

Investigation of Youth Empowerment Strategies via Education for All in Rwanda

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Abstract: Rwanda is one of the countries which argued to put into practice the agreement suggesting the international community to ensure access to quality basic education for all by the year 2015. In that line, Rwanda has set a policy in favor of all Rwandan children to have 12 years basic education for free. However, some reports revealed that there are still challenges to address for that mission to be effective. This paper offers a tentative snapshot on “the investigation of youth empowerment via education for all in Rwanda”. The research aims at investigating if really the Rwandan policy to promote education for all in primary and secondary level helped by the global EFA (Education for all) objectives became a primordial strategy to empower Rwandan youth. In the absence of sufficient instruments to measure the contribution of the Rwandan established policy, in practice, a coding scheme was developed and applied to the in charge of education at both district and sector levels. The research was done in two districts of the country which facilitated us to answer our questions. As few studies of this kind might have been conducted in developing countries and particularly in Rwandan context this adds to researchers’ existing understanding on the role of EFA in empowering youth. The findings suggest that there are important contributions of established EFA policy as initiated by Rwanda. Even if the overall impression is that the youth empowerment via education for all in Rwanda is not in a calamity, some areas require improvement. Based on our findings, these include the reviewing of some options attended by students in twelve year at secondary school, trainings of the latter have to be enhanced as well as financial support. The paper ends with recommendations to different concerned people.

Keywords: Youth, empowerment, strategies, education for all, Rwanda, youth empowerment.

1. Introduction

In the present work the researchers have not ignored the new targets of education like the education within the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. However the researchers opted to limit the data collection of what have been done in relation to EFA by 2015, the period under which the available data could reflect the reality. In Rwanda, after reading the work of Murenzi (2005), we got an inspiration that little is known about the EFA implementation in general and to the extent on which its objectives have been achieved in particular. The fact that Rwanda is one of the countries which signed the agreement of putting into actions the EFA policy is the reasons which prompt us to investigate the youth empowerment strategies via the above programme in Rwanda, so that we could understand how it is done and know the gaps which may be filled.

As highlighted above, Education for All is a global concern. It has been taken into consideration by different education stakeholders of different levels. However, as posited by the EFA monitoring report of 2015, the education for all still presents different factors which work as barriers to its successes, like school teachers not equipped with training needed to support children learn efficiently; children who do not have a schools to go to, the issue of transition to English as language of instruction, teachers heavy workload, some education system which are not targeting the labour market needs, distance from home to school, insufficient teaching materials, poor provision of facilities for children with disabilities who are in need of special needs education and parents’ shortage of resources to educating their children.

The previous raise other problems, among which low primary education completion rate, low number of girls in science and technology options and a high ratio teacher to pupil. To address those, doing international research was seen as crucial option for various education managers to

know how the above mentioned challenges are handled elsewhere (EFA monitoring report, 2015) to enable them to apply the solutions in their countries' context.

Thus, a study was carried out and data were collected in two provinces of Rwanda. In this paper, however, we limit ourselves to the implementation of global EFA objectives, challenges and the taken strategies for their success.

2. Literature Review and Studies

In education, different scholars (Adeola at all 2013, Global Monitoring report, 2015, UNDP, 2014, Murenzi, 2015) have investigated on success of youth empowerment strategies via education for all. Youth empowerment is defined as creating and supporting the enabling conditions helping people to act for their own (Adeola at all, 2013). Different goals have been established globally to support all young children to attend classes, targeting mostly those marginalized for one or many reasons. Learning needs have been classified into two categories, namely, learning content, i.e. knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, and learning tools, i.e. literacy, numeracy, problem solving and oral expression (Government of Pakistan, 2008). In Rwanda, a great number of young people have accessed to primary and secondary school education, regardless of cost, gender and other kind of discrimination (Murenzi, 2015).

Results from the above studies show differences mainly due to the context in which each study was conducted. Thus, some studies find that there has been improvement in EFA in different domains, such as on the quality of education, serious reflection, more rigorous planning, a spirit of innovation as well as the decrease in drop out of classes (Torres, 1999). Despite the real improvement mentioned by above authors, another part of the latter find that, although EFA is declared to be free (Nichol, 2013), a big number of students is not attending school due to poverty, lack of school uniforms, domestic work and distance from school (UNICEF, 2007, Paxton et al., 2012). In addition, the quality and availability of teacher training, insufficiency of textbooks and resources, and class size, remain serious challenges affecting education quality (UNESCO, 2015).

While there has been much focus on achievements and challenges of EFA, in our view, the policy brought a considerable change although challenges are inevitable. Considering this in relation to established goals, it is useful to consider if there is a special type of strategies established in our country which increased the achievement of EFA. However, in this study, we only consider primary and secondary schools (nine and twelve year basic education) in four districts of Rwanda two being in rural areas and two others in urban areas to investigate the results from strategies established in EFA since the beginning of the policy up to date.

Even if the education for all is a global movement led by UNESCO (United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), significant effort has been seen in Africa with an international meeting on EFA held in Senegal under which the Dakar Framework" as an EFA commitments Framework for action was agreed by different international education community institutions and agencies (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2015). The main key elements agreed on were, the six goals and their associated targets to be achieved with the target of gender equality, and twelve strategies to which all stakeholders would contribute to the Dakar EFA goals and strategies. Gender concerns were embedded in all the Dakar Framework's six goals, and three of them made explicit reference to gender.

The six goals were first to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Second, it was to ensure that all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality. Thirdly, to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. Forth was to achieve a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. The fifth was to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, and achieving gender equality in education, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. The last goal was to improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The African effort to implement the above goals were tackled by different African countries. For example in Rwanda, in order to ensure the implementation of the first Dakar Framework mentioned above, the government of Rwanda, through the higher learning institution like the University of Rwanda College of Education (UR-CE), initiated the early childhood education by setting up in their academic programmes the one to train pre-primary and primary education tutors. This was in line with the suggestion of UNICEF, of expanding early childhood development (ECD) programmes to support Government and civil society organization to improve the welfare of children. This could close the gap of the fact that the Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2014 to 2015 showed that few numbers of children attended ECD as only 13% of children between 3 to 6 attended it. This low attendance demotivated the access of children to pre-primary schools, even if the progress in primary education is satisfactory. Despite all different efforts by different institutions, agencies and government of Rwanda who put a great effort in investing in concrete ECD programmes in all its villages, the gap still exists, because all Rwandan

primary schools have not yet their pre-primary schools to ensure the concrete development of children in early years so that they don't lose their development potential later in life.

In Rwanda, to ensure the implementation of EFA with respect to the second Dakar framework goal, the Gender Policy at national level were outlined in all country sectors and some strategies are in place, namely: Introduction of measures that aim at ensuring that gender issues are mainstreamed in the educational system, in the areas of curriculum, policy and all educational programmes; introduction of measures that aim at enhancing opportunities for boys and girls at all levels of education and in all institutions of higher learning and training; introduction of special measures to improve girls' enrolment in the non-traditional fields of study particularly in Science and Technology, to increase their performance and introduction of measures to promote and enhance vocational skills and functional literacy for women and men taking into consideration gender roles and responsibilities.

Conferring to the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), the main objectives for education are to improve and increase access to education for all EFA, quality education at all levels, equity in education at all levels, effective and efficient education system, science and technology and ICT in education, and promotion of positive values, critical thinking, Rwandan culture, peace, unity and reconciliation. This was tried out through the introduction of the Nine Years Basic Education policy (9YBE) in Rwanda in 2006 and later its extension to twelve years Basic Education policy in 2012. There was also an introduction of TVET schools through WDA (Workforce Development Authority) as well as promotion of Science and technology in all sectors of education (MINEDUC, 2008).

In 2006, the Rwandan Gender Parity Index was 1.00 for primary education, 0.98 for lower secondary, 0.74 for upper secondary and 0.67 for higher education. The gender parity tends to deteriorate as students climb up the education ladder. In 2011, the number of learners per classroom was 81 in primary education and 42 in secondary education (REB, 2015) which shows the gap in the enrollment (Bennell & Ntagaramba, 2008).

In their studies on the above interest, various authors focus on the role played by the Ministry of Education to empower youth in EFA, through the established goals (Murenzi, 2015). A different perception was clarified based on their analysis. Hypothesize that EFA enumerate a number of challenges, the confirmation that can be supported by the result from our research, since limited number of authors conducted research in the same area. As a matter of fact, some other researchers claim that challenges are expected in the new policy of education that offer equal chances to all young people at the age of attending classes (Paxton et al., 2012, UNDP, 2014).

The literature in the Rwandan context on youth empowerment through education for all seems to be limited. Thus, the present study was deemed a useful contribution to our understanding of the contribution of the established policy from the beginning up-to-date, as will be discussed in the present paper.

3. Methodology

This part explains the methodology used to guide the study.

3.1 Method

The researchers seek to describe the current status of the phenomenon previously informed. This makes researchers to opt for a descriptive research design for this particular research.

3.1.1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire we used in this study was piloted and adjusted in December, 2016. It aimed to investigate youth empowerment strategies via education for all in Rwanda. Some questions related to what have been done to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood education, particularly to the vulnerable and disadvantages children, others were about to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. As the primordial aim in the present paper was to investigate the achievements of EFA in Rwanda, researchers were only interested in the questions which could reflect the real image of youth empowerment strategies via education in Rwandan context and put less interest to other areas such as sources of international financing with regard to the concerned programme.

3.1.2. Sampling

As earlier stated, as a consequence of budget limitations the researchers purposively opted to choose two Rwandan districts, one considered as an urban area district and another one considered as a rural area district so that both rural and urban context are reflected. Based on the aim of this research, from those districts, two groups of respondents were chosen, random sampling has been used wherein Researchers selected the ultimate sample including ten respondents. Investigators purposively involved the district education officers, to warrant that the sample would be evocative enough. All involvement was voluntary and all respondents answered the questionnaire in their own time, but in their offices, since they were not permitted to take questionnaire in their own families.

3.1.3. The respondents

The sample comprised both sector education officers and district education officers, and was composed by 6 men and 4 women. Respondent's average age was 36 years old, where the youngest was 28 years old and the oldest was 44 years old. In lieu to their education level, we would like to acknowledge that they were all Bachelor degree holders.

When it comes to working experience, 70% of respondents had between 2 and 5 years working as education officers, 20% were between 5 and 10 years, whereas 10% worked as education officers in a period of less than 2 years. Even if respondents were of different age, researchers did not investigate the correlation between time of working experience and the answers provided by respondents. All the received answers were equally treated.

3.2. Data analysis

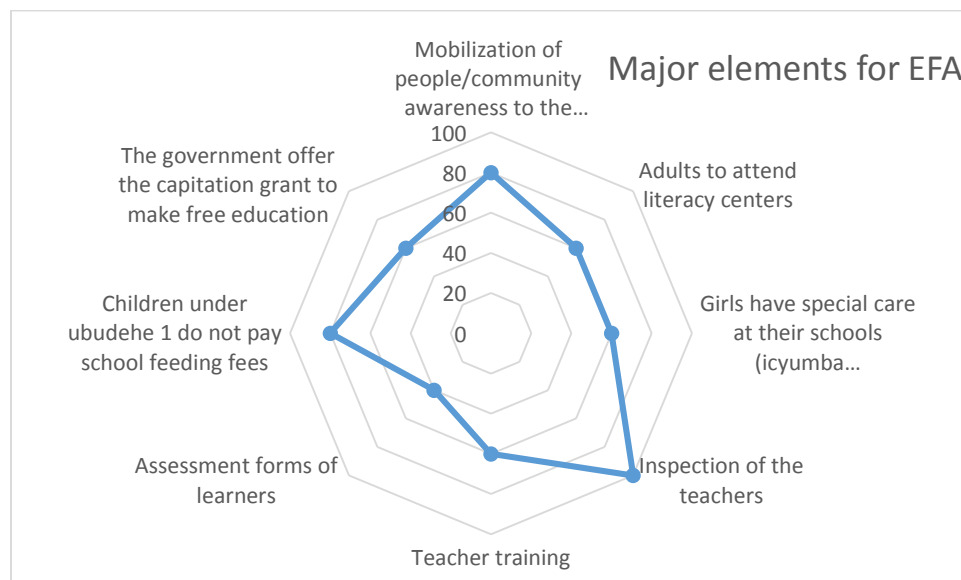
This was done for the researchers to make data having meaningful insights. The researchers did a basic data checks and no outliers or missing data were observed. To analyze the data, researchers produced an Excel spread sheet in which they entered each and every response from each respondent's questions. Some descriptive statistics

like percentages were used and graph has been used for representation of findings. The fact that research was done only in two districts of Rwanda one being in rural area another one in urban, researchers cannot make sweeping statements from the results. However, they can still reflect realistic likelihood of the real situation.

4. Results and Discussion

The data analyzed in this study focused on youth empowerment strategies via education for all in Rwanda. Researchers were expecting various challenging in the implementation of the previously noted policy. However, the results showed that there are a limited number of challenges in the implementation of that policy, generally due to the Rwandan government efforts. 40% of respondents mentioned some challenges including their wishes to increase budget to build the ECE centers as well as the hidden costs paid by parents such as little contribution made for feeding their children at schools.

The overall results on the major elements which pertain to EFA within Researchers sampled areas are shown in the Figure below. The government effort mirrored through its determination to offer the capitation grant to all public schools to make education free, has been one of the major elements, which makes the education for all a reality in Rwanda.



The same case has been the mobilization of people/community to the importance of ECE (Early Childhood Education) to encourage them to construct more ECE centers. Albeit, the general tendencies seem to be fair in terms of performed elements within the EFA lines (see the above Figure), there is a considerable range in some areas. This is the case for assessment forms given to learners for them to evaluate the way this policy is implemented and give feedback to their school authorities (20%). From our understanding, this method would reveal

untrustworthy results as it is not always fair for someone to evaluate his/her immediate supervisor, who has considerable power on him/her.

As previously mentioned, in Rwanda, the EFA implementation policy is basically motivated by the political will of such policy. Again, this is observed through the results presented in the above mentioned Figure, where 80% of our respondents confirmed that the number of enrolment in schools was driven by the fact that

the Rwandan government has set a policy suggesting that all children whose parents are under Ubudehe (this is a term used to let people know the various life status of Rwandans) first category are not obliged to pay school feeding fees. This encouraged parents to send their kids to schools.

Researchers would like to remind that their research was based on the EFA objectives for the community, to have an idea on those objectives presently in Rwanda. It would be more pertinent to consider the present findings in view of the overall EFA lens and hope that, the method will be the same in researchers' forthcoming work.

Regarding the strategies taken to eliminate gender disparities for enhancing the level of girls' access to basic education, apart from mobilizing the community about the gender equity and its role, the school authorities have supported the idea of constructing a special room for girls at each and every school in Rwanda. This room is known as Icyumba cy' Abakobwa (It is a room exclusively for girls' special care when it is needed being at school) (60%).

As informed elsewhere in this paper, researchers further investigated on what have been done to ensure that the learning needs of adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. In that view, 60% of our respondents argued that special literacy centers have been constructed and adult people are encouraged to attend those literacy centers.

In the present work, the school authorities' determination was also explored, to investigate if the options attended by learners, generally meet learners' will. With this regard, the respondents posited that learners are not consulted for

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- the options to be in place. They continued by arguing that schools register options based on the availability of the teachers and to the school materials they have. Besides, they added that this is due to the fact that some options like Mathematics-Chemistry-Biology (MCB), requires sufficient laboratory materials which cannot be afforded by most of the schools. From researchers' own view, this need to be reviewed so that the Rwanda government effort to sciences enhancement is not lost (cf.Maniraho & Christiansen, 2015).
- ## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations
- The current paper presented the main elements which pertain to EFA in Rwanda, within our sampled zones. Nevertheless, because of the sample size used, researchers decided not to generalize the outcomes even if the method used could designate the status of EFA in Rwanda. The results may still help the education policy makers to think about which aspects to focus more, to ensure the full success of EFA in Rwanda.
- From researchers' results analysis, a review of some options attended by students in twelve year at secondary school is suggested to Rwandan education stakeholders. Above and beyond, trainings of the latter have to be improved and the financial support to vulnerable groups is to be held in reserve.
- In the researchers' next issue, their wish will be to investigate to what extent the achievements of the EFA policy impact on Rwandan's mode of living.
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