Culturally relevant education and training for communities: A review

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion of people's cultural background in education and training is crucial for development. This article considers involvement of learning institutions in communities as a way of sharing cultural values. There is need for culture in aspects of education and training. This can only be realized by integrating communities' culture in generating knowledge and skills. Education and training change people's behaviour which has an implication on how people relate to their culture. It is important to provide education and training which are reflective of people's culture. This is a way of enabling people to embrace it, wholly. This paper points out the need for institutions of learning to collaborate with communities in a bid not only to learn from one another, but also to collectively share and find solutions to prevailing problems. Learning institutions are urged to use approaches that enable communities to fully participate in activities conducted in their areas. Communities should not be used for selfish gain, but to develop them to acceptable levels. Culturally relevant education (CRE) is a terminology espoused by researchers and academics. It makes a synergy between CRE and training for communities. This paper addresses relationship between education and training, effect of education, training for community responsibility and how to involve it in its own education. This is done against the backdrop that people are educated and trained but fails to make meaningful contributions to improving their own lives as well as those of other communities. What is surprising is that there is little being done in some cases to support this and systematically lead to its realisation. Among other thought-provoking questions, the article raises the following: i) Why is the education and training that some receive fail to have a trickle-down effect? ii) Is it because institutions of learning are focusing on education alone, leaving the aspect of training? The article advocates for institutions of learning to consider education and training of people (the community) as crucial aspects of development.

Keywords: Education, training, communities, culture, culturally relevant education.

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INTRODUCTION

Some education and training programmes do not embrace cultural aspects of communities. This is because the programmes concentrate on imparting externally determined knowledge and skills which are not related to the culture of community members. Some researchers conduct studies which rarely allow full participation of community members. When community members are minimally engaged in education, training and research, it becomes difficult to tap on inherit cultural knowledge and skills crucial to development. Culturally relevant education (CRE) depicts inclusion of diverse backgrounds of learners in teaching and learning process

which concern them. It is not a contemporary phrase in researchers and academics vocabulary (Aronson and Laughter, 2016). For adult educators like us, there is a direct link between CRE and Training for Communities (TfC). Community emancipation (Freire, 2006), widely popularised by Paulo Freire among others, is deep rooted in the type and form of CRE designed, offered and implemented. CRE entails learners to critically think about their lives and work towards initiating changes meant to liberate themselves from oppressive situations that limit their growth (Stromquist, 2014). CRE values learners' cultural resources as capital to anchor and

promote education (learning).

IMPLICATIONS OF EDUCATION ON COMMUNITY DEMANDS

Education attainment has implications on community. The philosophy on which education system is based, determines the extent to which the community can contribute towards its content. This section partially addresses the question on why education fails to have a trickle-down effect on communities. When an education system has some of its content externally determined, it is liable to provide knowledge and skills which are foreign, therefore fail to meet needs of the people. For example, in Zambia, decontextualized education provision has equipped some people with knowledge and skills not applicable in their own communities. Education viewed in this sense delineates people from their own communities. This is because it provides knowledge and skills likely to delink recipients from their own communities (Bouillion and Gomez, 2001). History has it that introduction of western education in Zambia changed people's perception of their communities. Such a trend has continued to initiate change in the way people behave, culturally. Wahab et al. (2011) note the need for communities to adhere to their cultural principles for them to be functional and effective. Education attainment implies improvement in lifestyles associated with civilization. Unfortunately, such a perception of education has only resulted into indigenous cultural erosion among some people. This calls for provision of education which embraces people's culture and avoid losing it completely. Some of the educated people do not want to stay in communities which lack social and economic amenities and others require incentives that meet their new demands. They opt for already established and furnished dwelling and working places which have better standards that correspond to their attained educational levels. Education acquired, in this case, is meant to serve selfish ends and not needs of the entire community. This is because people are educated and not trained to serve communities around them. It is for this reason that culture of community members must be considered for education to have a meaningful contribution in their lives.

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION

The term culturally relevant education (CRE) seems common among educators. Yet, there are not many who are able to put into effect the actual dictates of culturally relevant education. CRE revolves around three characteristics: promotion of academic proficiency, cultivation of cultural competence, and inculcation of critical consciousness (Gay, 2000). These three premises, on which CRE is grounded, are indicative of an inclusive approach to education and training which is responsive to real needs of the people. However, there are some people who see a direct disconnect between what culture offers and what institutions of learning offer. Such a view, is liable to mislead communities which are left to wonder and abandon 'learning' because of failure to relate to it meaningfully. This is because they do not see immediate benefit and synergy that leads to CRE. Ideally, CRE should foster diversity in its entirety.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training are concepts which are interrelated. It can be misleading to use them synonymously. While the concepts of training and education can be difficult to separate, it is imperative, from an institutional perspective, to develop precise, and separate definitions, in order to better understand the specific, concrete challenges and outcomes associated with each type of activity (Masadeh, 2012). In institutions where education and training are key components, it is important to distinguish them so that learners are empowered accordingly.

Lippert et al. (2007) contend that training is associated with quality productivity and 'learning by doing' which leads to specific, concrete results. Masadeh (2012:2) further define 'Training' as 'a learning activity that is designed for immediate impact, for the job or role that one does at present.' Ideally, training is often supplemented with practical, hands-on experience (Hughey and Mussnug, 1997). This collaborates with what Overman (1994:62) observes that 'what people hear they forget, what they see they remember, what they do…they understand'. This is with regard to any activity or course, either formal or informal (for example, on-the-job) which has helped a person to acquire the knowledge and skills to do their job. Henceforth, this defines training as 'the transfer of defined and measurable knowledge or skills'. Without doubt, 'Training endeavours to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to perform job-related tasks. It aims to improve job performance in a direct way' (Truelove, 1992:273). In addition, Karim et al. (2012) add on that training is characterised by instructor-led, content-based intervention which result into required performance. It is characterized by imparting specialized skills in people to enable them perform accordingly in specific job-related areas. Training is prescriptive in its content meant to impart required skills for specific tasks.

On the other hand, education is concerned with learning by thinking. It continues throughout one's life and initiates independent thinking. To a large extent, the outcome of training and education is seen as development. According to Manpower Services Commission (1981:17, in Masadeh, 2012) the term education encompasses 'activities which aim at developing knowledge, skills, moral values and understanding required in all aspects of life rather than

knowledge and skill relating to only a limited field of activity.' This definition is embracive as it provides a generalized view of education which covers many facets.

EFFECT OF EDUCATION

Education changes people's behaviour. It is important for people to attain right type of education so that they can perform required tasks. When people are empowered with the right knowledge and skills, they can contribute to improving their livelihoods and that of other members of the community. Beckett (2011) urges learners to gain expertise required for them to contribute meaningfully in time to come. However, there is little being done, in some cases, to support education attainment and systematically lead to its realisation. This is because not all the community members have access to education provision sort for. While some members of the community get educated, others do not. At the same time, those that get educated, in most cases, do not contribute to changing the lives of other members of the community for the better. Education creates individualism in people as a result it ends up serving serve selfish ends. Such a situation raises questions which demand answers. The questions that arise include the following:

i) Why is the education and training that some receive fail to have a trickle-down effect?
ii) Is it because institutions of learning are focusing on education alone, leaving the aspect of training?

Apparently, communities are in dire need of knowledge and skills that some so called 'educated people' have to turn a lot of things around and re-think about 'tomorrow'. Some people are perishing for lack of knowledge and skills which others have and are keeping them to themselves. They are waiting to be paid to go and share valuable information in surrounding communities. This kind of attitude which education has instilled in such people must be changed for the better. CRE is crucial to turning the situation around. The education system needs to embrace concerns from communities which must give direction to contents required. As a human right, education provision should cater for everyone in dire need of it regardless of the levels. Doing so will allow for inclusion in the system context specific types of education determined by varied cultures of communities. It is incumbent up on teachers to learn from communities what they want to learn and in return the members can also learn. In CRE, learning becomes reciprocal.

ISOLATION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Isolation of some of these higher institutions of learning has distanced them from some community members.

Some members perceive these institutions of higher learning as high towers meant for serving only a few privileged people. Such a situation defeats the whole purpose of education and training. Some people from higher institutions of learning are only seen in the communities when they want to conduct a research. Using communities for advancing one's own knowledge and skills at the expense of the researched is a sign of selfishness. That is why some communities are over researched such that they do not even want to see researchers again asking them questions related to their lifestyle. The researched are fed up furnishing researchers with data which seem not to be put to good use. The lives of the researched have remained the same despite several studies conducted in their vicinity. For example, some of the community members in some villages in Monze District, asked a team of researchers how many times they were going to conduct such studies without initiating any change. Others told the researchers that *'your friends were here the other day doing the same thing: Asking us many questions about our lives and so on'.* The villagers had 'research fatigue'.

There is enough evidence that communities are tired of giving data to researchers who do not provide solutions to their problems. They feel like they are being used to achieve other people's goals. For instance, many observed that non-governmental organisations and other researchers request for information from them without looking at their plight. This is true to a certain extent because institutions that send their students to these communities are benefitting in terms of knowledge gain, but fail to initiate positive change in the lives of the researched. This is because the communities have been over researched to no avail. They have not seen any benefit from research studies conducted so far. Learning institution need to initiate a change which can end this 'splendid isolation'. Often times, communities do not have the capacity to do so because most of the members in these underserved communities are not educated and trained enough to initiate such changes. It is incumbent on institutions of learning to take a leading role to collaborate with communities. Ruiz et al. (2012:1) urges such institutions to bridge the cultural and social barriers between underserved communities and service providers.

ABSENCE OF TRAINING IN COMMUNITIES

Some communities are bereft of knowledge and skills required for their survival. They survive by chance in some cases. Health and nutrition education as well as training are not provided to all deserving people. Usually, education and training are provided when things get out of hand. This is a sign of lack of preparedness on the part of those who have the knowledge and skills to share with others in need. While prevention is said to be better than cure, it seems response to epidemics is preferable in

some situations.

The recent outbreak of cholera in some townships in Lusaka District is partly attributed to lack of knowledge and skills. Some were neither educated nor trained to properly apply knowledge and skills in hygiene. While some people had the knowledge and skills in avoiding the disease, others did not. They perished due to lack of knowledge. Certain educated people did not share valuable knowledge and skills in time. There are some people who have developed poor health conditions attributed to bad eating habits due to lack of nutritional knowledge. The following series of questions are worth pondering over:

1. Why must people continue using contaminated water from shallow wells in communities which are near higher institutions of learning?
2. Why should people be left to trade in filthy market places for years on ends, when there are institutions of higher learning offering environmental health programmes to some members of the communities?
3. Why should people be taught about health and nutrition after they suffer from adverse conditions?

It is apparently vivid that adult education programmes are not responsive to the needs of community members. If lecturers can only concentrate on educating the educated and fail to go out there and teach the people in need, then it defeats the whole purpose of having the knowledge and skills. Surrounding some of these institutions, are communities that are in dire need of adult education. Talk of literacy skills and other non-formal education programmes which are being denied to the needy out there which could go a long way in solving some of the difficulties that communities face. It is time we questioned as a people: Why the nation should respond to such a situation as a crisis as though there was no enough evidence to warrant appropriate action? Deliberate programmes offered to help solve some of these problems are hardly enough. This, therefore, calls for a concerted effort from various sectors of the population to continuously serve our communities. The answer lies in institutions of learning which must play a leading role to foster appropriate training.

It is clear that some people go to institutions of learning to get educated and not trained to serve their communities. This shows how education and training processes differ from one another. Concentration must not only be on education, but also on conducting training which can easily be transferred to other community members. The educated and trained should be ready to share their expertise.

TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

Education and training offered in institutions of learning

must instil in learners social responsibility. It is about time that institutions of learning developed a community concern for their impact to be felt. They need to develop altruistic behaviours which are motivated by a disposition to help others (Kanungo and Conger, 1993). Institutions have to make it clear about its position on enhancing altruistic behaviours so that members can embrace it in all their activities. According to Ruiz et al. (2012:1) doing so will spur them to 'initiate community work training programmes and curricula in which community members and organisation partner with academic institutions on research studies' and many other training programmes of interest.

This can be made possible by having some linkages with communities one way or the other. Initiation of demonstration facilities attached to these higher institutions of learning can go a long way in serving community needs. Ferguson et al. (2015) explain that community service entails working in both urban and rural environments to provide life experiences with community members they serve. It is also a way of ploughing back to the communities by rendering needed services. Diab and Flack (2013) explain that community-based education provides relevant experience to students and underserved communities.

Additionally, institution involvement in service delivery contributes to improvement of communities' status by being instrumental in accelerating required change (Diab and Flack, 2013). Demonstration schools in various areas can be created from which communities can benefit. Doing so initiates development of partnerships with communities which provide mutual benefits. Bean (2011) describes such a situation as one leading to a 'win-win' programme as it provides both the training institution and the service site with additional resources. It is for this reason that a balanced relationship is established which recognizes both parties as equal partners in development. This means that institutions will not be treated as superior over the communities concerned. It provides experiential and contextual learning to students. While institutions guide communities in service delivery, they also provide new thinking which is crucial to development (Tucker et al., 1998) not only do institutions get to grips with social needs, they also get inspired to contribute to making a difference in the lives of community members. In agreement, Ruiz et al. (2012) attest to the fact that community academic initiatives not only offer skill, but also build confidence and provide participants with a more contextualized view of social needs.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Strides are being made to reach out to some communities, but they leave much to be desired. More

needs to be done than what is on the ground. The approach must change. There is need to emulate what some health institutions are doing to collaborate with community members. Institutions must have a heart for the people and not just concentrate on educating students and pupils who end up feeling delineated up on graduating. They must be educated and trained to go back and serve the underserved communities with a view of contributing to their welfare. All this can only work if it starts from the institutions where people are engaged. Education and training must be used concurrently during the period of study. Doing so will allow institutions to produce holistic graduates who are educated and trained to serve and not to be served. It is one of the ways of making institution become increasingly significant and relevant to surrounding communities.

The need to reach out to communities cannot be over emphasized. There are strategies that can be used to involve these communities so that they can benefit. Borrowing from what some health institutions do, communities can be made stakeholders of some of these learning institutions. Notably, it is community engagement which is a process of inclusive participation that supports mutual respect of values, strategies, and actions for authentic partnership of people affiliated with or self-identified by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of the community of focus (Ahmed and Palermo, 2010: 1383-4). It requires academic members to become part of the community and community members to become part of the learning institution, creating a unique working and learning environment before, during, and after the education and training activity. Therefore, community engagement operate on the principle of fostering partnership, collaboration in mobilizing resources, influencing systems, accelerating change relationships among everyone concerned and involved. Power sharing is advocated for in community engagement.

It is about time that training was put to good use by applying knowledge and skills to help solve the problem. This, therefore, means that researchers must be trained not to only collect data, but also initiate development in the researched areas. There are researchers who are not exposed enough to engage communities. Checkoway (2015) agrees that the extent to which some researchers involve community members is very minimal. There is need to incorporate in research training aspects of community participation and how to realize it. Education and training must show by contributing to improving lives of people in communities. It is a known fact that a lot of research studies that have been conducted are kept in libraries gathering dust whose recommendations have not been taken. This is what becomes of a situation when institutions of learning concentrate only on educating people and neglecting the training aspect of development. Education and training offered in learning institution must foster the realization of the Zambia Seventh National Development Plan whose theme is 'Accelerating national development towards the Vision 2030 without leaving anyone behind' (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2017:i). Communities must be involved in selecting the curricula for institutions to enhance a sense of belonging. Included in areas of education and training must be what Ruiz et al. refer to as 'culturally appropriate education' which is contextual.

Community partnering is a sure way of gaining access to traditional information which could be included in the academic circles for comprehending certain cultural values which are beneficial to learning and development. It is a known fact that communities, too, can serve as good sources of human resource for training learners in these institutions. Because some of the community members have vast knowledge, skills and experience in certain fields, they can be called up on to share them with learners. This brings in the realization that institutions of learning cannot go it alone. They need input from other interested parties to achieve holistic development which is grounded in the real lives of the people.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown the need for CRE in institutions of learning. While there are some weaknesses in the implementation of culturally relevant education and training, the need to overcome them cannot be over emphasized. Because of the inclusiveness of the premise on which CRE is based, institutions and communities should collaborate to foster its application. It has also highlighted strands of strength that can be used to build on formidable CRE and training that shall be responsive to community's demands. Because education and training are crucial to the realization of development among community members, it imperative to device ways of engaging them. CRE is a collective empowerment approach (Aronson and Laughter, 2016) Knowledge generation is reciprocal and this can be realized by incorporating research approaches that engage the researched. Doing so will remove the distance that exists between institutions of higher learning and communities. It is a way of removing the feeling of being used among community members during research work. It is time that researchers put aside their selfish motives to realize their set goals and embarked on appreciating collective efforts in developing and improving their lives as well as those of others in communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher institutions of learning should collaborate with community members when conducting research to allow for collective ownership of knowledge gained.

Universities and community members should work together in fostering change. Government ministries and NGOs should work in partnership with people who are in dire need of knowledge and skills.

All stakeholders in development should participate actively in improving their lives.

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