## Role of Education in the Political and Economic Transformation of Africa

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### Abstract
*Education is an essential factor in the political and economic development of Africa. African countries have faced several challenges over the years, including political instability, poverty, and underdevelopment. These challenges have hindered economic growth and development in the region, leaving a significant portion of the population in abject poverty. Education has been identified as a critical tool in addressing these challenges and promoting economic and political development. This paper examines the role of education in the political and economic transformation of Africa in contemporary times, highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with this process. It also discusses the various strategies that have been employed to improve the quality and accessibility of education in Africa, as well as the outcomes and impacts of these initiatives.*

**Keywords**: Africa, economic, education, political, transformation

### Introduction
Africa is the second-largest and the second most populous continent in the world, with a population of over 1.2 billion people. The continent is endowed with vast natural resources, including minerals, oil, gas, and arable land, making it a potential powerhouse in the global economy. Yet, according to the World Bank (2022), most of the poorest countries in the world are in Africa. For example, Nigeria has a poverty rate of 40%. Moreover, Africa continues to face significant political and economic challenges that

hinder its development and growth. These challenges include political instability, corruption, poverty, and underdevelopment, among others.

Education has been identified as a critical tool in addressing these challenges and promoting economic and political development in Africa. Education is a fundamental human right that enables individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for personal and societal development. Education also helps to create a more informed citizenry, which is essential for building and sustaining democratic institutions. This paper examines the role of education in the political and economic transformation of Africa, highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with this process. It also discusses the various strategies that have been employed to improve the quality and accessibility of education in Africa, as well as the outcomes and impacts of these initiatives.

**Education and political transformation**
Education is a vital instrument in promoting democratic values and a more informed citizenry (Chikwanha, 2021). It "promotes civic literacy, which is critical in promoting citizen participation and engagement in democratic processes" (Brown, 2015, p. 78). Furthermore, education enables individuals to develop "critical thinking skills, which are necessary for analyzing political issues and making informed decisions" (Smith, 2018, p. 52). Education plays a significant role in Africa's political transformation. In particular, education policies have played a crucial role in fostering political participation and social activism. For instance, the introduction of civic education in schools has been shown to be a critical factor in promoting democratic values and enhancing political participation (Chikwanha, 2021).

**Education and social cohesion**
Education plays a critical role in promoting social cohesion and reducing political instability. Education promotes social cohesion by promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance, social skills, and values that encourage intergroup understanding and empathy (Dang, 2019). According to Boudon (2004), education fosters social integration by providing individuals with the means to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Through education, individuals learn to appreciate and respect differences, which in turn promotes mutual understanding and social harmony (Kymlicka, 2017). Additionally, education fosters positive value system in the society, which in turn promotes social cohesion (Omeje & Eyo, 2008). Furthermore, education helps to reduce prejudice and discrimination by promoting critical thinking and challenging stereotypes (Pettigrew, 2008). Research suggests that individuals with higher

levels of education are more likely to support social cohesion and multiculturalism (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Therefore, investing in education can be an effective strategy for promoting social cohesion and creating more cohesive and tolerant societies.

## Education and political participation

Education is widely regarded as a crucial determinant of political participation. Political participation can be defined as the range of activities in which citizens engage in order to influence public policy, including voting, campaigning, and expressing political opinions. According to Adeyemo (2020), education has been identified as a critical factor in the development of democratic and accountable governance in Africa. Verba et al. (1995) found that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to vote, participate in political campaigns, and engage in other forms of political activity. Similarly, Gallego and Zaller (2010) found that education is positively associated with political participation in Latin America. Africa cannot therefore be left behind given the youth bulge, where young people make up a significant proportion of the population. Education has the potential to encourage youth's participation in the political process and development of democratic institutions.

## Mechanisms through which education affects political participation

Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain the relationship between education and political participation. One possible explanation is that education increases civic knowledge and political efficacy, which in turn lead to increased political participation (Verba et al., 1995). Another possible mechanism is that education increases social capital or the networks and relationships that individuals have with others in their community (Putnam, 1995). Finally, education may also increase exposure to diverse viewpoints and perspectives, which may lead individuals to engage in more political discussions and consider a wider range of political options (Nie et al., 1996). This exposure to diverse viewpoints may increase political tolerance and encourage individuals to engage in political activities that promote the interests of marginalized groups.

## Education and economic transformation

Education plays a prominent role in the development of any society. Several studies have investigated the relationship between education and poverty reduction in Africa (Adepoju & Olayinka, 2022) by improving citizens' productivity, which in turn increases their income, leading to a reduction in poverty. Income may be increased through employment and income generation (Omoke & Akinola, 2019). Education, furthermore, helps to reduce poverty by improving the employment prospects of individuals, especially in the formal sector. Education also contributes to political stability by promoting democratic

values and institutions, which are necessary for social cohesion and sustainable development (Adeyemi & Adeyemo, 2020).

Therefore, education promotes economic growth by enabling individuals to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship, innovation, and technological advancement. By developing skilled workforce, education improves the employability of individuals. Education also promotes entrepreneurship, which is critical in creating employment opportunities for individuals (Barrera-Osorio & Linden, 2015). According to the World Bank, education is the most powerful tool for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable economic growth in developing countries (World Bank, 2020b).

One of the mechanisms through which education impacts political and economic transformation is the promulgation and implementation of education policies. Education policy is an essential tool for reducing poverty in Africa. According to Olofin and Adeniyi (2022), education policy is pivotal to poverty reduction in Nigeria. They suggested that education policy should be focused on increasing access to education and improving the quality of education. Additionally, Adetoro and Oyekanmi (2015) found that education policy is critical for poverty reduction in Nigeria. They argued that education policy should be focused on improving the quality of education, reducing dropout rates, and increasing access to education.

In the past few decades, many African countries have implemented education policies aimed at achieving universal primary education (UPE). Education for All (EFA) initiative was launched in 2000 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), while Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) was initiated by the African Union (AU), among others. The CESA aims to transform education and training systems in Africa by improving access, equity, and relevance of education to the continent's needs.

Furthermore, education policies have played a critical role in promoting gender equality and empowering women in Africa. Studies have shown that women's education is important in reducing poverty in developing countries. A study by Kwegyir-Afful and de-Graft Aikins (2018) found that educating women in Ghana can help reduce poverty by empowering them economically and socially. The introduction of gender-sensitive curricula in schools has been a critical component of these policies. Policies such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Kenya Education Sector Plan (2018-2022), Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (2014), the Ethiopian government's Gender Equality Strategy (2016-2020), and the Rwandan government's National Gender Policy (2019) are

examples of policies that promote gender equality and equity in education. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), strategic education policies have been instrumental in promoting economic growth and development.

Since education can empower citizens, it has played a crucial role in Africa's political transformation. Education has the potential to promote democracy and good governance, reduce poverty and inequality, and enhance economic growth. Also, education policies that have been implemented in Africa have increased access to education, especially for marginalized groups such as girls and children from low-income families. This increased access to education has led to greater political participation by citizens and the emergence of a more informed and politically active population.

Several African countries have implemented policies to promote entrepreneurship education. African Development Bank's Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Multi-Donor Trust Fund, which supports youth entrepreneurship initiatives across the continent (African Development Bank, 2019); South African government's National Youth Policy, which prioritizes youth entrepreneurship as a means of addressing unemployment and promoting economic growth (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2020), are some examples.

Rwanda has integrated entrepreneurship education into its national curriculum, while Ghana has established entrepreneurship centres in universities to provide training and support to aspiring entrepreneurs (African Development Bank, 2019). Similarly, Kenya has launched several initiatives, such as the Presidential Digital Talent Programme, to promote entrepreneurship and innovation among its youth (World Bank, 2016). Nigeria, like many other developing countries introduced Nigerian Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) in 2020 (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2020). This fund provides financial and business support to Nigerian youth entrepreneurs to develop and grow their businesses. Additionally, the government has established the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) to provide training and support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country (SMEDAN, n.d.). Among other such policies are: the Nigerian Entrepreneurship Support Programme (NESP) launched by the Nigerian government in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2013 (UNDP, 2013); tax incentives for SMEs to encourage their growth and development (Federal Inland Revenue Service, 2019).

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of economic growth and development in Africa, and education policies that promote entrepreneurship are essential for supporting

and nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit in the continent. Therefore, in addition to government policies, private sector organizations have also played a role in promoting entrepreneurship in Nigeria. For instance, the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme (TEEP) provides funding, mentorship, and training to African entrepreneurs, including Nigerians (Tony Elumelu Foundation, n.d.). Similarly, the Nigeria Entrepreneurship Summit and Honours (NESH) is an annual event that brings together entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers to discuss entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigeria (NESH, n.d.).

Despite the benefits of education in poverty reduction, access to education remains problematic for a large population of learners in Africa. A study by Belay et al. (2016) found that access to education is a challenge in Ethiopia due to poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited educational opportunities. Similarly, Chuma and Maina (2016) noted that access to education in Kenya is hindered by poverty, high tuition fees, and inadequate infrastructure. A report by UNESCO (2020a) elucidates this phenomenon by giving an embarrassing (59 million) figure of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa in 2018. Therefore, lack of access to education can continue to situate Africa as an economically beggarly continent.

In addition to access, there is rapid growth in global technology and any education that is out of sync with the demands and challenges of the 21st century is likely going to impoverish rather than empower its recipients. A study by Namakula et al. (2019) found that the quality of education in Uganda is substandard, leading to poor learning outcomes and hindering poverty reduction efforts. Another study by Geda et al. (2018) in Ethiopia found that the quality of education is affected by inadequate infrastructure, a lack of qualified teachers, and insufficient teaching materials.

## Education and technological development

Technological advancements have brought significant changes in the education sector in Africa. The problem of access to education has been significantly mitigated across African states through the intervention of technology. Technology has made it possible for education to be delivered beyond the traditional classroom setting. With the use of the internet and mobile devices, learners in remote areas can access educational materials and interact with their teachers.

According to the World Bank (2020a), the number of internet users in Africa increased from 2.1% in 2005 to 28.2% in 2019. This growth in internet penetration has made it possible for e-learning to become a viable option for delivering education in Africa. E-

learning platforms such as Coursera and edX have partnered with African universities to offer online courses. Mobile technology has also played a significant role in improving access to education in Africa. According to a report by GSMA (2018), there were 456 million unique mobile subscribers in sub-Saharan Africa in 2018. This growth in mobile technology has made it possible for mobile learning to become popular in Africa.

## Challenges of technology in education in Africa

Despite the significant benefits of technology in education, there are also challenges. According to a report by UNESCO (2020b), there is a lack of infrastructure and resources to support technology-based education in many African countries. In addition, there is a lack of trained teachers who can effectively use technology to deliver education. There are also challenges related to the cost of technology, particularly in remote areas where there is limited access to electricity. In addition to the challenges mentioned above, there are also concerns about the quality of online education. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (2019), digital divide remains a significant challenge in many African countries. The report noted that while some African countries have made progress in closing the digital divide, much more needs to be done to ensure that everyone has access to the internet and can benefit from technological advancements.

Despite the challenges, there have been notable successes in using technology to improve education in Africa. For example, the eLearning Africa conference, which is held annually, brings together stakeholders in the education sector to discuss ways of using technology to improve education in Africa. The conference provides a platform for sharing best practices and ideas and promotes collaboration between stakeholders. Therefore, technology has the potential to transform education in Africa by improving access and quality of education.

## Challenges and opportunities in education in Africa

Despite the importance of education in promoting political and economic development in Africa, the continent faces several challenges in providing quality education to its citizens. Inadequate funding is a significant challenge facing education in Africa. Poor budgetary allocation reduces the quality of education in many African countries. This informs poor teachers' salaries and welfare, which contribute to low morale and poor performance (Killick, 2018). According to Killick (2018), shortage of basic resources such as textbooks, qualified teachers, and classrooms are recurring issues in many African countries. Poor infrastructure, including inadequate classrooms, poor sanitation, and limited access to electricity, has been identified as a significant challenge facing education in Africa (Mundy, 2010; UNESCO, 2017). The lack of proper infrastructure has a

negative impact on students' learning outcomes and perpetuates poverty in the continent (Mundy, 2010; UNESCO, 2017). According to UNESCO (2017), over 30% of schools in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to basic water and sanitation facilities, making it challenging for students to maintain good hygiene and learn effectively.

Inadequate teacher training resulting in low quality of teaching and learning and the overall poor performance of students is yet another challenge. Despite the challenges, some countries in Africa have made progress in increasing education funding, such as Rwanda, which increased its education budget from 12% to 17% in 2020 (Killick, 2018). More so, opportunities abound for improving education in Africa. For instance, the African Union's target of achieving universal access to quality education by 2030 is a move in the right direction.

**Strategies for improving education in Africa**
Several strategies have been employed to improve education in Africa. These strategies include increasing funding for education, improving teacher training, improving infrastructure, and promoting access to education in rural areas. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), as of 2021, many African countries make only minimal budgetary allocations to education. The UIS tracks education financing and produces data on education indicators for countries around the world. As of 2021, the average share of government expenditure allocated to education in sub-Saharan Africa was 17.1%, which is lower than the global average of 18.8%. In 2019, only six African countries (Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland) met the 4% benchmark for education spending recommended by the African Union. This benchmark is based on the Dakar Framework for Action, which was adopted in 2000 by African governments committed to providing universal access to quality education. In 2020, the UIS reported that 53% of children of primary school age and 58% of children of lower secondary school age in sub-Saharan Africa were not learning the minimum expected level of reading proficiency. These statistics suggest that many African countries are not allocating sufficient resources to education, which may be hindering progress towards universal access to quality education and limiting opportunities for children and young people in these countries.

Another strategy for the economic transformation of Africa is improvement in teacher training. African countries should invest in training teachers and providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge required to deliver quality education. This will improve the quality of teaching and learning in African schools, and ultimately leading to improvement of education in Africa (Addey & Duku, 2018). According to Addey and

Duku (2018), African countries need to invest in training teachers and equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge required to deliver quality education. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2016) further asserts that investing in teacher training can improve the quality of education by improving teacher motivation, knowledge, and skills. In addition to improving the quality of education, investing in teacher training can also improve students' outcomes (UNESCO, 2020b). UNESCO (2020b) reports that teacher training programmes have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes in developing countries.

According to a study by Akyeampong et al. (2013), there is a positive correlation between education and economic growth in Africa. Additionally, improving teacher training can also have political implications. As argued by Chimombo (2019), education is a fundamental human right that empowers individuals to participate in political and social processes. Therefore, African countries should invest in improving the infrastructure of schools, including the provision of basic amenities such as electricity, water, and sanitation facilities. This investment in infrastructure will create a conducive learning environment for students and teachers.

One of the key strategies that have been adopted to harness the power of education to transform the African political and economic landscapes is increasing access to education. African countries should build schools and provide qualified teachers in rural areas. This will improve access to education for children in these areas and contribute to reducing the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. As noted by Galabawa et al. (2005), promoting access to education in rural areas is critical in improving education in Africa.

**Outcomes and impacts of education initiatives in Africa**
Several education initiatives have been implemented in Africa, with varying outcomes and impacts. For example, the Education for All (EFA) initiative, launched in 2000, aimed to achieve universal primary education by 2015. African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) is another education initiative that has had a significant impact on education in Africa. AIMS provides advanced training in mathematical sciences to students from across Africa, with the aim of promoting scientific and technological development in Africa.

The impacts of these education initiatives go beyond just improving the quality of education. They indicate positive correlation between education levels and economic growth in African countries (Nkamnebe et al., 2021). Education initiatives have also been shown to have positive impacts on social development, with studies showing a positive

correlation between education levels and social development indicators such as health, gender equality, and social cohesion (United Nations, 2019).

## Conclusion

Education is critical in promoting political and economic development in Africa. Educated individuals are more likely to be engaged in political process and have the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. In many African countries, the lack of access to education has been a barrier to political participation and the development of democratic institutions. Studies have shown that education has a positive impact on political participation. However, several challenges include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and limited access in rural areas. To improve education in Africa, strategies such as increasing funding for education, improving teacher training, improving infrastructure, and promoting access to education in rural areas must be employed. As such, investing in education in Africa is critical to promoting the overall development of the continent.

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