



Repositioning African youth for leadership and governance: Implications for educational development

Lucky Nziadam¹, Lawrence², Ojule²

¹ Department of Educational Foundations, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria

² Department of Educational Management and Planning, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the educational implications of repositioning African youth for leadership and governance. The paper becomes imperative as a result of leadership failure noticeable in virtually all sector in the society. The paper further cited countries where transformative impact of prepared leaders was seen based on the good performances, unlike African countries where leaders emerged without such structured preparation. For proper justification of the matters at stake some possible clarifications were made, and the paper recommended that the provision or investment in leadership training, promotion of youth participation for governance, civil education should be strengthened in primary, secondary, tertiary and other institutions for possible development.

Keywords: African youth, leadership, governance, educational development, leadership training

Introduction

Africa is steadily progressing in its transformation, drawing on the continent's resources, creativity, and youthful demographic to drive change – yet there remains significant ground to cover. As this era continues to accelerate, we must seize the opportunity to position Africa as a key player on the global stage. If we fail to act decisively and work together, we risk being sidelined in the global progressive landscape.

The reality is that African nations are at a critical turning point confronted with the risk of being sidelined in the global race for progress. As countries worldwide rapidly embrace technological advancements, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and data analytics, the continent must act swiftly to avoid being marginalized.

The pace of innovation and technological advancement is incredible. Daily new developments take place, reshaping industries and redefining how we live and work. It is interesting to note however that the gathering of at unstoppable Africa, the technological landscape has evolved rapidly, highlighting the critical need for African nations to keep pace with global trends.

One of African's most significant advantages is the youthful population with ever 60 percent of African's under 25, we are blessed with a demographic comfortable with technology and eager to experiment – qualities that are vital for driving technological advancement (Usamani, 2024).

Alongside, our youthful population, Africa boasts a wide variety of cultures. This emphasis that promoting a culture of creativity is essential for achieving sustainable growth. This means creating an environment where new ideas can flourish, and failure is seen as a stepping stone success rather than a setback.

To capitalize on these strengths, however, African nations must prioritize investments in education. An educational system that includes digital literacy, critical thinking and project management skills which is essential to preparing

the workforce for the digital economy. Beyond driving digital success, project management is capable of empowering African youths with the frameworks and skills needed to address complex challenges in an ever-evolving world; building a future ready workforce that can take African innovations to scale. Education can be used for the preparation of African's youth for leadership and governance.

Preparing African's youth for leadership and governance

Just as Achebe (1983)^[1], the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership and Bishop Kukah (2024), almost every leader who came to power did so by accident. These insights encapsulate a challenge not unique to Nigeria but prevalent across Africa; the absence of systematically prepared leadership. Chidoka in Sarumi (2024)^[5] argues that the problem of accidental leadership in Nigeria and the need to “create a system that produces prepared leader; leadership training and development must become institutional priorities”.

Leadership is the cornerstone of governance, and a lack of preparedness among leaders often leads to systematic inefficiencies, corruption and underdevelopment. The governance challenges across Africa ranging from poor infrastructure to political instability – underscore the urgent need to cultivate leaders equipped to address the continents complex realities. Drawing lessons from global and regional examples, this works explores strategies to prepare Africa's youth for leadership and governance.

Accidental leadership and its consequences

The phenomenon of “accidental leadership” refers to individuals assuming leadership roles without the requisite skills, vision or experience. Across Africa, this has led to reactive governance weak institutions, and an inability to address pressing developmental needs.

According to Sarumi (2024) [5]. Haiti presents a cautionary tale, where decades of unprepared leadership have perpetuated cycles of political instability and economic stagnation. Similarly, in Africa, reliance on unprepared leaders often entrenches systemic issues such as corruption, weak policy implementation, and lack of accountability. Accidental leadership fosters a culture where governance is reactive rather than proactive. Leaders with inadequate preparation are less likely to articulate and pursue long-term visions, leaving their countries vulnerable to crises and missed opportunities. This recurring pattern raises critical questions: Where and how do African leaders prepare their roles?

Educational Implications of Prepared Leadership and Governance for Development

One of the underlying principles and fundamental features of the world's most developed economies such as Ireland, Finland, Singapore, Qatar United Arab Emirates (UAE) Switzerland and the United States (USA), going by their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is sustained quality education delivery. That is both the public and private sectors.

The significance of having well-bred, resourceful and dedicated teachers and adequate ones at that cannot be overemphasized. That perhaps explains why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended twenty six percent for budget for the nation, which is a worrisome aspect of Nigerian educational situation. The direct situation of inadequate teachers to the numbers of pupils should be matter of concern to the leaders. The burning question therefore, is just how the country will enhance its human capital development in the field of agriculture, education, health care delivery, engineering, science and technology in the information age of the 21st century with this crass disregard for quality education development?

Globally, the transformative impact of prepared leaders is evident in some countries, such leaders as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and South Africa's Nelson Mandela demonstrate how structured preparation, mentorship, and a clear vision can uplift nations.

Singapore: Lee Kuan Yew's Leadership transformed Singapore from a struggling post-colonial state into a global economic hub. His success was underpinned by decades of meticulous planning, institutional reforms, and a meritocratic approach to governance. (Birley, 2024) [3]

China: The communist party's leadership grooming process involves decades of service at regional and national levels. Leaders like XI Jinping gain experience in administration, policy and governance ensuring they are well equipped for national leadership.

United Kingdom: Britain's parliamentary system emphasizes years of service in lower offices enabling leaders like Margaret Thatcher to ascend with proven credentials and policy achievements. (Sarumi, 2024) [5].

In contrast many African leaders ascend to power without such structured preparation, often prioritizing party loyalty and patronage over competence. This lack of preparedness undermines governance policy implementation, and national development. In case of Nelson Mandela, there was adequate preparation. The twenty-seven years in prison serves as school for preparing for leadership.

A case for establishing elite leadership institutions in Africa

To bridge the leadership gap, Africa must invest in the establishment of elite institutions dedicated to leadership development. These institutions can serve as hubs for training, mentorship, and research, fostering a new generation of leaders equipped to address the continent's unique challenges. What Sarumi called "leadership academics" (2024). This is the establishment of institutions like the National Institute for Leadership Development and the Africa Leadership Academy (ALA) in most African nations can provide targeted training for young politicians, public servants and community leaders. Critical modules should include governance, ethics, strategic planning, and crisis management among others.

There should be curriculum reform. Incorporating leadership education into school curriculum at all level can help instill leadership values and skills early. This approach ensures that leadership development is not limited to political or professional spheres but become a societal norm. In this vein, there should be mentorship programmes. This mean pairing young leaders with experienced mentors can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical governance. Such programmes can leverage Africa's existing pool of experienced professionals and leaders. Each country in Africa should create mentorship institutes by act of parliament to oversee the effective running of mentorship for aspiring young leaders across various disciplines.

Another one is electoral integrity; strengthening mechanisms for electoral transparency and fairness can promote merit-based leadership. Primary debates and public assessments kin to systems in the United States, can evaluate candidate policy depth and readiness for governance.

Conclusion

Africa's future hinges on the quality of its leaders. Addressing the prevalence of accidental leadership requires a deliberate shift towards structured preparation, systematic reforms, and a focus on youth development by investing in elite institutions; mentorship programs, and civic education. Africa can build a new generation of leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of governance and drive sustainable development.

Prepared leadership is not a luxury but a necessity for Africa to achieve its developmental aspirations and realize the vision of Agenda 2063, it must prioritize leadership training, propagate inclusivity, and strengthen governance systems. The time to act is now, for the stakes - Africa's progress, stability, and prosperity could not be higher than we ever imagined.

Recommendations based on Africa Agenda 2063

The African Union's agenda 2063 provides a comprehensive framework for the continent's transformation. Leadership development aligns directly with its aspiration particularly Aspiration 1 (A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development) and Aspiration 6 (An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people).

There should be increase investment in leadership training. Allocate resources to establish leadership academics and fund training programs for emerging leaders. This investment would be crucial for building a pipeline of skilled and visionary leaders.

Regional cooperation should be fostered and encouraged. Bodies like ECOWAS and SADC should be able to create cross-border leadership training initiatives. Such collaboration can standardize governance best practices across the continent.

There should be promotion of youth participation in governance. Government at any level should create platforms that will allow young people to engage in policy-making, community leadership, and public service. This is because African's youth demographic is a powerful asset that must be harnessed for sustainable development.

There should be leverage technology for leadership development. There should be investment in digital platforms that provide online courses, virtual mentorship, and knowledge sharing forums. This approach can democratize access to leadership resources, particularly for individual in remote areas.

Civil education should be strengthened in both primary and secondary schools. Educate citizens about the importance of leadership quality, governance and active participation in political processes. Informed citizens are better equipped to demand accountability and visionary leadership.

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