

African Higher Education – Celebrating African Education
African Education: Modernity and Idealism of Africa

The African landscape has for far too long been deemed archaic, ancient in history, and lost in the 20th century. This has been perpetuated by years of disenfranchisement, a downward look on Africa's ability to grow and develop and an inherent bias that our education is subpar to the rest of the world. This has been ever-so-evident when it came to the development of education in struggling African countries, the establishment of state-of-the-art institutions that not only allow access to higher education but offer competing technologies and an African flavoured fuel to develop. Although this may be seen as true to Eurocentric thought, a development has been in existence in social, cultural, and legal frameworks across Africa. We realise this through the establishment of multilateral regional blocks and communities recognised by the African Union, such as the EAC, Arab Maghreb Union, Economic Community of Central African States, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) among many. In academia, we have noted over 1 225 institutions of higher learning by *UniRank*, with the caveat that many more are being developed and recognised. Our cultures, communities, governments, and citizens all play a shared role in the unification of African thought, and interestingly, this goes beyond borders, shades of skin colour, languages, and ideologies, but is a representation that there is an inherent need for Africans to come together to ward off the past and represent their own identities.

It is almost impossible to assume that our rainbow nation is merely on the crux of those who namely exist within the University of the Free State, Qwa Qwa, Bloemfontein, the Free State or even South Africa. The diverse nature of our knowledge systems today supersedes our immediate surrounds. This is prolific when we realise that our African higher education authors, innovators and thinkers contribute immensely to the realisation of an Africa we all aspire to live in, an Africa community that resonates the need for a grandstanding celebration by those who pickpocketed our systems during the years of colonisation. These theories and concepts we commonly use in our everyday language, Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism, liberties such as freedom and unity, Uhuru na Umoja, uBuntu, are a reflection of what we are and what we have created. Although these may sound like mere stones on a hill, they have foundationally created an avenue of development in higher education throughout the continent – one that our colonisers cannot pickpocket us once more.

The starting point for evaluating and appreciating the efforts and chains of development, is by looking at academics and philosophers who have dedicated years of research at the crux of what makes for the ideal frame of learning, especially with Africa and Africans in mind. The likes of Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, who shaped unique features of philosophy, a counternarrative to the archaic nature of Africa being old in thinking, sociology, and linguistics in his book *The Invention of Africa*, or even Sophie Oluwole, who spent half a century researching the intellectual society that Africa has

to offer – these are but a few beacons in African education that we look at, as well as the role they have played in our aspiration to construct a unique yet impactful view of higher education in a Pan-African setting. It would be wishful thinking to commend our past achievements while not realising the impact of those voices of our past, today.

Beyond the academic thoughts, we can also turn our eyes to the Centre for Collaboration in Africa established by Stellenbosch University, the African Economic Research Consortium under the sub-theme Research Collaborations on domestic and international research, the African Research Universities Alliance, the University of the Free State Centre for Gender and Africa Studies in partnerships with the University of Ghana and others, and the collaboration of Botho University in Botswana, and many more by the UFS. These are some of the continuous relationships formed and built upon the premise of holding and maintaining relations with other African institutions in the coming together of higher education in Africa. According to Dr Cornelius Hagenmeier, Director of the UFS Office for International Affairs, these partnerships and collaborative efforts are critical for the University of the Free State – the UFS wants to grow its partnerships, and therefore requested the Kenyan Education Attaché to connect the UFS with Kenyan partners – these are sentiments shared across the African terrain with directors, students, deans, rectors, staff, and those who live around the university, to have a melting pot of Pan-African-centred higher education.

Notably, the road to a brighter tomorrow need not end there. Jenipher Owuor from the University of British Columbia suggests – more in the Kenyan context, but we can learn from this analysis – is that the best approximation to dealing with sustainable development in school curricula is to realise our local capacities under indigenous ideas and integrating this with formal education. What we can already realise, is that there is a place for community and cultural knowledge in spheres of higher education – valiant attempts do exist that we can see today. Realistically speaking, how the UOFS Faculty of Law requires an overview of historic and value-centred knowledge with every module. The emancipation of thought and idealism has been growing steadily, with unimaginable results. My valuation is on the need to celebrate the steps that have been taken and the roads paved by those who realise the need to celebrate our African education, that is, over a million of academics, students and institutions with the same valued-aim.

A once eminent tool to colonise the African child is one best represented by schools of critical thought, the valuation of intrinsic capacities, and well-sought-out capabilities. African education, especially in higher learning institutions, has enjoyed great glory outside the confines of pre- and present unionisation Africa. For the most part, higher education was fragmented among nations, with the disparity being stark – a relationship of ‘states with more capital boast more robust institutions and research’ while those who are incapacitated suffer, and so the education provided is seen as subpar. The reason why this hegemony of power relations existed for the past couple of decades, is the loss of what it meant to be African – higher education has cemented

itself as the bedrock for critical thought and fruitful thinking, and why even smaller institutions have a role to play, regardless of the stigma attached to them.

As we are constantly prompted to realise our positions in academic spaces, the privilege that the lottery of birth has given us, our realisation of what we aspire to have and what to be, the role we play in the grander feature of the society and community of higher education – one cannot wander too far from the crevices that we all share but overlook, the reality of our education system being set on the African continent, the intermingling benefits and drawbacks that we can realise, often impacted by management, and resources, and those who are part of these institutions. It is almost intuitively true that the appreciation of the advancement and robust form of education we receive has had many curves and, as we are aware, potholes. The sufficient response to create and enhance an African-centred harmony in ideology and in higher education is not too far from our grasp and this speech is to set alight the fire we all have – that we are living ancestry of years of falling and getting back up, that the swords of today are not bronze and silver, but are words and collaboration, patriotism and *Botho*.

Let us not wallow in the feats we have created and neglect the shortcomings. It is wise to be awake to the fact that resource shortages, capital flight in less affluent states, saturated markets, and mismanaged institutions are tainting the dream of adequately celebrating how far African higher education has come.

I implore you, me, states, leaders, and activists to create strategies that will not only rival those of larger economies and states, but strategies that the African child can best relate to and that can best protect them, hone them, and equip them with enough capacities to make them successful, while embodying the reality, namely that African higher education ought to live within us for a long time. We are the generation that is comfortable with creating platforms of conversation – let us use those to further develop and see ourselves beyond the physical lens of colour, borders, language, and ethnicity.

Every day, as you walk, as you learn, as you engage various individuals and their realities, be cognisant of Africa Day not being a day in which we rock our traditional attire and ululate the coming together of all Africans – but as a step to reflect, rejoice, and remember that we are the sum of our efforts, that being African goes beyond what we can see, but rather what we embody.

Thank you