

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN TANZANIA: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Tanzania's current educational assessment system. Using critical reflection, the author argues that the current educational assessment model deprives students and their parents the rights they deserve in the practices affecting the final examination results. The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussions along democratization of educational assessment in Tanzania. Inspired by Tanzania's participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) global initiative, this paper recommends a Full Democratic Assessment System (FDAS) which considers total openness to stakeholders as a key component of good educational governance from preschool education to tertiary/higher education in order to build a lasting democratic culture for current and future citizens.

Key words: Democracy, Educational assessment, Transparency

INTRODUCTION

The global call for greater democracy in education has been promoted by the United Nations since the early 1990s (UNICEF, 1995; UNDP, 1993). As a result, education worldwide has become increasingly accountable to the public and mechanisms to involve learners and parents in the governance of schools are employed globally as a form of democratizing education (Mncube, 2008). No wonder Davies (2002) argues for the process of "double democratization", referring to the simultaneous democratization of both education and society. Davies (2002) suggests that without the democratic development of a society, a more democratic system of education cannot be promoted. Conversely, without a more democratic system of education, the development of a democratic society is also unlikely to occur (Mncube, 2008).

It is, however, a matter of great concern that while some democratic approaches can be easily brought into almost any area of the educational system (Mncube, 2008), such democratic approaches do not penetrate into the educational assessment area as the educational assessment practices are rigid and often taken for granted. Curtis and McDonnell (2011) reported that although the Education studies at De Montfort University in Wales were conducted using collaborative (democratic) approaches to teaching and learning that favoured discussion, active student involvement and a conception of knowledge as tentative and contested, (strangely) the assessment practices did not attest to that approach. In fact, the researchers found that the assessment practices were conducted in an entirely different manner contrary to the democratic approaches used in teaching and learning.

In this paper, the author critically examines Tanzania's current educational assessment system with the intention to stimulate discussions along democratization of educational assessment. The author argues that the current assessment model deprives students and their parents the rights they deserve in the practices affecting the final examination results. The paper concludes by recommending a Full Democratic Assessment System (FDAS) that considers *total openness* to stakeholders as a key component of good educational governance from preschool education to tertiary/higher education. The inspiration to write this paper derived from Tanzania's participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a global initiative that aims to improve governance through promotion of transparency, among other things (HakiElimu, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a body of literature that supports the idea that more education implies more democracy in a nation. For example, initial empirical experiments on 108 countries for the period from 1960-2000 showed that a more equal distribution of education is a robust indicator of the implementation and sustainability of democracy (Castello-Climent, 2008). Also, early cross-national studies of developed countries found literacy rates to be significantly and positively associated with democratic political systems (Lipset, 1963; Cutright, 1969; Sanderson, 2004). Furthermore, a study of eighteen developing countries showed a strong, nearly linear, correlation between literacy and the level of democracy (Evans and Rose, 2007). Additionally, there are studies that support an understanding that a more equal distribution of education accelerates transitions to democracy, and that a large educated population boosts a country's chances of establishing and maintaining democracy through bottom-up and top-down processes (Bourguignon and Verdier, 2000; SIDA, 2005).

However, there are studies which have disputed the significance of a "superficial link" between literacy and democracy, pointing out that, in the Middle East between 1917 and 1999 and in the former Soviet regimes, higher levels of literacy did not often produce a growth in democracy – because schools were used to promote dogmatic and anti-democratic ideologies (Wejnert, 2005). This means that issues affecting the democratic potential of education need to be addressed carefully, if investments in education are to have wide-ranging beneficial consequences for developing countries. Education is not likely to yield democratic outcomes unless its content and processes, as well as the external environment in which it takes place, are also democratic (Davies, 2002). Sometimes, internal structures and processes within schools often do not engender a culture of democracy and rights (SIDA, 2005). There are authoritarian tendencies in the management and culture of educational institutions which are likely to breed less democratic values in the future. In many parts of the world, educational institutions are run in an authoritarian manner, with decisions over curriculum and management sidelining those of students and their parents (for the case of Tanzania, see Ndunguru, 2015 and Mbise, 2015). Students and their parents play no part in school decision-making, and school attitudes towards students and their parents are often paternalistic and derogatory (SIDA, 2005).

It was, also, observed in early 2000s that in many African countries, educational practices and content did not promote the values associated with democratic political culture (Harber, 2002). Furthermore, although among the SIDA partner countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania was categorized as a country with strong positive democratic development along with Kenya, Burundi, Mozambique and Uganda, the relationship between education and democracy was not straightforward (SIDA, 2005).

Government of Tanzania's Commitment to Democratic Approaches

Recently, the government of Tanzania joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a global initiative formally launched in New York on 20th September, 2011 by eight founding member countries namely Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Tanzania declared its intention to join OGP during the launching meeting and became one of the six countries in Africa to qualify for involvement in the OGP in September 2011. It became the ninth government to be represented on the OGP steering committee since the Brasilia's 2012 annual meeting (OGP-Tanzania, 2012). In his keynote address at the OGP summit in Brasilia, Brazil, in April 2012, the then President of Tanzania, Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, promised that the Government of Tanzania would do their best to promote transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

The OGP Tanzania (2012/2013) Annual Report indicates that the major focus has been placed on three delivery sectors of health, education and water. In the education sector, that implementation report shows that, apart from other things, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Education received 172 comments from the public concerning the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) results. Although the report did not disclose the details of the complaints, it is still sufficient evidence that the public had issues with the way the secondary school final examination results were handled given the 2012 CSEE results were the most controversial in the history of the National Examination Council of Tanzania having been released with over

65% of students' failure in February, 2013 and later on changed to 57% failure in May, 2013. Of course, the Government has admitted that because OGP is a new way of working in Tanzania, some public officers were still reluctant to provide information openly (OGP-Tanzania, 2012), thus causing dissatisfaction from citizens. More recent studies have also pointed out lack of democracy for students in identifying what constitutes quality education in government-owned higher learning institutions (Mbise, 2015) and ineffective involvement of key stakeholders such as students and parents in the decision making processes of the same institutions (Ndunguru, 2015). Together, these studies show that there is still limited democracy in the Tanzania's educational system.

Challenges for Deepening Democracy in Educational Assessment

According to Professor Steyn (2000) democracy is currently a very popular word all over the world and virtually everyone would declare themselves currently in favour of democracy, though they may not be practising even what seems to be so obvious about democracy. Green(1999) contends by saying what is needed now is not only “formal democracy”, but also “deep democracy”. Deep democracy means a democracy that affects every aspect of the government's functions including the educational assessment practices. Steyn (2000) further observes that we should value democracy first and foremost as a way of life, and school education should be the breeding ground to nurture these values.

Levinson (2011) has insightfully observed that although educational standards, assessments, and accountability systems are of immense political moment around the world today and have the potential to serve democratic goods such as transparency, equality, and public discourse, their very potential to advance systemic democratic goods signals a level of reach and power that threatens the achievement of these same democratic values. He provides an example where in the contemporary United States, the adults' democratically legitimate control over education *within* a democracy may also undercut children's legitimate claims to receiving an education that equips them *for* democracy. In Tanzania the situation is different. The author argues that the current autonomy of the assessment bodies (which was intended to promote quality) has been used to erode the very foundations of building an education that will create a society based on the principles of democracy.

It is worrying when research shows that the educational assessment bodies are currently sidelining, in decision making, even the most important stakeholders of such bodies including students and their parents in higher learning institutions in Tanzania (Mbise, 2015 and Ndunguru, 2015). Especially, it should be a serious matter of democratic concern to observe that while higher education is often the first formal educational context in which students experience significant levels of social freedom and equality (Curtis and McDonnell, 2011), such freedom is not reflected in the way educational assessment is done at that level of education in Tanzania. The ideal situation, then, would be to increase transparency and fairness in the assessment system as the educational level increases and not vice versa (SIDA, 2005). Otherwise, this confirms Hall and Rossouw (2000)'s observation that while it is true that educational assessment has the potential to improve learning for all learners, historically it has acted as a barrier rather than a bridge to educational opportunity.

Need for Conceptualizing a New Educational Assessment System for Tanzania

At times even the so called “democratic societies” (like Tanzania) can forget themselves and drift away from principles of democracy they claim to uphold. In that situation it is only the sound educational practices that will be responsible for reinstating and strengthening principles of democracy (Steyn, 2000). Puhl and De Clerk (2000) have rightly observed that if our young people are educated through authoritarian ways, they learn and practise these ways and likewise if they are educated through democratic ways, they learn and practise democratic values. In the context of this paper, young people will not stop at just learning authoritarian ways. They will become future authoritarian leaders who want to scare democracy itself. Why? Because it is known that educational institutions exist within the context of other social institutions and that schools are socializing agents that teach younger generations norms that they will live in the larger society (HakiElimu, 2011). So, if the educational institutions pay lip-service to democratic values, or have curricula that encourage democratic approaches not mirrored in the functioning of the government, it is unlikely that a strong culture of democracy will develop and become embedded (Neuberger, 2007). Since education is not easily separable from other factors in society, its ability to promote democratic culture and respect for human rights is limited if there is no

serious shift in culture and practices (SIDA, 2005). True democracy promotion, therefore, requires a whole-hearted support of people and institutions in society such as schools and examination bodies.

It is unfortunate that it has been common to have pedagogical practices reflect growth in autonomy and critical engagement of students as levels of education go higher up, without the same being reflected in the assessment practices. Actually, according to SIDA (2005) democracy seems to completely swing backwards step by step as education levels increase. Even the changes in Tanzania's *Education and Training Policy, 2014* from the old formal educational system of a 2+7+4+2+3+ years - that is, nursery/preschool(2yrs), primary school(7yrs), ordinary(4yrs) and advanced(2yrs) secondary school and higher/tertiary(3yrs or more) (MOEC, 1995) - to the new system of a 1+6+4+2+3+years (WyEMU, 2014), does not indicate any changes in the educational assessment practices. That means, in the area of educational assessment, the new policy essentially still perpetuates the same practices which were being implemented under the *Education and Training Policy, 1985*, thus a need to rethink the current assessment practices.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is mainly a result of Critical Reflection done between July and August 2016. A Critical Reflection is a description and a thoughtful analysis of a topic of interest. According to Kolb's model of reflexive learning, critical reflection emphasizes on experiential learning and it attempts to integrate thinking and practice (Rolfe *et al.*, 2011). In this paper the author critically reflected on a comprehensive survey of secondary sources on democratic education and educational assessment and integrated the information with his 25 years' experience of teaching and assessing learners since 1991, ranging from preschool to primary to secondary, to lower college to higher learning. Practically, the author would do scan-reading of various literature and documents on democratic education and educational assessment followed by careful intensive reading of the selected material. Then content-analysis of the relevant parts of the literature was done through carefully noting key words which were transcribed, coded and studied to look for meaningful, similar or related information to the study topic. The resultant logical analyses of relevant literature and the synthesis of issues emerging from the literature were then combined with the author's experience on the topic. After rigorous reflection, the final result was a thinking framework which enabled the author to formulate themes that gave birth to the various sections of the current paper.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The author has consolidated information that is presented in two matrices representing the old (less democratic) system of educational assessment and the proposed new (full democratic) system of assessment in Table 1 and 2 below. Conventionally, Tanzania's educational assessments are generally in the form of formative and summative evaluation. In the formative (or continuous) evaluation the teacher provides all types of activities to evaluate the understanding of the students as teaching and learning continues. Then at the end of a prescribed period of study there is a summative evaluation in the form of a final examination given either at the end of the term (semester) or at the end of the academic year. The exam at the end of the academic year (annual exam) may also signify the end of the educational level if that exam is the last in that cycle of education.

Table 1: The Less Democratic Assessment Matrix

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	AMOUNT OF DEMOCRACY(More or Less)		
	Continuous Assessments (Class Assignments, Quizzes, Projects, Tests, etc)	Summative Assessments (Final Exams)	
		<i>Within Cycle of Education</i> (End of Term or Semester or Class)	<i>At End of Cycle</i> (Finishing School, College or University)
Tertiary/ Higher Educ.	More	Less	Less
Advanced Secondary Educ.	More	More	Less
Ordinary Secondary Educ.	More	More	Less
Primary Education	More	More	Less
Preschool Education	More	More	More

It can be easily deduced from Table 1, that the Tanzanian educational assessment system lacks consistency, having total democracy in preschool education and then systematically reduces the amount of democracy as the students go higher up in the educational system. It is only the continuous assessments that enjoy the same amount of democracy throughout the entire current educational system. For the preschool until the advanced level of secondary school, more democracy is observed only in the final exams that take place *within* the educational cycle or level (such as when a student sits for exam at the end of term or end of form one, form two or form five ready to move to the next class). For such exams, students are allowed to see their marked papers and matters of transparency and fairness are naturally taken care of. On the contrary, the final exams that complete an educational cycle (such as when finishing primary school education or ordinary and advanced secondary school education and teachers' college education) have limited democracy. Students are given their results but have no right to see their marked papers. A common reason for that practice is that these exams are handled centrally by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania.

But, the strangest and most inexplicable of all educational assessment scenarios is found in institutions of higher learning. It is common practice that colleges and universities return marked papers only for continuous assessments. Students at this level are not given back their marked scripts for both the final exams that take place within the cycle or level (such as the end of semester exam) and the annual exam which take place to finish a cycle of education (such as when students are moving into another academic year or completing college or university). It is inexplicable because these institutions of higher learning do prepare, administer and handle the exams themselves, and yet they do not return the marked papers to their rightful owners (the students).

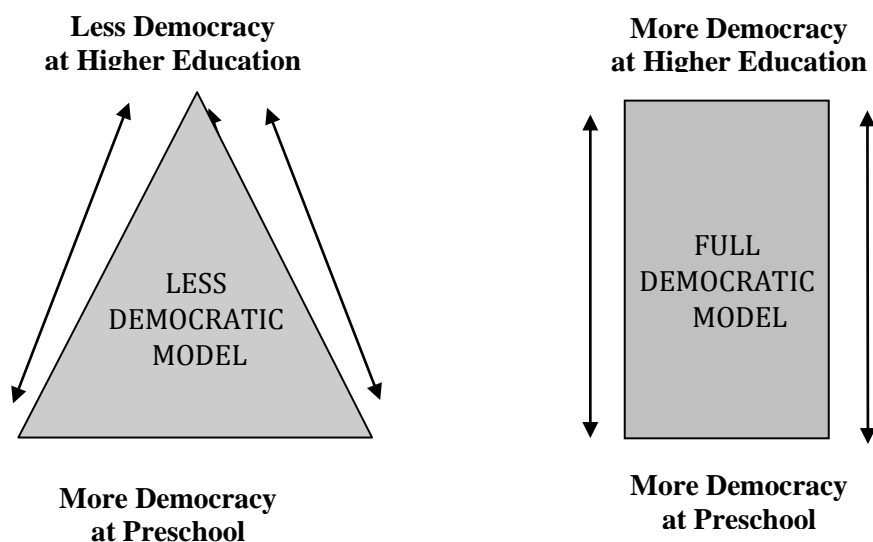
Based on Table 1 above it is clear that, currently, Tanzania practises a skewed system of educational assessment in which there is more democracy at the lower level and less democracy at the highest level. An illustration may serve the purpose: a nursery school kid will receive back all his/her marked examination papers for herself and her parents to verify with the teachers if there is any concern but that is not so with a university student who is not allowed to see his/her marked papers even after appealing for dissatisfaction of the marking process. Fundamentally, this is where this approach differs with the logical schema of this author who believes democracy should equally pervade all the levels of educational assessment as proposed in Table 2.

Table 2: The Full Democratic Assessment Matrix

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	AMOUNT OF DEMOCRACY(More or Less)		
	Continuous Assessments (Class Assignments, Quizzes, Projects, Tests, etc)	Summative Assessments (Final Exams)	
		<i>Within Cycle of Education</i> (Finishing Term, Semester or Class)	<i>At End of Cycle of Education</i> (Finishing School, College or University)
Tertiary/Higher Education	More	More	More
Advanced Secondary Educ.	More	More	More
Ordinary Secondary Educ.	More	More	More
Primary Education	More	More	More
Preschool Education	More	More	More

Note that in the matrix above, all the levels of education, the continuous assessments and the two categories of final exams, indicate “More” in the amount of democracy grid as opposed to the less democratic matrix whose amount of democracy was consistently “Less” in the final exam results, especially as the level of education increased. In practice, this means if the second matrix is adopted by our assessment bodies, students shall have all their papers returned to them both for continuous and final assessments for verification of their performance, if they so desire. This can be done easily for exams that are handled internally and for those exams that are handled externally, communication technology can assist students to see their marked papers if the need arises.

To summarize the above information, the author has developed two pictorial representations of the two assessment models for the reader to compare and contrast. The less democratic assessment system (LDAS) looks like a pyramid with more democracy at the base and less and less of it as one progresses toward the top of the pyramid. On the other hand, the full democratic (FDAS) looks like a vertical rectangle with the same amount of democracy from the base of the rectangle to the top. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Less Democratic and Full Democratic Assessment Systems**

It is easy to observe from the representations above that the formal educational system in Tanzania has taken away the academic and democratic rights of the students as they progressively mature in the educational system. Either way, whether this system is coincidental or by design, it cannot produce truly democratic-minded citizens and this situation calls for a change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are at least two conclusions that can be drawn from the above. First, it is clear that some democratic values of openness and transparency are limited in the current educational assessment system in Tanzania, especially in the higher levels of education. Second, to rectify the present foibles, the educational system has to incorporate democratic elements into all levels and areas of educational assessment for facilitating students' active participation in their own education, thus making education a more meaningful endeavor for students and their parents. That way, our schools and our assessment systems can be more student-centred, challenging teachers to be more objective in assessing students and building more trust for our stakeholders like parents.

Based on the conclusions above, this study recommends a Full Democratic Assessment System (FDAS) for Tanzania which will allow students to see *all* their papers and verify their marks *when needed* – as one sure way of genuinely practising democracy in our formal educational system. This will allow the Tanzania educational assessment system to harness the contemporary characteristics of good governance, democracy and transparency advocated by the Open Government Partnership (OGP) global initiative in which Tanzania is a member. Furthermore, by adopting the FDAS model Tanzania will not only be making important developments in pedagogy, but also it will be contributing to a broader, democratic education that is of value to students both in their present academic life and their future professional and political life (Biesta, 2006).

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