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Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection

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Abstract

This paper analyses the politicization of decision making in the education sector in Kenya since independence in 1963, to 2000. Utilizing a catalogue of major political decisions that have influenced trends and patterns of educational growth and policy formulation in Kenya, I demonstrate how such decisions have interfered in the running of education. I argue that these political decisions have marginalized the role and contribution of professionals and thus impacted negatively on policy formulation and implementation. My contention is that ideas of politicians are privileged even when they are shallow and myopic. I therefore blame politicians for the crises in the education sector in Kenya today. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Education policy; Education planning; Curriculum development; Educational administration; Public education; Comparative education

1. Introduction

Education has the potential to play an important role in any country's socio-economic development by availing high level manpower, besides defining and guiding cultural, social, economic and political dynamics. It therefore deserves to be treated very carefully as it defines generational developmental imperative of societies. Politics also play an important role in societal development as they permeate all sectors of the societal structures of all modern nations. Sharing of resources, allocation of power, arbitration in conflicts and provision of internal and external mechanisms of relations in societies are some of the functions of politics. Edu-

cation falls within the larger domain of political control which is not to say that politics must always interfere with the development of education but rather that it should direct it appropriately when called upon to do so. Despite the fact that the presence of politics in education is inevitable, there are parameters of how this is supposed to be done without being suicidal. Where this is not the case, political intervention should be moderated so as not to have the overridingly privileged and puffed-up presence, as is the case in Kenya.

The case of Chancellor Gordon Brown who berated Oxford and Cambridge, Britain's two most prestigious universities in the much-publicized case of Laura Spence, the Tyneside Comprehensive sixth-former rejected by Magdalene College, Oxford in 2000 can be used for illustration (Guardian, 2001). This was to the dismay of many

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