



2025

Exploring African Education, Innovative Solutions, and Diverse Perspectives for a Globally Competent Citizenry

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Recommended Citation

(2025) "Exploring African Education, Innovative Solutions, and Diverse Perspectives for a Globally Competent Citizenry," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 50: No. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2466>

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Cover Page Footnote

My sincere gratitude to Dr. F. Todd Goodson, Executive Editor, for his dedication to open-access scholarship and for inviting me to serve as Guest Editor for this special issue. I greatly appreciate Drs. Lotta Larson and Lori Goodson for their structured guidance throughout the editorial process; their expertise and intentionality were invaluable. Special thanks to Dr. Alex Marquez for his insightful feedback and collaborative partnership in bringing this project to fruition. To all the contributing authors: Thank you for your scholarly rigor and actionable recommendations on African education in a globalized world. Your work enriches this critical conversation.

Exploring African Education, Innovative Solutions, and Diverse Perspectives for a Globally Competent Citizenry

Ernestina Wiafe

Ghana shares with most African nations a history of colonization. Despite gaining independence decades ago, many African countries continue to operate education systems established by their former colonizers. My journey through Ghana's education from nursery school through university, followed by eight years teaching high school geography and social studies, revealed a stark disconnect between classroom learning and national needs. I have come to recognize that much of what I learned and thought, based on the curriculum, had little relevance to Ghana's actual circumstances, including its geography, culture, economy, and political landscape. This realization led me to question: Why isn't education more aligned with our national context? Today, this incongruity persists, with many Ghanaian graduates unable to find meaningful employment or apply their skills to establish themselves and contribute to the benefit of their communities and nation.

This systemic challenge explains why the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) advocates for the explicit transformation of education systems to address Africa's development priorities by moving beyond colonial curricula and embracing indigenous knowledge, skills, and innovation (African Union, 2016). As stated in Section 3.2: "CESA 16-25 advocates for a paradigm shift in African education, emphasizing relevance, inclusivity, and the dismantling of colonial legacies that perpetuate dependency."

While African nations strive to decolonize education through policy and curriculum reforms aimed at strengthening human capital for national and continental development, African education should also consider how this movement intersects with globalization. Africa's 54 nations are interconnected through a web of global connections, including trade, migration, and shared geopolitical concerns. Current decolonization discussions often approach educational reform as an inward-focused endeavor, prioritizing local needs while overlooking how Africa's agency might engage with global frameworks.

This oversight becomes particularly urgent considering Africa's demographic trajectory. By 2050, the continent will account for one-quarter of the world's youth population. This workforce will not only influence African economies but also global labor markets, innovation networks, and cultural exchange. Given this future, why does decolonization discourse remain so Africa-centered? Shouldn't we equally focus on preparing African youth to collaborate internationally and contribute to the global impact while maintaining their identity and heritage? For me, the real challenge goes beyond focusing on substituting content with Afrocentric paradigms; it requires building an educational bridge that connects African agency with contemporary skills, enabling African learners to succeed within their communities, nations, and on the international stage.

Pursuing graduate studies in Curriculum and Instruction in the U.S., with research interests including African education, has revealed to me how academia largely overlooks Africa outside of colonial narratives or African Studies publications and niches. The continent's scholarly

contributions and knowledge systems receive inadequate attention beyond these limited contexts. Not to trivialize, but I would say that instead of African scholars persistently critiquing the impacts of colonialism, debating unwritten histories, or justifying oral traditions as valid knowledge systems, I would rather that we move past these to actively participate in and engage in a decolonization process that centers on globalization.

It is often said—and rightly so—that Africa possesses unparalleled riches: a youthful population, fertile lands, mineral wealth, thriving forests, and plentiful water resources. But let's be clear: we are also not some isolated island cut off from the world. As Africans, our greatest strength isn't just what we have; it's what we do with it. The world already knows about our resources. Now, we must demonstrate the future we want and are building. Africans don't need to be found by others; we need to stand up, create, and lead by using our strengths to impact the world both locally and globally.

This motivation and urgency are what inspired the special issue titled *Exploring African Education, Innovative Solutions, and Diverse Perspectives for a Globally Competent Citizenry*.

Africa stands at a pivotal moment in history. While the decolonization of education is a necessary and overdue step, it cannot be an insular process. The world is interconnected, and Africa's future, shaped by its young population, vast resources, and cultural wealth, will be transformative not in isolation but in collaboration with global dynamics. Our education systems must, therefore, do more than replace colonial frameworks; they must equip learners with the skills to navigate both local realities and global opportunities. I see hope in the African Union's CESA 16-25, which pushes for curricula rooted in indigenous knowledge and innovation, but we must expand this vision. Decolonization should not mean disengagement. Instead, it should empower African youth to innovate within their communities while engaging confidently on the world stage, whether in STEM, business, governance, or creative industries. The persistent narrative of Africa as either a victim of colonialism or a reservoir of untapped resources is reductive. We are more: we are thinkers, builders, and partners in shaping a shared global future.

This special issue sparks the broader conversation. How do we educate for a global agency where African graduates are not just job seekers but job creators, not just consumers of knowledge but producers of knowledge and solutions? The answer lies in educational policies and curricula that honor heritage while embracing adaptability and critically examining the past to design the future. Africa's wealth is not just in its land or minerals but in its people. Let's educate learners to reclaim our history and continent while forging a future of global impact. The time for inward-looking decolonization is over; the era of outward-leading transformation has begun.

The isiZulu proverb "*Umuthi ugotshwa usemanzi*" or "*A tree is bent while it is still wet*" reminds us that the time to shape leaders is now while minds are young, curious, and unhardened by the world. If African nations seek to educate a generation of global agents who create jobs, produce solutions, and lead with cultural pride, we must bend the tree early. This special issue's outward-leading transformation aligns with this ancient Zulu wisdom. Just as the sapling's bend determines the tree's growth, so too must African education mold learners who are rooted in heritage yet reach for global impact. Let us teach African learners while sowing seeds of

innovation that flourish across borders. The wet clay of the current and next generation awaits our hands!

Rooted in Africa, branching into the world!

References

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