

THE NEXT EDUCATION: Insights from a student in a Least Developed Country

As a native of Tanzania, one of the Least Developed countries in the world, I have witnessed firsthand the profound disconnect between the promise of education and the realities of our rapidly changing world. Growing up, the mantra was simple and universal: study hard and a good life will follow. My school, teachers and even my parents instilled in me that education was my golden ticket. Yet, after graduating with a degree in Industrial Engineering in 2023, the starkness of my disillusionment could not be more palpable. Jobs are scarce, internships are elusive and the assurances of my youth now mock me in their hollowness. With my family's expectations weighing heavily upon me, I find myself at crossroads questioning the adequacy of our educational system in preparing us in this tumultuous world.

Before diving deep into the heart of the matter; I want to address some of the most pressing sources of disruption in our world today;

One of the most pressing challenges we face in our world today is unemployment. The shadow of joblessness stretches far and wide, affecting both wealthy and poor nations, but the impact is particularly severe in Africa. Last year there has been a global unemployment rate of 5.3%¹, with projections of further escalation. In low-income countries like mine, the employment gap hovers around 21.5%², significantly higher than that of middle and high-income countries. The crux of this crisis lies in an educational system that is misaligned with the labor market's demands. Many graduates, myself included emerge with degrees yet find ourselves lacking the requisite skills and qualifications that employers seek. This misalignment stems from an education system overly focused on academic learning while neglecting practical and vocational training. Moreover, the pervasive emphasis on grades rather than skill acquisition has rendered many graduates ill-prepared for the workforce.

Rapid technological advancement and globalization further compound these challenges. Despite monumental changes in nearly every sector, educational curricula, especially in parts of Africa, remain stagnant and unresponsive to the evolving landscape. Learners are often constrained by outdated syllabi that fail to adapt to the new demands of society and technology, leaving

¹ Report of International Labor Organization (ILO) of 2023

² Report of International Labor Organization (ILO) of 2023

educational institutions out of step with the real world. Issues like cyber-attacks, youth disengagement and social malaises such as poverty, teenage pregnancies and substance abuse are symptomatic of this disconnect. The advent of technology while beneficial also brings with it new problems such as academic dishonesty facilitated by AI tools, further sidelining the role of human educators.

Gender inequality and human rights violations present another profound disruption. Women and girls, who make up half the global population, face pervasive inequalities that stunt social progression. Not a single country has attained gender parity³. Educational disparities are stark, with a significant number of girls almost 61% (aged between 10-18)⁴ in rural areas not attending school at all or dropping out at secondary level. Violence against women is also a problem. One in three women are subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetime and up to 10 million⁵ girls will be at risk of child marriage over the next decade. The issue of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is also critical. Seven countries still apply the death penalty against homosexuals⁶. Another 75⁷ countries criminalize same sex relations. In some cases, gangs specifically target LGBTQ+ people, killing, assaulting, threatening or extorting them⁸. It is thus evident that our education systems have failed to foster equality and human rights.

The specter of climate change and global warming looms large with dire consequences such as extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. According to UN experts, our planet is warmer now than it has been in 800,000 years and we are using more of the world's resources than it can regenerate. Climate Change could be irreversible by 2030⁹ if urgent action isn't taken to avoid the catastrophic effects of global warming. Also climate change is expected to create refugee crisis with up to 200 million people estimated to be displaced by climate change by 2050¹⁰. While the expected rate of species extinction is usually around 5 species a year, we are currently losing up to 10,000 times the normal rate every day. These issues

³ World Economic Forum (WEF) annual Global Gender Gap report in 2023

⁴ World Economic Forum (WEF) annual Global Gender Gap report in 2023

⁵ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report of 2021

⁶ Report of Open Society Justice Initiative 2022

⁷ Report of Open Society Justice Initiative 2022

⁸ Report of Human Rights Watch of 2023

⁹ Report by UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

¹⁰ Report from International Organization on Migration.

are largely anthropogenic, yet education has not effectively mobilized a generation towards sustainable practices.

Mental health remains a taboo topic particularly in Africa, where services are inadequate and stigma abounds. Lack of awareness and support exacerbates the burden of mental illness, perpetuating suffering and hindering development. More than 116 million people¹¹ across Africa were estimated to be living with mental health conditions pre-pandemic. Untreated mental illness is the leading cause of disability and later can result to emotional, behavior and physical problems. Mental health in Africa is stigmatized at a large scale due to misinformation and ignorance about mental illness and trauma.

Conflicts ravage communities worldwide fueled by regional tensions, economic disparity and resource scarcity. The main causes of international tensions today are religion, governance and politics. These issues and their allied topics of human rights, justice and so forth have historically caused most of the world's tension today and continue to do so. Most of the wars are currently taking place through Middle East and North Africa¹². Some of the most heard conflicts include Russian-Ukraine war, Israel-Palestine Conflict, Gaza-Israel Conflict, Iran-Israel Conflict¹³. As of 13th May 2024, over 36,000 people (35,233 Palestinian and 1,410 Israeli)¹⁴ have been reported as killed in the Israel-Hamas war including 97 journalists and over 224 humanitarian aid workers including 179 employees of UNRWA. But apart from these major conflicts there are also some conflicts that people don't hear about on the news; these include Ecuador, Sudan, Myanmar (Burma)¹⁵. Despite education's potential to promote peace, unresolved conflicts persist, underscoring the failure to impart crucial conflict resolution skills.

After examining the substantial challenges currently facing our global society, issues like conflicts, gender inequality, Human Rights Abuse, Unemployment, Mental Health and Climate change, it becomes clear that our educational systems, particularly in underdeveloped and developing nations like my country Tanzania, must undergo significant reform to equip future generations with the tools necessary to thrive in the increasingly complex world.

¹¹ Report of World Health Organization (WHO) of 2022

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org>

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org>

¹⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org>

¹⁵ <https://www.concern.net>

After looking at these challenges, it is thus very important to initiate change. **Peter Drucker** once said *“If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old.”* A multi-faceted approach is required to reshape education and the following transformative strategies should be considered;

Firstly, a holistic educational model that values and nurtures multiple skills and talents is essential. In many regions, including parts of Africa, talents are often undervalued, with the erroneous belief that those who pursue their talents lack a promising future. However, multi-skilled individuals often have greater employment opportunities than those with a singular skill set. This will help solve the problem of unemployment.

Secondly, the educational framework should balance theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This can be achieved by integrating practical training experiences, career counselling and a focus on skill development into existing academic curricula. The role of career consultants should be bolstered within the educational structure, becoming as fundamental as teachers, given that many students struggle with making informed career choices, a challenge I have personally faced.

Thirdly, the curriculum should foster the competences necessary for cooperative and peaceful coexistence. This includes cultivating an understanding of diversity, teamwork, conflict management and the values of pluralism and peace. Incorporating peace education, conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue into the learning process is crucial for mitigating conflicts and promoting harmony.

Fourthly, an inclusive educational system is imperative. This involves ensuring that curricula represent diverse perspectives and fostering an environment of acceptance for all individuals, irrespective of gender, sexuality, race or any other characteristic. Education must also empower students to develop their personalities and act with autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. Addressing gender inequality and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community is particularly vital.

Finally, it is essential for African educational systems as well as those in other developing regions, to embrace technology and digital literacy. Integrating coding skills, critical digital

literacy and global perspectives into the curriculum will prepare students for future challenges that transcend national borders.

By Implementing these changes, educational systems can transform into powerful catalysts for social progress and resilience, preparing students not only for the workforce but also to become informed, compassionate and proactive global citizens.

After looking at all the transformative changes that our educational systems need to undergo so that it can make leaders who will be able to deal with the disruptions that our world face, it is crucial to preserve certain key aspects.

First and foremost, the invaluable relationship between teachers and students must be safeguarded. While advancements in technology may suggest a shift towards automated education, the human connection between educator and learner is irreplaceable. The bond that forms through mentorship, guidance and support is essential for fostering a love of learning and personal growth.

Additionally, the emphasis on values and ethics within education must be maintained. It is imperative that students are taught the importance of empathy, respect, integrity and responsibility instilling in them the qualities of ethical and responsible citizenship. While Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools may enhance the learning experience, it is vital that individuals are educated on their appropriate use to prevent reliance or detachment from personal accountability.

In preserving these fundamental components of our educational system, we can ensure that future generations are equipped with the necessary skills and values to thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

Tomorrow's leaders embodied by the young generation, possess the responsibility of shaping and adapting to the inevitable challenges of our era. **Peter Drucker** once said "*The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, it is to act with yesterday's logic*". As the torchbearers of the future, it is imperative that these leaders cultivate a set of essential qualities and capabilities to effectively collaborate and navigate through the turbulence of our times. Outlined below are the indispensable attributes and skills that will empower tomorrow's leaders to confront and overcome the complex issues that lie ahead.

The first essential quality that emergent leaders should embody is empathy and cultural sensitivity. Understanding and embracing diverse perspectives and experiences are pivotal for effective leadership in a rapidly evolving world. This aspect is particularly crucial in regions like Africa, which grapple with complexities surrounding societal acceptance and LGBTQ rights. Many African countries struggle to acknowledge and respect the rights of individuals within LGBTQ community due to deep-seated religious and societal norms. For instance, Uganda has implemented some of the most stringent anti-LGBTQ laws globally¹⁶, while Yemen has been identified as the world's least gender-equal country¹⁷. By fostering empathy and cultural sensitivity, tomorrow's leaders can navigate such contentious issues with compassion and understanding, leading to more inclusive and harmonious solutions.

Another crucial quality is the possession of advocacy and activism skills. An important aspect of leadership is the ability to amplify voices, catalyze change and champion human rights causes. It is essential for young leaders to actively engage in raising awareness and advocating for transformative societal shifts. Initiating foundations and fellowships dedicated to human rights advocacy can significantly impact global discourse and policy. For instance, the Mandela Washington Fellowship persists in advocacy efforts for transgender health rights. By nurturing more of these initiatives, tomorrow's leaders can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive world ultimately fostering a higher level of global equality.

In light of the escalating unemployment rates, it has become imperative for leaders of tomorrow to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset and cultivate corresponding skills. Empowering individuals with the ability to navigate the shifting nature of the job market is crucial for addressing this pressing issue. By promoting entrepreneurship, young leaders can navigate challenges and uncertainties effectively. Additionally, equipping students with the agility to swiftly acquire skills, pivot career trajectories and rebound from setbacks is paramount in preparing them for dynamic workforce. Building connections, seeking mentorship and articulating strengths and aspirations through effective communication are also vital components in addressing unemployment.

¹⁶ <https://www.reuters.com>

¹⁷ Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022

Environmental and climate consciousness is another crucial skill for emerging leaders. The ability to prioritize sustainability, advocate for conservation and make eco-friendly choices is essential for fostering a healthier planet. Young leaders should actively engage in influencing policymakers, supporting green initiatives and promoting sustainable practices to drive positive change and doing the right thing. **Peter Drucker's** once said "*Doing the right thing is more important than doing the thing right.*". By cultivating more leaders with a strong environmental ethic, we can collectively combat climate change, address pollution issues and work towards mitigating the impacts of global warming.

Conflict resolution skills are essential for effective leadership, encompassing abilities such as mediating disputes, facilitating dialogues and championing peaceful resolutions. It is crucial for young leaders to complement these skills with diplomacy and negotiation, which involve comprehending diverse viewpoints and striving to find common ground among conflicting parties. By embracing their roles as global citizens, emerging leaders bear the responsibility of promoting tolerance and contributing to a more peaceful world.

Digital literacy is a critical skill that young leaders should possess. The ability to master technology, adapting to new tools and leveraging digital platforms for innovative solutions is very essential. Equipping themselves with these capabilities enables young leaders to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of the digital age. To address the potential negative impacts of globalization, young leaders must also comprehend the societal implications of technology including sensitive issues like pornography. By advocating for responsible technological usage and addressing ethical dilemmas head-on, young leaders can foster a culture of digital responsibility and uphold ethical standards in the digital realm.

A MODEL OF PERFECT EDUCATION SYSTEM (designed by me)

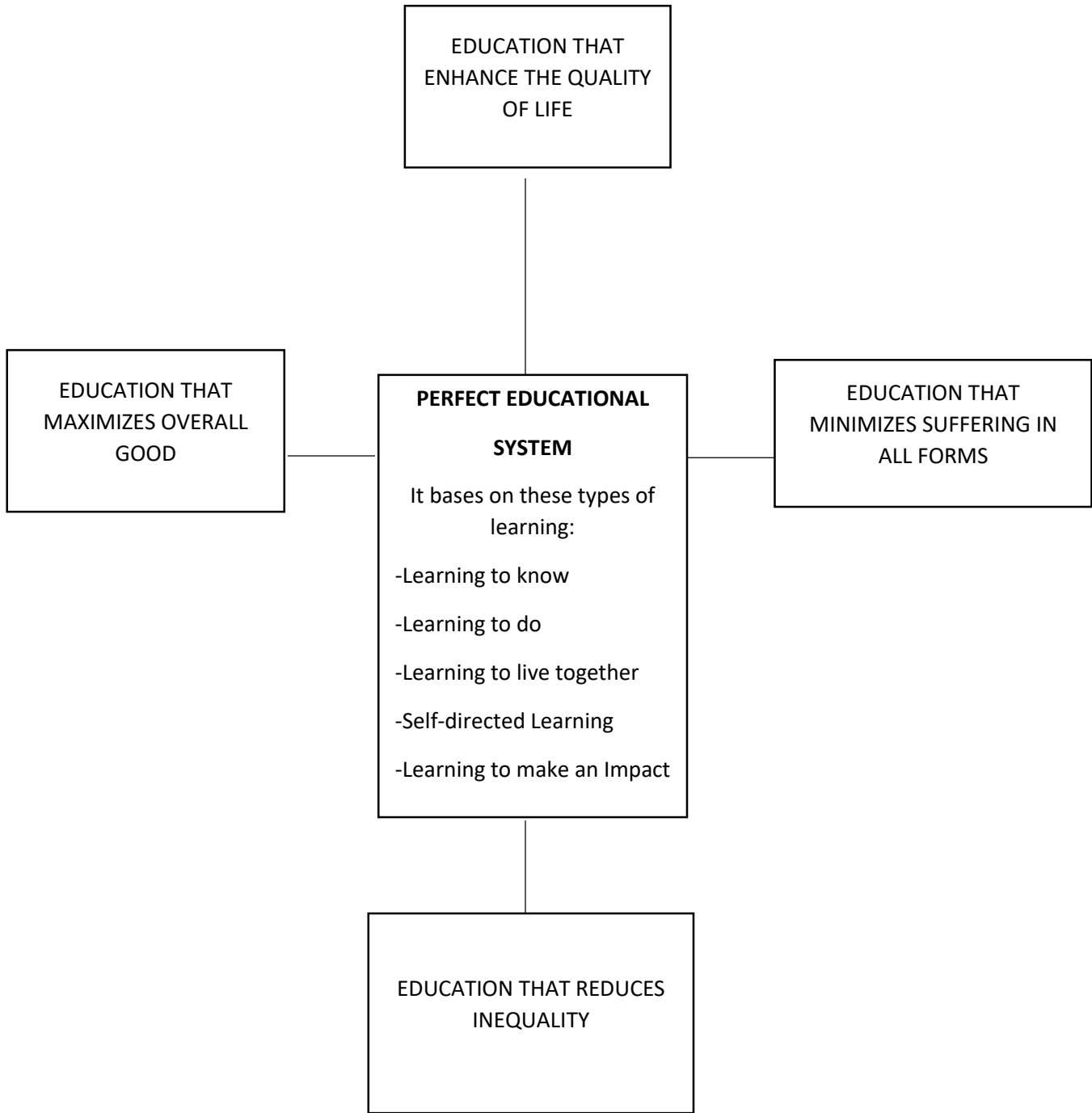


Figure 1: A model of a Perfect Educational System (designed by me).

To conclude, I have designed a model of perfect educational system. My model of perfect education system includes various types of learning and the impact of that education on the society. A perfect educational system emphasizes the following types of learning;

Learning to know. Many educational systems often emphasize memorization and exam performance over true understanding which is wrong. This approach emphasizes students to focus grasping concepts and understanding.

Learning to do. Education should not solely prioritize theoretical knowledge but also practical skills. Many educational institutions especially in regions like Africa, lack the necessary resources to facilitate hands-on learning experiences. For instance, as victim of this system myself, I pursued a degree in Industrial Engineering without ever having access to essential tools like a Lathe machine for practical learning.

Learning to Live Together. Education should also promote collaboration, empathy, inclusion, teamwork and social cohesion. Encouraging students to work together and appreciate diverse perspectives fosters a sense of community and cooperation.

Self-Directed Learning. This learning is crucial in empowering students to take ownership of their educational journeys. By allowing students to set their own learning goals and pursue knowledge independently, self-directed learning fosters confidence, creativity and adaptability. Personalized education can impact shift in teaching methods from traditional teaching methods to a more flexible and individualized approaches. Personalized education can make educational institutions invest in educational technology platforms and tools to facilitate personalized learning experience for students. Personalized education is important as it may ensure equity and access. Education institutions may address issues like access to technology, resources and support to prevent furthering educational disparities.

Learning to make an Impact. A perfect educational system should inspire students to strive for making a positive impact in their communities, countries and world at large. Cultivating a mindset focused on creating change and contributing to society can lead to a brighter future for all.

In terms of societal impact, a perfect educational system should strive to;

A perfect educational system should aim to reduce suffering in all its forms. By equipping individuals with new technologies, skills and knowledge such a system can work towards alleviating societal challenges and ensuring that people do not endure unnecessary hardships.

Education should not only be a means to acquire knowledge but also a pathway to a better quality of life. A perfect educational system should prioritize the holistic development of individuals, ensuring that education leads to personal growth, improved well-being and increased opportunities for a fulfilling life.

A perfect educational system strives to reduce various forms of inequality including gender disparities, human rights violations, LGBTQ discrimination and challenges faced by people with disabilities. Education plays a pivotal role in promoting equality by raising awareness, fostering inclusivity and advocating for the rights and dignity of all individuals creating a more equitable society.

Lastly is that it maximizes the overall good. Education should not only focus on individual success but also prioritize the collective welfare of communities and nations. By equipping individuals with knowledge to address complex challenges, promote sustainability and drive positive change, education becomes a powerful force for creating a better world for all. As I am finishing I want to share my favorite quote from **Peter Drucker** which says, "*The best way to predict the future, is to change it*". We can still change our education for the future generation.

