




Chapter 1

Access and Barriers to Education in Africa

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Africa is known for many things; one of the things it is famously known for is the fact that it has the youngest population in the world. However, access to education for many of these young people is still an issue. This article addresses the topic of access and barriers to quality education in Africa.

With 54 recognised countries in Africa, quality education for young people can play a crucial role in the growth of the continent's economy (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). This is because an economy is heavily dependent on the type of workers present and the type and quality of skills they possess. The ability to read and write one's name is not sufficient in today's competitive market. Therefore, it is important that African people have the necessary knowledge and skills to be productive in a globally competitive economy. As the world makes progress in technology and AI, it becomes increasingly important that Africa is not left behind. Technology is no longer seen as a luxury but as a way of life, and Africa has not been the quickest continent in integrating technology in its processes, the citizens' way of life, and ensuring ease of access to technology (Kgomoeswana, 2021). To mitigate this, we need to integrate technology into the education system. This will ensure that many people are skilled and informed about technology from a young age.

It is also important to integrate entrepreneurship into a curriculum. Entrepreneurship plays an important role in the creation of sustainable jobs and reduction of youth

unemployment, which, in South Africa, currently stands at 59.7% for people aged between 15 and 24 years and 40.7% for people aged between 25 and 34 years (Stats SA, 2024). Learning more about entrepreneurship will ensure that the youth learn more about being self-sufficient and less dependent on the government.

Although there could be improvements in the current curriculum, it would not be beneficial to implement any improvements; however, according to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, “almost 60% of youth between the ages of approximately 15 and 17 are not in school” in Africa (UNESCO, 2024). This raises the following question: what are the barriers that exist that make access to education impossible for many on the continent? First, an enormous gender gap exists between girls and boys who are of school-going age, with the exclusion rate for girls being 4% higher than that for boys. This is largely due to economic constraints. In countries such as Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire, education does not come cheap. Before a child is sent to school, parents need to consider the costs involved, such as clothing, books, and food, with average educational expenses costing \$87 per child in Ghana and \$151 per child in Cote d’Ivoire (UNESCO, 2023), whereas most civilians live off \$1 per day (Ombati, V & Ombati, M, 2012). Regrettably, a preference is often given to the male child to attend school, as some cultural views and societal expectations are that the male child should be the breadwinner and financial provider and the one to carry the family’s name.

Wars and famines play crucial roles in limiting access to education and the quality of education. Countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are prime examples of African countries that are currently facing wars. The unfortunate reality of war is that the youth are mostly affected, either as bystanders, who are caught up in the crossfire, or are recruited to fight in wars they know nothing about, and in some cases, young girls are recruited into forced marriages with “soldiers” (Abdi, 1998; Boyden & Ryder, 1996). It therefore becomes an enormous risk for any parent living in such affected countries to send their children to school and risk the possibility of losing them forever. These wars affect not only the ability

of children to go to school but also the capacity of schools to provide quality education, such as wars often result in bombings that affect infrastructure and the ability of educators to be physically present in the classroom and give children a quality learning experience.

The increasing number of climate change issues affecting the whole world presents an even greater problem for the African continent's access to high-quality education. This issue presents itself in the form of famines and food insecurity. South Sudan, northern Nigeria, and northern Ethiopia are some of the countries that are severely affected by climate change on the continent (Maxwell Howe, & Fitzpatrick, 2023). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 in 5 Africans faces hunger daily (WHO, 2024). A school-going child cannot be expected to go to school hungry and fully participate in the classroom. As a result, many opt to drop out of school to assist the family in earning a living.

Africa has considerable potential, especially when one considers its large number of youth. For the continent to continue progressing, education barriers need to be mitigated.

In conclusion, education is an important tool that can be used by governments worldwide to improve their economies. However, some barriers exist that make access to education impossible for some, and before one can address the change in curriculum provided, it is important to ensure that quality education is a reality to all, if not most, of the population.

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