



Published by the Nigerian Political Science Association, July 2019

Neo-Liberal Agenda and the African Educational System: A Recolonization Scheme

Mohammed, Shuaibu

Department of Political Science and International Studies
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Abstract:

The neoliberal agenda is an ideological conviction that supports maximization of economic freedom for individuals and thus reducing the amount of state intervention to the barest minimum. In this regard, it does advocate the elimination of government-imposed restrictions on transnational movements of goods, capital and people. In the 1960s, there was great expectation among Africans that the new African states would simply take the best institutions of Western democracies and liberalist ideology and use them to form efficient, effective and equitable models for their own societies. Soon, it was discovered that it would not be easy for the African states to work with these institutions. Instead, radical social science scholars began to reject the system and came up with their own or hybrid of Western and African institutions. In order to organize African societies and achieve development, radical scholars came up with several ideologies such as African socialism, scientific socialism and populism to challenge the failures of liberal democratic institutions. Against this background, the paper tries to explain how African educational system was recolonised through Western neoliberal ideas. Dependency theory was used as a guide and the study relies on qualitative data. The paper demonstrates that, with the neoliberal scholars nearly out-numbering the radical scholars in Africa, and the self-deceiving claim on democracy, the students of the 1990s and 2000s became the product of the tailored neo-liberal curriculum and left without alternatives. The curriculum has now been incorporated into the common-sense of the African students and shape the way they understand the world. This resulted in moulding African students to think only in the ideas of the liberal scholars.

Keywords: Neo-Liberal Agenda, African, Educational System, Re-colonisation

Introduction

The neoliberal agenda is an ideological conviction that supports maximization of the economic freedom for individuals and thus reducing the amount of state intervention to the barest minimum. In this regard, it does advocate for the elimination of government-imposed restrictions on transnational movements of goods, capital and people. The major agenda of neo-liberalism is to ensure the dominance of capitalism globally. In relation to Africa, it aims at restructuring African states for the benefit of the capitalist countries. The agenda was set up by the world's hegemonic economic powers in which the United States dominates. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, they continued to impose their agenda on weaker countries, which have little option but to accept the stronger states' demands. This is

not because those powerful countries directly force restructuring on other governments, but rather because their agenda has been adopted and implemented by international agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Johnson & Amy, 2007). In order to continue with the dominance of capitalism on a global scale, the African educational system was restructured to suit the needs of capitalism.

Against this background, the paper seeks to examine neoliberalism as an instrument of recolonization of African scholarship. The paper is structured into nine sections. Section one is the ongoing introduction. Sections two, three and four look at conceptual clarification, theoretical explanation and methodology respectively. Section five gives a brief background on neoliberalism. Section six presents the agenda of neoliberalism, while section seven looks at knowledge production and African scholarship. Section eight is the analysis of the effects of neoliberal policies on African education and section nine concludes the paper.

Conceptual Clarifications

Neoliberal agenda: This represents both an ideological position and a policy perspective that endorse economic individualism based on market competition. It encourages free trade and foreign investment, and opposes state intervention in the economy and welfare programs. Neoliberalism believes in the supremacy of markets in the distribution goods and services. The major agenda of neo-liberalism in Africa is to ensure the dominance of capitalism globally through the incorporation of Africa into the global capitalist system.

African Educational System: This is the process of learning and knowledge acquisition by African scholars and students with the aim of providing African solutions to African problems using African concepts and theories.

Theoretical Explanation-African Socialist Model

In order to fully understand how neoliberalism engenders the recolonization of African educational system, paper takes a leap from Claude Ake's model - Social Science as Imperialism. The model looks at Western social science education as a means of instilling capitalist values and capitalist development on the Third World, and to serve imperialist ends. He argues that the bulk of Western social science writings on the Third World amount to imperialism in the guise of scientific knowledge. Western social science is heavily biased in favour of capitalism. He then advocates a struggle for a new model of social sciences which is socialist-orientated, and that developing countries should reject Western models (Ake, 1982).

The Socialist-Oriented model, in this sense, means African socialism. African socialism stresses more on the African traditional values and marrying them with technology and the modern nation. African leaders portrayed in the pre-colonial era as being classless, communal and egalitarian. Thompson (2000:37) describes African socialism as "an attempt to recover these traditional values, and marry them with the technology and modern nation-state. It was about combining the equality, cooperation and humanism of the village community with the wealth and organisation potential

that could be generated by modern production methods and state institution respectively”. The state became central in managing both the political, economic and social and educational affairs of the citizens.

Furthermore, the neoliberal policies were imposed by the advanced capitalist and the IMF to ensure the continuous dependence on them. The dependence now is in almost all ramifications of life. As a result of this dependence, the educational system in Africa has now been structured in such a way that Africans think the way neoliberal scholars think. The level of dependence in terms of knowledge production has left Africa at the expense of neoliberalism.

Methodology

The study relies majorly on secondary source of data. The source comprises journals, textbooks, reports and other relevant written material. The data collected was presented and analysed qualitatively using content analysis. The analysis involves classifying textual material; reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data by making sense of historical documents, textbooks, journals, newspaper stories, political speeches, diplomatic messages among others

Background to Neoliberalism

Neo-liberalism is rooted in the classical liberal ideas of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Both viewed the market as a self-regulating mechanism tending towards equilibrium of supply and demand, thus securing the most efficient allocation of resources. These British economists and philosophers considered that any constraint on free competition would interfere with the natural efficiency of market mechanisms, inevitably leading to social stagnation, political corruption, and the creation of unresponsive state bureaucracies. In modern times, neoliberalism emerged as a synonym for the mainly externally directed attempt to remove the state from the economy. The World Bank’s Berg Report claimed that many of Africa’s economic problems emanated from excessive inefficient state intervention in the economy (Ekanade, 2014 and Tar, 2009)

The structural crisis of the 1970s in the US and other capitalist countries in which the Keynesian economy failed to address led to the emergence of neo-liberal ideology as argued by Ferguson (2008:12):

The structural crisis of the 1970s was also a period of alleged or real decline in the domination of the United States (in the wake of the defeat in Vietnam). Japan and Germany were seen as rising stars. The risk of the assertion of a global order, organised around three centres (the triad of the United States, Europe, and Japan), was growing. These events cannot be assessed independently of the failure of Keynesian policies to stimulate the economy. Keynesianism could not solve the structural crisis of the 1970s.

Furthermore, neoliberalism emerged as monetarism-ascendency of the market and “peripheralization” of the state, which in the monetarists’ view had become too large, unfit and inefficient, and excessively interventionist in the 1970s. It

was propagated by the governments of Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Ronald Reagan of the United States, Helmut Kohl of West Germany, later Brian Mulroney in Canada, WTO and IMF.

The imposition of neoliberal policies from 1970s were damaging to African countries. The first manifestation of neoliberalism within countries of the periphery was the so-called ‘Third World debt crisis’. It stated with the decision to lend African countries during the 1960s and 1970s in response to a major political goal; the fight against communism. But political conditions were different at the interstices of the 1970s and 1980s. The main cause of the crisis was the rise in real interest rates in 1979. This was aggravated by the structural crisis of the main capitalist countries, which had a negative impact on the exports of the countries of the periphery. (Gérard & Dominique, 2005).

The 1980s was the era of monetarists’ domination of economic policies in the Third World as summarised by Tar (2009) using Nigeria as a case study:

The IMF/World Bank effectively promoted SAP as a panacea of economic transformation in the developing countries, including Nigeria. This volume questions the assumption that Africa (Nigeria in particular) was lacking the essential components for a spontaneous transition to democracy – on the basis of which donors have imposed ‘political conditionality’. It argues that such assumptions pay little or no consideration to domestic factors such as the dependent and peripheral nature of developing economies in Africa, where capitalist development has not significantly flourished (Tar, 2009:2).

Neoliberalism and Its Agenda

Neoliberalism as a concept, ideology and policy has been characterized by the following features: the minimal scope and weakened role of the state sector; the replacement of public ownership and control by private enterprise and management; the increased cooperation between the state and private capital; the withdrawal of the welfare programs and adoption of market-led goods and services; and the transformation of public institutions based on business like structures and strategies (Haque, 2008). Its major elements are: *methodological individualism*-the notion that society is reducible to individuals pursuing their own self-interests; *rationality*-in the sense that individuals normally act rationally in pursuit of their own self-interest; and *market supremacy*-the belief that the market unhindered by impediments such as trade unions is the most rational way to organise society (Ferguson, 2008).

According to the core proponents of neoliberal economic policies like Friedrich Hayek, the implementation of various prescriptions embedded in the Washington Consensus, has the capacity to stimulate economic growth and development which will translate into wealth creation, employment opportunities and poverty reduction in the developing economies (Okoli & Elijah, 2015). Moreover, they believe that neoliberalism involved the creation of new markets, whether through the privatisation of existing State-owned utilities (such as rail, gas and water etc.) or through the setting up of new institutional arrangements which allow market

forces access to areas from which they have previously been excluded. In this sense, the state is an obstacle to economic development.

In relation to African countries, instead of the neoliberal policies to create employment, reduce poverty and foster economic growth, the reverse was the case. The major reason was that the agenda of neoliberalism was to restructure African states for the benefit of the capitalist countries. The agenda was set by the world's hegemonic economic powers in which the US dominates. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, they continue to impose their agenda on weaker countries, which have little option but to accept the stronger states' demands. The World Bank, IMF and WTO are used as instruments of economic global dominance the capitalist countries (Johnson & Amy, 2007).

Another area that neoliberalism affected the African states was on the role of state in economic development. This is manifested in the declining role of the state as a direct producer and deliverer of goods and services to the people. The state has now assumed a more indirect role to facilitate or support the market forces that are now encouraged to play the leading role in service delivery. The implication here is that, how can a state in which its capitalist structures have not been fully developed be able survive by surrendering its major functions to the market forces? The reality is that in Africa, the shift toward a diminishing role of the state and its economic functions is increasingly becoming obvious in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zaire, Zambia among others. Since the last three decades there has been proliferation of such pro-market policies in Africa.

To corroborate the above assertion, a major feature of the neoliberal state is its anti-welfare position. It tends to abolish the welfare rights on economic security, health services, and education facilities. In most Asian, African, and Latin American countries, the contemporary regimes have increasingly moved toward such anti-welfare option, which is quite evident in their recent attempts to streamline anti-poverty programs, withdraw food and agricultural subsidies, and introduce user fees for public sector services. The consequence of this is that instead of African states to concentrate on nation-building, social progress, and human development, the focus is now on business like objectives such as commercialisation of almost everything in order to achieve efficiency, productivity and economic growth (Haque, 2008).

Furthermore, neoliberalism in Africa was designed without a human face and human heart. Rather than to ensure equitable distribution of resources, it has successfully but subtly located access to the national treasury in the hands of a minority in government, thus risking investment in infrastructure, security, education and health of Africans (Egharavba, Imhonopi, & Iruonagbe, 2015). In other words, neoliberal policies have continued to create inequality within African states and the international system. Therefore, how does neo-liberalism affect knowledge production

Knowledge Production in Africa

African education is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community, which is stored in various forms and transmitted through various modes.

Such modes include language, music, dance, oral tradition, proverbs, myths, stories, culture and religion. Traditional African education, which is passed from one generation to another, is usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has to some extent been the basis for sustainable development in agriculture, food preparation, health care, conservation and other sectors for many centuries. This mode of education has by and large been used as a way of acquiring lifelong learning (Omolewa, 2007). Furthermore, Nyanchoga (2014) looks at African education as the education in Africa before colonialism, which meant to preserve the heritage of the community and adapt members to the physical environment and to perpetuate community institutions, laws, language and values inherited from the past. Education was the center piece of sustainable society in pre-colonial Africa. Knowledge production in Africa was communal, transferable from generation to generation and was focused on societal needs. Knowledge production also means the cluster of related activities in the society (in modern time majorly in institutions of learning) that has to do with producing new knowledge. (Cloete, 2012).

The major goal of traditional education in Africa is to produce a complete individual, a lifelong learner who is cultured, respectful, integrated, sensitive and responsive to the needs of his family, neighbours and the society at large. It is aimed at inculcating attitudes and values capable of integrating the individual into the wider society. The ultimate objective is to produce a person guided by wisdom (Omolewa, 2007).

The coming of European (Western) education from the late 15th century onwards disrupted the traditional system and brought the formal school system at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the learning of European languages, literature, history, philosophy (Omolewa, 2007). The colonial educational system became an instrument of colonialism with the aim of implanting in African psyches that they (Africans and their educational values) were inferior. Colonial education was used to modify the beliefs, thoughts, behaviour and mental thinking of Africans that they are inferior to the white race. This was demonstrated in the cases of colonisation and segregation by the white race who have only allowed blacks as much education as would benefit their priorities. This continued to have resounding implication for the Third World Countries today. As such, the indigenous people were brainwashed to discard their own cultures and embrace western cultures which were supposedly superior (Ake, 1982 and Falola, 2018)

Furthermore, Kaya & Seleti (2013) refute the Eurocentric view that Africa was a *tabula rasa* before colonization, that is, it is a continent with no history of civilisation. African Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production are scientific and were applied in solving societal problems. In order to demonstrate the scientific nature of indigenous African education Omolewa (2007) gives the example of the Maasai and Barabaig in Tanzania who have developed and maintained traditional knowledge and practices for the management and conservation of the biological resources on which they depend. Their knowledge and practices depended on empirical observation. The knowledge is stored in cultural and religious beliefs, taboos, folklore or myths as much as in the individuals' practical experience.

Neo-Liberalism And African Education: A Recolonisation Scheme

The advent of colonialism in Africa led to the destruction and subversion of African indigenous educational system which aimed at knowledge production, improving the lives of people through moral values and societal development. The imperial powers achieved this through forceful introduction of liberal political thought, which is incompatible with African cultures and values.

Gyan (1995) critique European conception of history that societies and knowledges come into view in Africa only after having been worked over by colonialism. This is not true because the claim made by the colonial masters that their mission was to spread civic virtue in Africa, but they did that through military power, or propagate the text of the “Rights of Man” in the context of slave and indentured labor. The precolonial African societies were more democratic than many of the European societies as it was demonstrated by Igbo societies in pre-colonial Nigeria.

The major aim of colonial education was to serve as a tool for the realization of the social and economic development and social transformation desired by Europeans. The missionaries desired catechists’ messengers and other handlers, merchants required personnel to handle their business transactions; colonial settler required skilled native labour. Colonial education was tailored to provide required skills to service the needs of the Whiteman in Africa and not to develop Africa. The consequence of this was that colonial education had a different socialization that was in conflict with African traditions and authority structures. For example, colonial education was not built on African culture such as language. Indeed, Africans were even forbidden to speak their language and adopt to foreign language such as French and English. It also alienated, de-culturalised and brought those educated Africans into direct conflict with their traditions and values (Nyanchoga, 2014).

Furthermore, due to imposition of colonial education, the rich traditions and culture which define Africa are now playing second fiddle to the incursion of the globalized Euro-American culture. African culture has been invaded by Western belief systems, ways of knowing, and ways of experiencing the world thus reinforcing the colonization of African knowledge production. (Shizha, 2013).

Moreover, Ake (1982) and Garba (2014) challenge the kind of Social Sciences we are learning in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Garba (2014) challenged the foundation of the field of economics due to the problems of policy failures which he attributed to lack of knowledge about the Nigerian economy by teachers and policy makers; the reliance on irrelevant or misguided economic thought for policy design; the dominance of external interests in policy making and employment of phony goals to cover up foreign interest driven policies. Also Ake (1982) argues that the bulk of Western social science writings on the Third World amount to imperialism in the guise of scientific knowledge. Western social science is heavily biased in favour of capitalism. Many works on development studies disguise capitalism for democracy (liberal democracy), the possibility of modernization, and the prospects of development. With the exception of Marxist tradition, Western Social Science scholarship on developing countries is imperialism in the sense that:

1. It foists, or at any rate attempts to foist on the developing countries, capitalist values, capitalist institutions and capitalist development;
2. It focuses social science analysis on the question of how to make the developing countries more like the West.
3. It propagates mystification and mode of thought and action which serve the interests of capitalism and imperialism (Ake, 1982: xiii).

After independence, there was great expectation among observers that the new African states would simply take the best institutions of Western democracies and liberalist ideology and use them to form efficient, effective and equitable models for their own societies. Soon, it was discovered that it would not be easy for the African states to work with these institutions. Instead, radical social science scholars began to reject the system and came up with their own or hybrid of Western and African institutions. In order to organize African societies and achieve development, radical scholars came up with several ideologies such as African socialism, scientific socialism and populism to challenge the failures of liberal democratic institutions. The collapse of Soviet Union brought an end to this dream. Instead neoliberalism is now used as a means of recolonising the African scholarship.

The recolonization started with the imposition of economic restructuring packages on African countries as a prerequisite for aid and other assistance, along with the general neo-liberal rhetoric of globalization. The result of this was the removal of subsidies on educations and commercialisation of education. This commercialisation reform devalued higher education into a form of low-level training that lacked a meaningful research component (Cloete, and Maassen, 2015).

Consequently, neoliberalism educational system did not only affects the curriculum of African educational system but ownership and funding of education. Hill & Kumar (2009) argue that the current structure of the anti-egalitarian education systems across the world is part of the ideological and policy offensive by neoliberal capital. Consequently, the poor schools have, become poorer and the rich schools have become richer. This exacerbates the level of inequality in Africa. It was only the rich parents that can afford to send their children to a better and quality school. Also, higher education in Africa is structured to be an elite system.

Conclusion

The current economic, cultural and political dependence of the African states can be attributed to the influence of neoliberal policies that were imposed on them by the advanced capitalist countries. This continued to engender unequal relationship between the centre and the periphery. The international capitalism is the motive force behind the dependency relationships. As against the argument of the pro-neoliberalism that neoliberal policies will lead to poverty reduction, employment generation and economic growth in Africa, the reverse was the case. Instead, the level poverty and crisis in Africa increase. Neoliberalism, also, changed the thinking of Africans from that of collectivism to individualism in which man became selfish and self-centred. In order to sustain their dominance, the capitalists now restructure the

educational system in Africa to suit their agenda. This was achieved by limiting the role of the state in provision of public services- reducing the cost of governance, commercialising education as well as removing subsidy in education. The educational system in Africa is now dominated by neoliberal scholars nearly out-numbering the radical scholars in Africa, and the self-deceiving claim on democracy. The students of the 1990s and 2000s are now the product of tailored neo-liberal curriculum. The Curriculum has now been incorporated into the common sense of the African students and shape the way they understand the world. This resulted in modelling African students to think only in the ideas of the liberal scholars.

Since it will be very difficult to delink from globalisation, this paper recommends that, the educational curriculum in Africa has to be redesigned to include African indigenous education. The state has to take its responsibilities of providing public goods to the people. Instead of allowing market forces to have a full control of the economy, the state needs to be strong and take control of the many important aspects of the African life like education and agriculture.

References

- Ake, C. (1982). *Social science as imperialism*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University press.
- Cloete, N. B. (2012). *Challenges and opportunities for African universities to increase knowledge production*. OECD Better Policies for Better Lives.
- Cloete, N., & Maassen, P. (2015). Roles of universities and the African context. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, & B. Tracy (Eds.), *Knowledge production and contradictory functions in african higher education*. Cape Town, South Africa: African Minds.
- Egharavba, M.E., Imhonopi, D., & Iruonagbe, C. (2015). Neoliberal reforms, healthcare and other human development challenges in Nigeria. *Global Journal of human-Social Science:F Political Science*, 15(2).
- Ekanade, O. V. (2014). The dynamics of forced neoliberalism in Nigeria since the 1980s. *Journal of Retracing Africa*, 1(1).
- Falola, T. (2018). *The Toyin Falola reader on African culture, nationalism, development and epistemologies*. Texas: Pan African University Press
- Feraro, V. (2008). Dependency theory: An introduction. In G. Secondi, *The Development economics reader* (pp. 58-64). London, England: routledge. Retrieved from <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/depend>.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neoliberalism and promoting social justice*. London, England: Sage Publishing.
- Garba, A. (2014). Economics: A Discipline in Need of a New Foundation. *Inaugural Lecture Presented at Assembly Hall, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*. 5th March, 2014
- Gérard, D., & Dominique, L. (2005). The Neoliberal (Counter-)Revolution. In A. Saad-Filho, & D. (. Johnston, *Neoliberalism: A critical reader*. London, England: Pluto Press.

- Gyan, P. (1995). *After colonialism: Imperial histories and postcolonial displacement*. New Jersey (NJ): Princeton University Press.
- Haque, M. S. (2008). Global rise of neoliberal state and its impact on citizenship: Experiences in developing nations. *Asian Journal of Social sciences*, 36, 11-34.
- Hill, D., & Kumar, R. (2009). *Global neoliberalism and education and its consequences*. New York (NY): Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Johnson, R., & Amy, G. (2007). Neo-liberalism, democracy and the state: Temporal and spatial constraints to globalization. *Space and Polity*, 11(1).
- Kaya, H.O., & Seleti, Y.N. (2013). African indigenous knowledge systems and relevance in higher education in South africa. *The International Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 12(1), 30-44.
- Lumba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. London, England: Routledge.
- Mbachu, O. (2013). *Great issues in political theory*. Kaduna, Nigerial: Madusa Academic Publisher.
- Nyanchoga, S.A. (2014). Politics of knowledge production in africa: a critical reflection on the idea of an African university in sustainable development. *European Law and Politics Journal*, 1(1).
- Okoli, A. M., & Elijah, N. K. (2015). Neoliberal economic policies and Boko-Haram insurgency in Nigeria. *Studies in Politics and Society*, 3(1).
- Omolewa, M. (2007). Traditional African Modes of Education: Their Relevance in the modern world. *International Review of Education*, 53, 593-612.
- Shizha, E. (2013). Reclaiming our indigenous voices: The problem with postcolonial Sub-Saharan african school curriculum. *Journal of Indigeneous social development*, 2(1).
- Tar, U. A. (2009). *The politics of neoliberal democracy in africa: State and civil society in Nigeria*. London, England: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Thomson, A. (2000). *An Introduction to African politics*. New York(NY): Routledge.