerere died in 1999.

Nkrumah and Nyerere believed that education could enhance the potential of the individual (Nkrumah, 1943; Nyerere, 1985). They advocated that the knowledge and skills gained by individuals should ultimately be used to develop society at large. Nyerere’s warning ‘Education for self-reliance is not education for selfishness’ (Lema et al., 2004, p. 164), is in line with his principle of serving society.

The relationship between practice and theory was vital for both of them. According to Nyerere, the theory of farming should be related to the practice; students could be farmers and farmers could be students. In the case of practical knowledge of farming, the farmer with significant experience could be an instructor. When theory and practice go hand in hand, he believed that there would be a change of attitude, and instead of giving high status only to studies through books rather than practical education, theory and practice should be recognised as inseparable and complementary (Nyerere, 1967).

While recognising the importance of knowledge produced in the West, East or any other place on the globe, Nkrumah and Nyerere saw the importance of prioritising local knowledge (Nkrumah, 1943; Nyerere, 2004). Nkrumah recommended combining the best of Western culture and African culture in education while simultaneously emphasising the need ‘to prevent the destruction of the best in indigenous African culture’ (Nkrumah, 1943).

In my view, it is difficult to observe Nkrumah’s and Nyerere’s visions on education by separating these views from the contemporary movement of decolonisation. Today’s decolonisation movements are also relating the education system to the local needs of African societies, researching and integrating the indigenous knowledge system to the sciences that are already established, and trying to develop methods that are suitable for conducting research on local realities. This could be summarised in an overarching theme of ‘liberating the African mind, nurturing African Character, owning the African narrative, and the essence of knowledge’ (Amuzu, 2021, p. 8).

The difference between the decolonisation thinking of their time and today could be the context. When Nkrumah and Nyerere formulated their ideas on education and attempted to apply them, many African countries were suffering under colonialism and fighting for physical as well as mental decolonisation. In their two countries, Nkrumah and Nyerere built new educational systems that could match the needs of the independent Ghana and Tanzania.

Today, the education systems in Ghana and Tanzania have existed for quite a long time. Practitioners have access to knowledge and experiences of their own and other countries in the world due to advanced communication technology, mainly in the form of the Internet. However, the countries have not yet freed themselves from the Western perspective in diverse fields of life. Today, the education systems in the two countries may not be subject to direct coercion but are nevertheless under the strong influence and imposition of the ‘universal truth’ from the West. I argue that the visions of Nkrumah and Nyerere can have a continuing influence on education systems of different countries through aiming to develop their societies, ensure the equality of citizens, respond to local needs and realities, integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of education, recognise the due importance of indigenous knowledge, and liberate the mind of the learner and the teacher. These ideas are still relevant to contemporary societies and education in the continent and could be used in the struggle to decolonise African education systems.

* The idea of this text was first presented at the SANORD (South African-Nordic Centre) conference held at Karlstad University, Sweden, in 2014.

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