

The great degree goose chase... to nowhere

Rakesh Rajani

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If Martians were flying over Tanzania, what would they see?

- Possibly other than getting food/agriculture, millions busy doing education.
 - 8+ million students
 - Over 200,000 teachers
 - Parents everywhere scrambling to have their children go to school

What does education look like?

- Buildings

- Lots of new classrooms (often best structures in the villages)

- Neat rows of desks...

- Or at least children sitting in neat rows.

- Books (but often locked up in cupboards)

- Teachers (or viranja) standing in front with a stick, and children copying notes.

They would also see

- Examinations
 - Lots of anxiety (even some strikes)
 - Lots of tuition and cramming
 - Teaching to the exam
 - A heck of a lot of cheating, stealing, bribing to get hold of exams or to fudge scores...
 - ... and if that fails, then forging certificates

Differences yes, but...

- Three classes of education
 - Well off in a few cities have nice buildings and more stuff and less overcrowding, in English
 - Next layer have some of the basics
 - Poorest overcrowding, no books, few teachers, no water
- Difference between urban/rural, within districts (Same/Ilala, Bariadi/Ileje)
- But all of them are focused on the same things: buildings and examinations and certificates

Martians would notice its costly

- Many, many years 2+7+4+2+3+?
- Lots of staff – about ½ civil servants
- Lots of money – about 20% of the government budget, \$1b/year (cf EPA is less than 2 months of edu expenditure) ... not to mention private education costs.
- Huge private costs from parents for fees, uniforms, michango (books, exams, ulinzi, wageni, usafiri, michezo, ukarabati, etc)

And in particular these days everyone wants degrees

- Those with diplomas want BA, with BA want MA .. doesn't matter what too much (staff anecdote)
- Schools turned into universities (mostly change of status?)
- Many more now in university
- Lots sweating in evenings, taking time off, running around
- More graduation ceremonies with gowns (and some even strike if they cant wear silly hats)
- ... but more CVs that proudly say degree!

In summary ...

- The Martians would therefore reasonably conclude that:

education = an expensive exercise with lots of people in classrooms sitting in rows cramming things trying to pass or steal exams so as to get or forge degrees and certificates.

The Martians might
reasonably ask ...

All this,
for what?
towards what
end?

To understand they eavesdropped (3 real stories)

- My interviews with short-listed candidates (dealing with scenarios)
- Earlier experience getting experts with masters degrees in Mwanza
- Asking top CEOs if they had three wishes...

Martians wish to be more objective

- PSLE pass rates increasing dramatically
 - Multiple choice with pass cut off very low
 - Fudging of how scores are counted
 - And there's always some buying
- Independent study by HakiElimu (2007) found:
 - Math: Only 11% primary and 10% secondary could solve a basic math problem.
 - Language: 25% in primary could do English dictation, and 90% could not translate Swahili to English.
 - Note: these were basic questions...

Two real examples

Primary School Pupil's Translation to English – rated "poor"

Dat 14 Disemb me know Jehu School Zentre mosng mEken Kne
ntr onw like you mujrtwen six mtrow too Kbel you Kott onre
School you I onw Sekuwerand my fredheson the rest School
Sok and the Sek you fredhes Kell CLASS Ipeng Sheeg you
and the See of Scholar we CLASS

Secondary School Student's English Dictation - rated "poor"

when I take ~~at~~ school ^{that} every friend Christina, good morning
the sat she saynd, I you perped english test, I can nos
remember ~~I say~~ ene thing I say. I have inorce horror, base
if ock the test. ifacae to me that is how ifll to, agree
christina. ~~ea~~ I hope the test will be esey. ()

Now the Martians would be really puzzled

- Why would intelligent people spend decades and billions in education when
 - Students cannot read and write?
 - Doesn't help them solve problems?
 - Graduates cant get jobs, and those who do have a hard time doing them well?
 - Those who don't get jobs (80%+) have a hard time creating decent livelihoods?

Martians would look at the research

- World Bank IEO study on 15 years of basic education support found progress in enrolments but not learning outcomes
 - That problem was defining quality in terms of inputs rather than outcomes
- Meta-study by Hanushek found value of education is not enrolment, years of schooling but quality.
- Etc, etc

Shaking their heads, the Martians would give up and leave

- Compare with a factory
or restaurant
- Our problem is that by focusing on nice
buildings and exam pass rates we use the
wrong measures, na kupoteza mwelekeo
kabisa

What then is quality?

- Measure not inputs (classrooms, books, supplies)

Or cramming facts for multiple choice exams

But what people can do

Human capabilities

First basics

- Ability to read and write
 - Fluently
 - With confidence
 - In mother
- Basic arithmetic
 - tongue and then foreign language

Then the essential abilities

- Think
- Ask interesting questions
- Be curious
- Solve problems
- Analyze
- Construct
- Empathize
- Be creative
- Reflect
- Write well
- Articulate
- Make an argument
- See different points of view
- Put into perspective
- Avoid mob-thinking
- Self-critical

Look back in the classroom primary or university

- Shikamoo culture
 - Teacher instructs, students copy
 - Cram memorize, know the right answer
 - Don't ask difficult questions
 - Do what you are told
 - Don't think, don't wonder, don't dream
 - Stay within the box
 - Or else you'll see...

What can be done?

- Transform culture of learning
 - Within schooling
 - In our daily practices
 - In our societal norms/values

And it starts with

you

We will know we have arrived when
we can say...

“We are the ones
we have been
waiting for...”