

## Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), an African Philosopher, Re-envisions Teacher Education to Escape Colonialism

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**ABSTRACT:** Before the introduction of the Western system of education into Africa (18th century), the aim of indigenous education was to preserve the cultural heritage of the family, the clan, and the larger groups. Indigenous education was meant for every member of the society because it was believed that every member of society had a role to play in educating the child, thus the proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." This paper addresses the philosophy of self-reliance as advocated by Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) when he became president of Tanzania in 1962. Nyerere was highly critical of the social, political, economic and cultural value system imposed on his country during the period of colonization, and he worked relentlessly to go back to the traditional African values. He believed that the Africans should decolonize their minds in order to accept themselves as Africans. He believed that the education system introduced by the British in 1900, when they colonized Tanzania, did not address the needs of the Tanzanian people, therefore Nyerere advocated for education that he believed was more culturally relevant. Nyerere's philosophy of education has had a great impact on many African countries. This paper explores his educational philosophy of self-reliance and the impact of African Socialism on the African education system today. Furthermore, the paper critically discusses the reasons for the downfall of Nyerere while reemphasizing the power that educational ideas hold for transforming societies.

**Keywords:** African philosopher, colonialism, teacher education, social justice, socialism

### Introduction

**M**walimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922-1999) was the first president of Tanganyika, presently known as Tanzania. He was given the title "Mwalimu" as a mark of honour for being a teacher. Nyerere was a secondary school teacher and when he became the president of Tanzania, he led his people wisely and firmly like a good teacher guides his pupil (Akinpelu 1998). Julius Nyerere studied at Edinburgh, in Britain. He was the first Tanzanian to study at a British university and only the second to gain a university degree outside Africa. He obtained his Masters of Arts degree in Economics and History in 1952. It is at Edinburgh University where Nyerere

learned the concept of Socialism that he later connected to African communal living.

When Western education was introduced to African countries, most African people viewed it as a form of "civilization." Some people like Henry Carr (Akinpelu 1998) were very grateful for the introduction of western education to Africa during the period of colonization from 1800 to late 1900. Nyerere had a different view of Western education being imposed on Africans. He believed that Western education was alienating Africans from their own values and thus reinforcing western values. Nyerere (1968a:269) stated colonial education "was not

designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state.” The British (Tanzania was a British colony) system of education placed more emphasis on the white-collar jobs and less on blue collar jobs. White-collar jobs are mainly office work related jobs while blue collar jobs are the manual jobs. Nyerere (1968a:270) noted that the education system was not transmitting the “values and knowledge of Tanzanian society from one generation to another; it was a deliberate attempt to change those values and replace traditional knowledge by the knowledge from a different society.” According to Mulenga (2001a), Nyerere refused to reject the African traditional way of life from his first year of education. He wanted to restore the African traditional value system that was despised by the colonizers. He wanted people to appreciate themselves as Africans.

### Nyerere: African Socialist

In traditional society, Nyerere maintains, the individual and the families were rich or poor according to whether the whole tribe was rich or poor. Nobody starved, either of food or human dignity. [Civille 1976:171]

Nyerere was against the economic and social ideas that the colonizers introduced in Africa. He believed that the economic system introduced by colonizers was a capitalist system that encouraged individualism at the expense of the community. Nyerere noted (Akinpelu 1981:115), “Capitalism fosters excessive individualism; promotes the competitive rather than the cooperative instinct in man; exploits the weak; divides the society into hostile groups and generally promotes inequality in the society.” He believed that capitalism regarded some individuals as superior (the rich) and others as inferior (the poor). He further asserted that the major aim of capitalism was the production of goods and profits, not human satisfaction or the interest of the consumer. Capitalism encouraged inequality since each person was allowed to acquire as much as one can (Nyerere 1968b). According to Nyerere, these capitalist ideas could

not be reconciled with African values; therefore, he advocated for Socialism.

Nyerere’s idea of African Socialism was based on three principles: work by everyone and exploitation by none; fair sharing of resources which are produced by joint efforts; and equality and respect for human dignity (Akinpelu 1981:115). Nyerere advocated for Socialism because he believed in the idea of *Ujamaa* or familyhood. By tradition, Africans are people who work together for the benefit of all members of the society (Nyerere 1968b). Many Africans hold the value of sharing and assisting one another, which in Botswana is called *letsema*.

Ujamaa was to help restore the cooperative spirit that the African people had before the colonizers introduced the idea of individualism. Mulenga (2001a:17) stated, “Nyerere’s aim was to transform the colonial value system which had alienated Africans from their past into one group of attitudes based on past African values and attitudes of self-esteem, cooperation, and family.” The idea of unity and cooperation in African tradition is further supported by Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe describes how Okonkwo pleaded for communal unity involving feasts in which he said:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for the kinsmen to do so... I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong the bond of kinsmen is. [Adeyemi and Adeyinka 2003:431]

Unity was one of the principles that Nyerere advocated among Africans. He believed that when the society is united, they can help one another. Nyerere believed that people of Tanzania had to live as a family.

Nyerere emphasized equality among the society. He believed that social justice could not be achieved if there was no human equality. People were not to be judged by skin colour, material wealth or intellectual ability, but “each individual should be assessed by her or his worth as a person” (Mulenga 2001a:15). Each

individual person was to be respected and valued for who he or she was. This idea encouraged respect among members of the society.

### **Nyerere: Educational Philosopher**

Before the introduction of the Western system of education into Africa, the aim of the indigenous education was to preserve the cultural heritage of the family, the clan, and larger groups. The indigenous education was for every member of the society. Every member of the society had a role to play in educating the child, thus the proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” The advent of the Western formal education changed the whole education system of the Africans. Education became a privilege of the chosen few. It also introduced western values and traditions that were in direct conflict with African values and traditions. Nyerere believed western education was a way of colonizing the mind of the Africans. Therefore, he wanted change in the education system.

Nyerere believed that education is an instrument of the society to reinforce its values and traditions. This is supported by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003:426): “Education is the process of cultural transmission and renewal, the process whereby adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of the society.” Nyerere believed that Africans acquire the attitude of the mind from socialization by the extended family.

Nyerere believed that the purpose of education should be to liberate a human-being (Mulenga:2001b). He concurred with Paulo Freire’s idea that education is a path to permanent liberation and it should make people self-reliant. According to Freire (1970:67) “liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.” Education should help people to recognize their oppression and then participate in its transformation. Nyerere stated that:

People can not be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a man’s house, an outsider cannot give man pride of self-confidence in him as a human-being. Those things man has to create in himself by his own actions. He develops himself by what he does, he develops himself by making

his own decisions, by increasing his understanding of what he is doing and why; by increasing his own knowledge and ability and by his full participation as an equal in the life of the community he lives in. [Akinpelu 1981:118]

The idea of one being able to recognize the condition of oppression and being able to participate in transformation was highly emphasized by both Nyerere and Freire. These two philosophers believed that it is only genuine education that can help the people to transform and become better citizens. Genuine education, according to both Freire and Nyerere, is the type of education that helps the individual to think critically. It helps one to apply theory into practice.

Nyerere’s educational philosophy can be approached under two main headings: education for self-reliance and adult education, lifelong learning and education for liberation (Kassam 1995). A brief discussion of each of these aspects follows.

### **Education for Self-Reliance**

Nyerere advocated that teachers and students should be engaged in productive activities and students should participate in the planning and decision-making process of organizing the activities (Kassam 1995). Active participation of students has been greatly advocated by many philosophers such as Dewey and Freire. Dewey believed in learning by doing. He asserted “the first principle is that teaching must be child-centered, that is, must take into consideration the present needs, interests and ability of the child, and it must involve the child in the activity: learning by doing” (Akinpelu 1981:151). Furthermore, Freire also noted that teachers should actively involve the students in the learning process. Freire believed that through dialogue, students become active investigators instead of passive listeners. Active participation encouraged the idea of self-reliance. Self-reliance in education calls for a school curriculum that integrates theory and practice. Nyerere as cited by Akinpelu (1981:122) stated “the object of teaching must be the provision of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will serve the student when he/she lives and works in the changing socialist state, it must not be aimed at university entrance.” Nyerere wanted education that

students could apply to the real world and he advocated the following changes in the education system of Tanzania:

1. It should be oriented to rural life.
2. Teachers and students should engage together in productive activities and students should participate in the planning and decision-making process of organizing these activities.
3. Productive work should become an integral part of the school curriculum and provide meaningful learning experience through the integration of theory and practice.
4. The importance of examinations should be downgraded.
5. Children should begin school at age 7 so that they would be old enough and sufficiently mature to engage in self-reliant and productive work when they leave school.
6. Primary education should be complete in itself rather than merely serving as a means to higher education.
7. Students should become self-confident and co-operative, and develop critical and inquiring minds. [Kassam 1995:253]

Nyerere's ideas of education can be analyzed under three philosophical tools: metaphysics, axiology and epistemology. In his metaphysics, Nyerere believed that it is through Socialism that Africans can get the vision of what is life. He believed that Africans had been exploited by colonizers and they no longer valued themselves as Africans. His idea was to find ways to bring African people back to their original values and traditions. For example, Nyerere (1968b) stated that after independence, Tanzanian schools should teach African history, and children learned national songs and language. This was to help the young Tanzanians to appreciate their own tradition.

Nyerere believed that African minds should be decolonized and that there should be respect for manual as well as academic labour. Africans had always valued manual work, but due to western education, they began to look down on blue collar jobs. Within the schools, teachers were to encourage the combination of theory and practice. Practical subjects were highly emphasized in the curriculum as Nyerere

believed that when students complete their education they should be able to go back and work in the villages. Education was geared towards the societal needs as compared to individual needs.

Nyerere valued social justice and communal harmony. His emphasis on these values helped to establish a new sense of community among many tribes in Tanzania. He united 153 tribes by having one common language: Swahili. Nyerere believed that children should be proud of their roots and a unifying language would help accomplish this goal. Education was not supposed to alienate children from their traditions but should make children appreciate themselves as Africans. Abosi and Kandjii-Murangi (1996:22) claim that colonial education divorced pupils from their original society as it supposedly prepared them for a new social order. They stated "the school is always separate; it is not part of the society. It is a place children go to and which they and their parents hope will make it unnecessary for them to become farmers and continue in the villages." In effect, he was creating a new brand of Socialism.

Nyerere also valued an egalitarian society. He wanted to narrow the gap between the privileged and the non-privileged. He also valued equality and cooperation. In education, working together as a team would have been one of the methods that could foster the idea of cooperation.

Even though no documents exist that can unequivocally state what methods of teaching Nyerere advocated, it is widely believed (Akinpelu 1981) that group work, with an emphasis on team building, was greatly valued in the education system supported by Nyerere. One example of this is his emphasis on the value of familyhood, part of his concept of Ujamaa. Group learning encourages cooperation among learners and it also teaches students to value and respect one another. Students learn best when they are respected by both the teacher and other students. Nyerere wanted the ideas of Socialism to be instilled in the pupil's mind. Respect for one another, equality and cooperation were some of the values of Nyerere's form of Socialism.

Nyerere believed that knowledge gained should be linked to economic production and self-reliance (Akinpelu 1981). The curriculum emphasized both

theory and practice. The knowledge that students were receiving was to be applicable to the real world. Because most Africans were agriculturalists, education was supposed to be geared towards agriculture. Students were to learn the content, then go out to do the real hands on experience. Nyerere stated,

Agricultural progress is indeed the basis of Tanzanian development.... We need in this country more citizens who know modern productive agriculture, and are prepared to undertake hard work which is involved in increasing our agricultural output. [Nyerere (1968a:105)]

Nyerere emphasized that when students complete their education, especially in agriculture, it was important for them to go and practice the skills in the villages. The learned should teach the villagers the new methods of farming by applying the knowledge into practice and by being examples.

Nyerere's idea of education for self-reliance has been adopted by many countries in Africa. Botswana has widely adopted the idea that education should develop citizens who are self-reliant. One of the five national principles of Botswana is self-reliance. The National Commission on Education (NCE) stated

Self-reliance is important for the nation, for institutions, and for individuals... self-reliance for the nation means freeing the country from dependence on expatriates... for institutions and individuals involved to take initiatives and to seize opportunities without waiting for Government orders, or for government to provide a service which community or individuals could organise for themselves. [Botswana 1977:28]

Most villages in Botswana have been able to build junior secondary schools through this idea of self-reliance. One other example is the University of Botswana. In 1976 the first president of Botswana spearheaded a fundraising movement known as "One Man, One Beast" for the purpose of raising money to construct the campus. The people of Botswana made all types of contributions toward this campaign such as money, beasts, sorghum, beans and eggs in order to build the university. The belief was that all had something of value to contribute and each person ought to make a contribution for the good of the whole. This was a demonstration of the spirit of self-reliance

working toward another collective good, this time in service of higher education.

Other forms of self-reliance were also observable. For example, in the classroom, teachers were expected to be self-reliant and when necessary improvise some teaching aids in order to make teaching effective. The teachers were supported in these actions by public documents. For example, according to the National Commission on Education, which issued a public report in 1977, "teachers can be inventive in producing their own teaching materials" (1977:29). Students were also encouraged to do self-study. They should be able to find out information from a variety of sources instead of looking at the teacher as the sole provider of knowledge. The idea of self-reliance is still very much in practice in most African countries. Most African countries still value community over the individual. Community members in most areas like Botswana have established different projects involving, for example, poultry, gardening and brick molding for living as well as for creating employment for other people in the village. The government supports such projects but overall the whole project is managed by the community people.

### **Adult Education: Life Long Learning**

Nyerere concurred with the idea that education is what one learns from birth to death. He advocated for adult learning that was to be continuous throughout one's life. According to Nyerere adult education was not supposed to be offered only in the classroom setting. He stated "Anything which enlarges men's understanding activates them, helps them to make their own decisions, and to implement those decisions for themselves" (Nyerere 1978:30). Adults have to learn new ideas throughout their entire lives in order to improve in life.

Nyerere advocated the learner-centred approach for educating adults. He believed that the teacher should guide the adults in learning rather than being the dispenser of knowledge. Nyerere's idea is similar to Freire's ideas stated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that emphasizes student centered approach to learning. Freire (1970:67) stated "through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges:

teacher-student with student-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students.” Furthermore, Smith accurately summarizes Nyerere’s ideas with the following:

Educators do not give to another something they possess. Rather, they help learners to develop their own potential and capacity. Those that educators work with have experience and knowledge about the subjects they are interested in—although they may not realize it. [Smith 2005]

From this quotation, one can see the connections between contemporary ideas of constructivism and the ideas espoused by Nyerere. According to Brooks and Brooks (1993), the constructivist theory encourages students’ autonomy and initiatives, higher level thinking, teachers to ask open-ended questions, students to engage in dialogue with the teacher and with one another. Nyerere believed that adult learners have experience, so the teacher should guide them to learn from their own experiences.

The idea of adults being actively involved in their learning process was also advocated by Paulo Freire. Freire believed that through dialogue, adults can share ideas and learning can be more meaningful to them. He stated that in dialogue the teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but one who also learns through dialogue.

### Outside Tanzania

Nyerere did not only work to liberate his country Tanzania. In the 1970s he assisted many African countries including Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South Africa, and Mozambique to gain their independence from the colonial masters. He was also one of the founders of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) in 1963. THE OAU, presently known as African Union, is an organization of independent African states established to promote unity, coordinate policies, and protect the independence of the continent. Moreover, he was an instigator and leader of the “Front Line States,” which provided uncompromising support for the campaign for Black Majority Rule in South Africa.

Nyerere was a Pan-Africanist. He was also involved in the Pan-Africanism movement that

emphasized the need for Black people to unite regardless of where they live. The Pan-Africanism movement wanted to empower Black people and to help them overcome racial discrimination and oppression. Many argue that because of his efforts, Nyerere was indeed one of the greatest of African leaders. Mulenga (2001:446) stated that Julius Kambarage Nyerere was “one of the greatest African political leaders and respected postcolonial thinkers... he was a rare intellectual who was open to new ideas and criticism and yet displayed an independent mindedness that was unique among African thinkers.” Nyerere’s ideas of adult learning and self-reliance are still relevant to the education system in most African countries.

### Why the Down Fall?

When Nyerere took over as first president of Tanzania in 1962, he decided to terminate the employment of most of the British people who were holding very high posts during the colonial period. He chose young educated African men to take over positions like head of civil service, commissioner of police, etc. According to Sadleir (1999:254), “within a few months in 1962, as these changes were gradually introduced, the whole provincial administration was turned upside-down.” Even though it seems like a good idea to replace the British people in higher positions with the Tanzanian people, the change was too drastic. Sadleir further asserted that the politicians who were given these posts were not really good commissioners. One may assume that these people were less experienced in these positions. Nyerere could have allowed the Africans to learn the skills and to gain experience by working with the British people who were in these positions. The immediate removal of the British officials in posts of responsibility seems to have had a great impact on the downfall of Nyerere.

Another reason that could have led to the downfall Nyerere is the powers that he invested in himself.

Nyerere had drawn up a new constitution, which gave him powers even more sweeping than those held by the US president. He would be both the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, would have full executive author-

ity and would not even be bound to accept his cabinet's advice. He would rule for seven years. [Sadleir 1999:257]

If one looks at the power that Nyerere gave himself, one might suggest that he was “hungry” for power. It seems as if he wanted to be a dictator. A head of state should have good advisors who will greatly assist him in the ruling of the country well. If Nyerere was not prepared to accept advice from his cabinet, there is a great possibility that his executive authority lost trust in him and this may have led to his downfall.

The Tanzanian elite had adopted the capitalist ideas of individualism and of survival of the fittest. Those in positions of power began to abuse their powers in order to enrich themselves. They wanted to live the “western” life like their colonizers. According to Sadleir (1999:290) Nyerere was “disillusioned by the increasing capitalist tendencies of many of the national leaders who sought to increase their personal wealth by abuse of their positions in a variety of ways.” Those in power built big houses, bought expensive cars, etc. and did not welcome Nyerere's idea of Socialism. The gap between the rich and the poor widened. These privileged groups were not interested in sharing their wealth. Nyerere's idea of Socialism thus was unsuccessful because of the social and economic capital held by the elite in Tanzanian society.

Another problem Nyerere faced involved the teachers themselves. Many did not welcome the emphasis on practical subjects. The teachers had been educated in the colonial system in which the male teacher was to be seen in a tie and jacket and therefore was not prepared to do manual work. The first author of this paper has spent time as a teacher in Botswana and she reports that it was a common belief among teachers that doing manual labour, such as agricultural work, made them inferior. The teachers, along with other members of society, had been ‘indoctrinated’ by a functionalist approach to education where different forms of work are valued differently, as are the people who perform the work for the society.

## Conclusions

Nyerere's idea of lifelong learning is still very important. Adults in many parts of the world are continuously learning new ideas in order to cope with their present situations. Institutions of higher education have continued professional education as a part of adult education. Continuing adult education (life long learning) according to Nyerere was to help adults become more competent in their daily work, especially learning the new techniques of better farming.

The idea of Socialism advocated by Nyerere was an attempt to decolonize the African minds. Nyerere believed that Tanzanian people adopted the capitalist idea of individualism and competition, in part, due to an educational philosophy that wished to keep the vast majority unreflective about their lives—he wanted them to regain the idea of cooperation as a society. In his view, Tanzanians were to be self-reliant, self-reflective citizens able to construct education and economic systems that were compatible and mutually beneficial for all. Villagers were expected to work together and build their own villages. Problems arose because of the unwillingness of the elite (educated) people in Tanzania to adopt his idea of Socialism, and the idea of practical subjects being emphasized in schools was not welcomed by the teachers. The teachers had been trained to believe that an educated person cannot do manual work; therefore, the teachers were not willing to teach practical subjects.

Regardless of the weaknesses that Nyerere encountered, his ideas are still very influential as the social, economic and political arenas continue to be shaped by the form and function of the educational environments in Africa. The idea of interdependence and cooperation is greatly valued and educators continue to be encouraged by the ideas of Nyerere and others who held a vision for schools guided by African values. This re-envisioning of teacher education to escape colonialism was an essential part of Nyerere's political agenda. This paper hopes to contribute to the understanding of Nyerere's work and to spotlight the notion that educational ideas, and those who espouse them, hold the future for entire societies.

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