

# **Rediscovering the Didactic Identity of a Kenyan Learner; A Dual Ethnographic Approach**

## ***Abstract***

*This study relies on duoethnography to explore, identify, and define the pedagogical identity of a Kenyan learner. By doing so, it is hoped that it will help formulate a contextualized Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) framework that espouses the unique culture and life experiences of a Kenyan learner. This contextualized CRP framework can, in turn, be used to formulate, implement, and assess instruction and learning in Kenyan education system. According to partial findings of the study, the idea of jamii comes up as an essential component in the character of a Kenyan learner, while ukasumba remains the biggest threat to the pedagogical identity of a Kenyan learner.*

## **Background and Issue**

Like many previously colonized countries in Africa, Kenya adopted an extremely Europeanized or Westernized system of education. Obviously, the imperial system of education was never designed with the needs of natives at heart (Kessi et al., 2021). Its main purpose was to produce labor to work in farms, industries, and mining to create wealth for the United Kingdom.

The primary objectives and demands of curriculum development at the time of independence were to provide labor for economic development and to Africanize public service (Woolman, 2001). The issue of Africanizing the education curriculum itself, as such, was not a priority. This is problematic for several reasons. First, as generations come and go, the confusion about national identity continues to falter. As the internet continues to globalize commerce, trade, and the way people socialize, a Kenyan learner is caught in a turmoil of unresolved, obliterated identity and the need to fit in a global space provides opportunities for further exposure to more cultures—old and new ones.

The struggle for the Africanization of Kenyan education becomes even more complicated because, for the reforms to be realized, resources are required. In this case, there must be sufficient political and economic goodwill from the governments and well-wishers to realize culturally relevant/responsive teaching in Kenya. Since independence, Kenyans have been trying to Africanize schooling while maintaining the outdated British system. But this structure has a peculiarly non-African quality when it comes to learning. Traditional Kenyan native education is community-based, organic, and informal.

Age group transitions occurred naturally and without exclusion, without any sort of mechanism. Demonstrably, these differences are hallmarks of two completely independent systems of learning (Ntarangwi, 2005). The attempt to build on the European system while maintaining the cultural identities of Kenyan natives is not only a fallacy but an impossibility. This imported culture of egotistical consumerism "directly contributed to unemployment" and "induced the erosion of community responsibility."

The only solution is to redesign from scratch a Kenyan-informed curriculum that reflects the culture, traditions, beliefs, and more importantly, the local and national aspirations.

Consequently, one of the major challenges facing the Kenyan education system is insufficient or lack of espousal of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Gay, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Samuels, 2018; Tanase, 2020).

### **Study objectives**

This study is explorative. That is, before implementing and assessing the pedagogical impact of CRP on Kenyan learner identity, it is paramount:

1. To explore and define the pedagogical character of a Kenyan learner

### **Research Question(s)**

1. What is the pedagogical definition of an authentic Kenyan learner?
2. What is the main pedagogical menace to the authentic pedagogical identity of a Kenyan learner?

### **Methodology**

This ongoing study is a duoethnography—between the author and a Kenyan professor. Duoethnography is a dialogic and collaborative approach to curriculum inquiry, despite its origins as a qualitative research technique to examine how people comprehend shared experiences. It has been shown to be an effective teaching instrument in the formation of learners' professional identities and academic support. (Docherty-Skippen & Beattie, 2018) During the dialogue, we tried to answer the outlined research questions through lived education and professional experiences in and outside Kenya.

### **Results Summary**

The study reviews two critical notions:

1. Colonialism killed the idea of *jamii* (loosely translated, community or society)
2. With the death of *jamii*, came the death of *jamaa* (loosely translated, the self, the person)
3. To realize proper contextualized CRP for quality learning, decolonialization should begin by reviving the idea of *jamii* in the Kenyan education system, and in doing so, the *jamaa* will be revived.

### **Conclusion/Discussion**

From the dialogues with a Kenyan professor, Kenyan natives needed to absorb European culture, laws, and practices in order to attain sovereignty. Since their way of life was regarded as barbaric, it would have to be abandoned or subjugated. The British justification for colonizing Kenyan natives included the subjugation of local (*jamii*) institutions and systems as part of its moral obligation to "uplift" them from their uncivilized condition. Colonial systems meant that the empire is taught to students, and the narrative is told from the perspective of the colonizer.

The emphasis shifts to how Kenya progressed and eventually became civilized under colonial authority, minimizing the economic exploitation of the nation and the tremendous

violence during that time. This warped image of the empire leaves out the stories of the atrocities committed against the populace, the confiscation of land by the settler community, the struggle of the Mau Mau to restore their right to self-government, and the ongoing domino impact of this economic exploitation.

The mainstream narrative's version of colonialism ignores the legitimacy of pre-empire African customs, beliefs, and practices—thus the death of the authentic pedagogical self of a Kenyan learner. The illusion that British culture is superior to Kenyan native culture is further supported by this narrative, and similar perspectives are still present in the post-colonial *jamii*.

### Research Implications

Even after Kenya fought and achieved freedom, the remnants of colonialism often become even more pronounced, leading to a kind of neo-colonization by the upper classes of society—those who have so thoroughly appropriated the cultures of the colonizer that they now try to spread them as both contemporary and inevitable. This makes the decolonization of Kenyan education necessary, and difficult ultimately possible. One way of doing this is through the reawakening of *jamii* and *jamaa*.

### References

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## Author Information and Biography



After completing my elementary schooling in Kenya—where I was born and raised, I proceeded to Chestnut Hill College (CHC) in Philadelphia for my bachelor's and master's education. For my undergraduate studies, I majored in Computer Science and Accounting while proceeding to undergraduate studies in Instructional Technology. After graduation, I went back to Kenya where I worked for three universities as a trainer, instructional designer, and learning facilitator for almost seven years.

My view on access to quality education is largely shaped by my experiences in Kenya and the United States. Kenya, being a developing nation, quality education is considered by many as a fundamental input in the realization of national and personal developmental aspirations. Because education holds a paramount position in the advancement of society, it is a sector that demands intense and all-embracing exploration through research and proper deliberations by all stakeholders. My life objective is to become a vital participant in advancing the quality of learning not only in Kenya but globally through Technology and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.