Foreword

Education, especially in the Developing world, has of late been reduced to the art of passing examinations. The school leadership pressured by parents and at times governments has increasingly transformed education from learning to mere passing national examinations. In the same vein, politicians lay more emphasis on kids performing well in examinations rather than acquiring knowledge, skills and values. As a result, rote learning and regurgitation of content (not skills or values) has become the norm in most educational institutions. Further, in recent times, education has also been reformatted as a product or a commodity, in the same way as a packet of sausages. The teachers are the dukawallas retailing education to clients or customers. In this market configuration bottom lines are key.

Despite the fact that most educational institutions are “non-profit making” the talk within them is about growing the number of students (clients) and diversifying the curriculum (product) in order to inflate the demand, hence raking in more profits. In this market, the competitive and astute business-oriented Chief executives weed out institutions with weak managers. Right sizing or re-engineering of faculty numbers often times translates to reduction of faculty numbers, increase in workload and in number of adjunct or part-time faculty. The latter have a semester-by-semester contract with meagre pay and without any benefits. In the face of frightful unemployment, faculty are yoked to an exploitative, minimalist and mercantilist system. The resultant fear and demotivation engenders a survivalist mentality where faculty are likely to invoke the least effort law, i.e. devising ways and means to invest the least energy in their teaching duties. Further, the same market-schools, the centre constituting the teacher and the student is demeaned and undermined, while the periphery made up of administrators and non-academic officers enjoy market-based and competitive pay packages. Some academies have been challenged to state what their “core business” is considering that the teachers are poorly remunerated and students neglected while the administrators (read support staff) are well compensated. The demotivated and disempowered teaching force remains fragile and therefore constantly on the look out for greener pastures. This leads to a deterioration of the quality of students spewed out by the institutions.

The commodification makes massification easy to justify; a product can be produced en masse to satisfy a demand. As is usual the case, the massification is made easier by technology; many courses can be mounted on a server and availed to the whole world at the same time. Again, the danger here is compromising the quality of graduates. But even with a good education (motivated teachers, relevant curricula, appropriate delivery methods and favourable politics) new challenges are emerging to call into question the importance of a university degree, for instance. In Africa, a bachelor’s degree in humanities costs about USD 8,000 (eight thousand). Upon graduation, a bachelor’s degree holder earns about USD 620 (six hundred twenty) in Public service in Kenya, East Africa. Kenya has the biggest economy in Eastern Africa.
A business venture of a similar amount is likely to yield better financial returns to an individual than investing it in education. Parents are now thinking twice about selling their cows and goats to support their children’s education in university, especially since their progeny will be jobless for a long time. Even if they get hired, the salaries are paltry hardly justifying the investment. The opportunity cost calculus, anathema in the olden days, is now part of the conversations around college education, especially in the developing world. Invariably and while recognizing some intangible benefits of education, its overall contribution towards enhancing the material life of an individual is increasingly debatable. Narratives of rich college dropouts, semi-educated or illiterate folks do not help promote the case for higher education. Biographies of “rags to riches” hardly attribute the success to education.

Unsurprisingly, reputable organizations are in recent times been focussing more on soft skills and creativity than academics while recruiting candidates. Excellent communication skills, ability to cope with stress, team-work, decision-making skills, ability to work independently, organizational ability, solution-finding, etc. are mush sought after skills than the mastery of a subject. Further, some organizations with global outreach require a foreign language. And yet most schools only emphasize academic performance. Sports, clubs and community service are some of the domains that help design in soft skills in our schools. The disconnect between what the schools are teaching and what the industry requires now and in the future condemns our graduates to endless unemployment. So, whom are the schools training for? Or is it education for unemployment?

There is no gainsaying that education should be transformative; it should impart relevant knowledge, skills and values to enable an individual enjoy what life has to offer. The universities are meant to solve problems facing society as they are at the apex of the educational pyramid. Transformative education can therefore transform individuals and society. In this light, schools should be re-examined to determine, not the number of graduates, but their quality as problem-solvers in society. This is the only way the graduates can be relevant and therefore employable. Even when they are not employed they can still be trusted to create new jobs and ventures for themselves. They can also become good citizens that people view as a river in a desert. That should be the essence of education.

This handbook presents an array of best practices in pedagogy designed to ensure that learners, especially in next-generation teacher education, enjoy the learning experience. The chapter scholars have spared no effort in providing insights on how technology can enhance teaching and learning. Technology does not replace good pedagogical practices---on the contrary, it enhances the way we teach and learn, but only when employed judiciously. This handbook is highly recommended for educationists, social scientists and pedagogy experts.

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Foreword

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