

Government's Influence on the Development of School Administration and Curriculum Reforms among the Kipsigis in Colonial Kenya, 1909-1930

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Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the government's influence on the development of school Administration and curriculum reforms among the Kipsigis in colonial Kenya from 1909-1930. The discourse was focused on the role of colonial government in the development of education in Kipsigis in respect to school governance and curriculum reforms. Arguably, the study extensively utilized dialectical materialism theory as an organizing framework and for better conceptualization of data and subsequent data analysis and interpretation. Documentary sources mainly primary was utilized in this study, including, inter alia, written documents from the Kenya National Archives (KNA) and other relevant and appropriate internet sources. As arguably observed and being a generalized view in this study, the government has been under continuous pressure to expand educational infrastructure and make the system more appropriate to the needs of the majority of the African population. Africans continued to be relegated to inferior positions in the colonial educational ladder. This ultimately prompted the Africans to establish their own independent schools which would offer academic type of education as opposed to elementary type of education.

Keywords: *school administration, school governance, curriculum reforms, colonial Kenya*

1. Introduction

The first breakthrough in the development of education by the colonial government in Kenya was the arrival in 1909 of J.N. Frazer, an educationist from Bombay who was commissioned to carry out a survey of education within the British East African Protectorate. Particularly, he was to advise the government on the organization, structure and type of education to be offered to the various racial groups in Kenya. On his recommendation, the introduction of industrial code of training was closely followed by missions in training their apprentices in the three courses leading to the government examination's (Otiende, 1992; Tignor, 1976 and Sifuna, 1990). Understandably, the policy ensured that missionaries could not teach a curriculum which was not approved by the settler dominated government. As a result of this survey, a Department of Education was formed in 1911. The separate educational systems for Europeans, Africans and Indians as recommended by the Frazer commission persisted until the last years of colonial rule in Kenya as asserted by Muricho and Changach (2013) as well as Anderson(1970), Lidundu, (1996) Sheffield and Sifuna(2009). This was clearly reflected in the system of education in Kipsigis which was modelled along racial lines. The discourse around provision of education based on racial segregation was ideally captured within the dialectical materialism conception as

articulated by Marx and Engels (1974) as well as Chesnovok(1952) that the ruling elites or class control to a greater extent the material production as well as the superstructure of society. Indeed, as aptly asserted by Rodney (1994) and Ronoh (2000) that the colonial domination also included determining the administration and curriculum reforms in education in colonial Kenya.

Therefore, the initiatives taken by the colonial government in the development of school education in Kipsigis came much later than did those of the missions. A proposal to establish the first Government African School at Kabianga was made in 1921. The opening of government schools in Kipsigis - as elsewhere in Kenya - was viewed with much apprehension by Christian missionaries as they did not approve of such secular institutions.

2. Methodology

The study employed an ethno-historical approach in its design. The research sites and sample was drawn from Kericho, Bomet, Nakuru and Trans Mara district, where majority of the Kipsigis reside. The selection of the informants was done after a pilot survey was conducted in Kericho and Bomet Districts. To ensure comprehensive and objective data, the selection of the informants was done using snowballing and purposive sampling techniques so as to identify key cultural consultants (Dalen, 1979; Babbie, 1996; Cohen, 1994 and Gall 2003).

Individual interviews were carried out during the year 1996-1998 with approximately 45 elderly men and women. The interviews systematically covered social, economic, political, cultural and religious aspects based on a general historical framework. Open ended questions and interviews schedules were used to allow informants to express their experiences in their own situation. The author conducted interviews with the help of two research assistants. Interviews were taped then transcribed and analyzed qualitative through content analysis and triangulation method. Documentary sources mainly primary documents (written documents from the Kenya National Archives [KNA] and internet data bases) were extensively utilized in the study.

3. School Administration in Historical Perspective

The colonial government educated the Africans as artisans in its endeavour to instill technical and vocational education so that they would be employed as apprentices, hence replacing the Asians. The colonial officials saw the latter as the prime threat to their economic and political power in Kipsigis. The colonial government started participating in the development of education later than among all the other communities of Nyanza Province. In commenting on this, the Kericho District Commissioner FJ. Fennings stated in 1923 that it was deplorable that the Education Department had so far shown no interest in "so intelligent a community as the Lumbwa" (KNA, DC/KER/1/1: Kericho District Annual Report, 1923). By April 1925, however, the first government school in - Kipsigis that at Kabianga - was opened. It had thirty-five pupils, although enrolment had declined to thirty-three by the end of the year.

This decline was attributed to a certain amount of opposition to the establishment of the school from the warrior class who influenced the young boys to stop going to school and also from the elders (KNA, DC/KER/2/1: Handing over Report, 1923). The warriors opposed the introduction

of Western education because they saw it as an obstacle to their occupation of warrior-ship and cattle raiding which was rampant during this period. This problem was resolved through the formation of the area committees for all Kipsigis schools. The sole purpose of the committees' establishment in Kenya as a whole was to advise the Education Department concerning the organization of education as well as harmonising the activities of the religious denominations.

But in Kipsigis, they played a dual role. Apart from the above- mentioned objectives, the committees created awareness among the Kipsigis as to the importance of education which many of them did not yet have" appreciated (KNA, Education Department, Annual Report, 1925). In 1926, the South Lumbwa School Area Committee (No.8) was appointed (KNA, DC/KER/3/7: Political Record Book, 1925) and it consisted of the following officials: the District Commissioner as the Chairman, Maj. Caddick, Rev. Caddick, Rev. W.R. Hotchkiss, J.K. Matson, Chief ArapTaptugen and I.Q. Orchardson. The committee stressed the urgent need for expert advice and the co-ordination of education through a competent inspectorate. This was in line with the recommendations put forward by the second Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1925.

In 1927, the Government African School, Kabianga was faced with frequent changes in the school administration. There were three principals during this year, namely: G.W. Bell, LQ. Orchardson and P.R. Stanton (KNA, DC/KER/1/4, South Lumbwa District, 1927). During the same year, the School Area Committee decided that the school site should remain in the Kericho Township. Due to the repeated changes of the principals, no permanent building was undertaken and as result recommendation was made of the Director of Education and the Committee that the school to be transferred from the township to Mobego in Kabianga, twenty five kilometers from the town centre, in August 1927. The site was chosen because of the availability of good land for both agricultural use and grazing. There were also ready materials for building and plenty of water power.

In 1928, a definite start was made in the construction of the Kabianga School. Two dormitories and classrooms were built by the Education Department with the assistance of the technical staff at the school. The average enrolment figure for the pupils was forty-five. However, the school faced a major setback with the dismissal of the principal P.R. Stanton, who was very hardworking." allegedly because of mismanagement of school funds (KNA, DC/KER/4/4: Monthly Intelligence Report, 1925). He was replaced by R. Howitt on 1stOctober, 1928 who acted as principal until Lieut. Col. P. Weir arrived on 18th December, 1928 from Kajiado School (KNA, PC/NZA/3/1/96, General Correspondence on Kipsigis Education, 1929).

It was noted that Col. Weir proved to be hardworking; in reviewing the situation H.D. Weller, who was the supervisor for technical education in Nyanza, observed that it was gratifying to be able to say that the new Principal was doing well and the unfortunate period of Kericho history seemed to come to an end. Col. Weir took keen personal interest in the school's work. And every indication that he possessed both the force and the foresight which was essential in the development of the school. In fact, he ensured that the school was to be of greatest value to the Kipsigis by introducing technical education through which the people were trained in agricultural

land use. Generally throughout Kenya, Africans were given inferior education preparing for manual work while other races were given better specialized education system and this ultimately led to uneven development. Contrary to this view, the Europeans' philosophy was to develop the economy of the area through agricultural improvement and the growth to be accomplished by the White Settlers (Sheffield, 1971).

By 1929, Kabianga was the only school in Kipsigis that was directly under the control of the government with the rest being under missions. At the new site, the school flourished, and there was considerable increase in the pupils' enrolment to sixty. The ages ranged from twelve to sixteen, and this sometimes created problems in teaching (KNA, Education Department, 1929). Only very few of the pupils had received any previous instruction at village schools. For administrative purposes, the principal divided the school into dormitories to which he appointed prefects as a way of delegating duties as well as nurturing and mentoring their talents as future leaders (KNA, DC/KER/3/71, 1932). On 1st March, 1929, he sent away all boys who had not met the requirements for admission to bring their parents. Only twenty five pupils were left out of fifty, and most of the boys who went away never came back. This fact explained the contention that parents attached little attention to the education of their children and saw them as an opportunity to utilize them to perform other domestic chores.

The principal obtained permission from the Director of Education to start a new system of food rations which was accepted by the boys. During this time, the school also underwent a series of inspections. First, the supervisor of technical education visited and inspected the school on 26th July, 1929. On 2nd August it was inspected by H. Webb and on 12th December by the Provincial Education Officer, Nyanza. In all these inspections the school was praised for its dedication to work in all fields. Enrolment also increased to sixty-nine boys.

In 1930, six pupils passed the Elementary 'B' examination and joined the Kabete carpenters' school (KNA, PC/NZA/3/1/196, General Correspondence, 1926). With the implementation of the New Education Ordinance of 1931, which further stipulated the role of the School Area Committees, the Kipsigis School Area Committee continued to strengthen the development of education (Sang, 1997). During this period also, more buildings were completed by the Native Industrial Training Depot (N.I.T.D) trainees with the help of the school's labour force under the supervision of the principal. The entire construction scheme was completed and all the paintings and fittings done by the instructors.

During this year, eight more pupils passed the Elementary 'B' examination and were also sent to Kabete for the carpentry training course. And one pupil was admitted to the agricultural school, Bukura (KNA, DC/KER/2/1, Handing over report, 1930). The disparity in the ages of the pupils in the school made the principal's task difficult; but then the teachers were trained and out-schools were established, thus enabling the admission standards to be raised.

The school was certainly one of the greatest assets to the reserve and served not merely as a centre for the education of individuals but for the whole reserve (KNA, DC/KER/1/4, South Lumbwa District Annual Report, 1930). Pupils could be transferred after their preliminary

schooling to other government institutions as instructors particularly the Native Industrial Training Depots agricultural, veterinary and medical schools. Upon returning from their training, they could materially assist the economic and hygienic progress of the reserve.

4. Reforms in the Curriculum

In the initial stages, the curriculum that the colonial government introduced in the Kipsigis school system was modelled to suit the recommendations of the Phelps Stokes Commission of 1924. Training in character formation put religious and moral instruction as priorities in the curriculum as the government considered these to be of primary importance in the child's development. Academic subjects such as health instruction, agriculture and physical education were considered of secondary importance in the early 1920s (Lugumba & Ssekamwa, 1973) while crafts and home economics formed a third group.

The above approach was reinforced by the Advisory Committee for African Education formed in 1925. It stressed the urgent need for expert advice and the coordination of education through a competent inspectorate. It also laid down as a principle that the greatest importance be attached to religious teaching and moral instruction (KNA, report on African Education, 1964). The committee claimed that history had shown that devotion to some spiritual ideal was the deepest source of inspiration in the discharge of public duty and such influence should permeate the whole life of a school (Smith, 1973).

The colonial government emphasized the kind of curriculum that would suit its needs - especially in producing a docile and submissive labour force. The products of such an educational system were not supposed to question the colonial regime as explained with the dialectical materialist theoretical imperatives of education.

In 1925 a policy directive was issued, giving something of a vocational bias to elementary and primary education in Kipsigis. Schools were supposed to teach not only reading, writing and arithmetic, but also improved methods of agriculture and simple village handicrafts (Bogonko, 1991). This was intended to facilitate the improvement of native house building, domestic chores, cooking and clothing. Later, in 1928, Government African School, Kabianga settled for technical education where it specialized in carpentry, building, iron working, motor mechanics and agriculture. While in support of Bogonko (1991) earlier view as attested by Ronoh (2000) found that technical education taught in the school had only a slight influence on the Kipsigis agricultural system.

This was because the Kipsigis were still predominantly practising pastoralism, and not paying much attention to agriculture. By 1929, apprentices who had been trained at the Native Industrial Training Depot, Kabete had constructed a large number of permanent buildings at Kabianga. These included a principal's house and garage, dormitories, African teachers' quarters and classrooms. All this was done under the supervision of the European principal (KNA, Education Department Annual Report, 1929:29).

The literary work at the Kabianga School was elementary and continued to only standard two.

Besides, carpentry, smithing, motor work and gardening were taught with a large measure of success. In mid 1929, the school established an agricultural plot for the demonstration of methods suited to the Kipsigis as well as for supplementing the food supply of the school (KNA, DC/KER/1/6;1929). It was the sole responsibility of the pupils to prepare the day's cooking. Because of the technical and vocational training they received at the school, some boys took jobs in the post office as telephone linesmen while on leave. And six boys were also enrolled in the King's African Rifles (K.A.R.) as learner signallers.

Throughout 1930, the school registered great progress in the pupil's work where physical training formed the core of the curriculum. The pupils performed favourably in their school lessons in carpentry and gardening. Blacksmithing work was added to the technical side. At the end of the year, six pupils passed elementary 'B' to join the Kabete carpenters' school (KNA, DC/KER/1/7; South Lumbwa District Annual Report, 1930:32).

5. Conclusion

The few men that the missionary system had produced began to filter through to the government administration. These were mostly teachers who had sufficient education to be trained in a limited number of fields, particularly in clerical jobs and also in other simple professions. The colonial government considered it an invaluable means of providing effective administration through the production of junior administrators and others in professions necessary for the promotion of order and good government. The colonizers assumed that in this way civilizing influences would be maintained in their respective districts in the colony. In this way, the Kipsigis were only used as junior clerical officers, teachers, etc.

The impediments that faced the development of education in Kipsigis were largely solved with the creation of the Kipsigis D.E.B. in 1953. The Kipsigis D.E.B. greatly assisted the development of both primary and intermediate education and, later, secondary education. The Board played greater a role in the expansion of the Government African School, Kabianga - especially in terms of funding, supply of trained teachers and inspectorate, and so on. Generally, the Board ensured that schools under its management obtained adequate facilities. It also monitored the payment of school fees to ensure uniformity in all aided schools; and it supervised the work of the Boards of Governors that were formed in the early 1950s in these schools. In its activities, it sought reduction in the number of unaided schools.

Despite this, criticism was often leveled at the content of colonial education. The Kipsigis felt that the education provided in primary and middle schools was insufficiently academic, and that too much school time was being spent in the farm and workshop. In other words, pupils were therefore being given an inferior kind of education which fitted them only for the farm or workshop. The Kipsigis indeed regarded the school as an instrument of change, but only on terms broadly acceptable to their traditions. That is one reason for their reluctance to send girls to school. By 1960, mounting criticism forced the colonial government to abandon handwork in middle schools and retreat from its previously - held conviction about the place of agriculture in primary as well as intermediate education.

The colonial administrators did not arrive in Kipsigis with ready plans to produce manpower that would assist them in the gigantic task of the entire administration of the region. What the missionaries had laboured to produce was later utilised by the colonial administration. The colonists tailored education and administered education to serve their own ends. That was why after independence, the Kenya government was faced with the problem of establishing an educational system which reflected the Kenyan needs, values and ideals. This resulted in the appointment of the Ominde Education Commission in 1964.

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