

# Role of Higher Education Expansion in Enhancing Cohesion and Integration in Kenya

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## Abstract

There has been expansion of higher education in the recent years since President Mwai Kibaki's Administration. Universities and Middle Level Colleges are now easily accessible by most Kenyans and there are indications that the expansion trend is likely to continue. But how do current trends in higher education expansion deal with social exclusion, equity considerations, articulate issues of class, gender, and ethnicity and contribute to social development? Most leaders lobby for their regions to get more institutions. However, in this paper, I argue that the expansion is not driven by the need to have the face of Kenya in employment positions, but by the need by the local communities to take over employment opportunities. In the recent past, National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) reported that, the situation was pathetic because most universities have majorly employed staff from the communities where the universities are located. Three years later, Moi and the Masai Mara Universities were closed after students' unrest which was fueled by ethnic biases. Kenyans should depend on institutions of higher learning to improve cohesion and integration in the country. This paper therefore reiterates that one of the aims of higher education expansion should be to promote national cohesion and integration; which is bedeviling Kenya.

**Key words:** national cohesion and integration, integrity, institutions of higher learning

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## Introduction

Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental right espoused in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), NCI Act (2008), Employment Act (2007) and other international legislations such as the UN Declaration on the elimination of all forms of discrimination. According to National Cohesion and Integration Commission (2011), to integrate is to bring together.

Integration is a key contributor to community cohesion. It enables citizens to relate with each other harmoniously. On the other hand, Cohesion is the act or state of sticking together or close union. It is cohering or being in consonance with each other. Cohesion implies positive group dynamics and positive energy that is experienced within a community (Okwach & Abagi, 2005). Social cohesion is the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunities based on a sense of hope, trust and reciprocity (Republic of Kenya, 2005). It also involves the willingness of groups with diverse values and objectives to coexist, share resources, have mutual respect for each other and abide by the rules of the land. Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income so as to generally enable people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise facing shared challenges and that they are members of the same community (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The ultimate goal of national cohesion and integration is to create an overarching national community that renders loyalty to competing ethnic, racial, regional, class and religious communities secondary. National cohesion embraces unity of purpose in the citizenry's participation in economic, social and political processes.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was based on structural functionalism theory developed by Spencer (1898). The theory sees society as a [complex system](#) whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole and believes that society has evolved like organisms. This approach looks at both [social structure](#) and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely [norms](#), [customs](#), [traditions](#) and [institutions](#). A common analogy, popularized by [Herbert Spencer](#) presents these parts of society as "organs" that work towards the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible to each feature, custom or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system". Education functions as a key mechanism (functional pre-requisite) through which a new generation of children acquires the 'central' norms, values and culture of their society. This unites or glues people together by giving them shared values; what sociologists' term as a value consensus. This means that schooling is an avenue of secondary socialization. They, the schools, provide a bridge between the 'particularistic' values of the family and the 'universalistic' values of meritocracy of contemporary society. This paper therefore explores the role of higher education in enhancing cohesion and integration in Kenya.

## **Literature Review**

Education is a deliberate, purposeful activity directed at the achievement of a range of ends which could potentially include the development of knowledgeable individuals who are able to think rationally, the formation of a sustainable community and the realization of economic goals benefiting both individuals and their communities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The term education, therefore, has normative implications: it suggests that something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted. This implies that there are some values that education should seek to achieve. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) also note that philosophers have always sought to explain how education should serve moral, social, political and economic ends. Baker and Le Tendre (2005) observe that education plays a crucial role in the making of our social world. Governments, therefore, use education to strengthen national identity and inculcate citizenship values. How then does a country determine the specific values that its education system should achieve? How are these values achieved? Tyler (1949) argues that the purpose of education should be closely tied to the pressing problems of contemporary society. He sees education institutions as the agency for helping young people to deal effectively with the critical problems of contemporary life. Colleges play an invaluable role in promoting community cohesion and integration, providing settings where young people and adults from every ethnic, faith, belief and social group can come together.

The Commission for Integration and Cohesion's report and Sir Keith Ajegbo's Curriculum Review of Diversity and Citizenship both stress the importance of citizenship education for future national stability. The Ajegbo Report (2007, pp.39) states "It is important not to marginalise or silence voices if we aim for an inclusive, democratic and participative citizenry....We believe that, in order for people to explore how we live together in the UK today and to debate the values we share, it is important they consider issues that have shaped the development of UK society." Colleges should foster shared values which prize openness, respect, tolerance and the importance of debate. Promoting and discussing these shared values can help individuals develop their own sense of identity and establish their place in society. Learners who are able to engage in vigorous debate will develop the skills to challenge the ideas of those who espouse violent extremism and develop the ability to resist the superficial attractions of lifestyles involving illegal activities – whether the membership of violent gangs or of groups promoting separatist agendas or racial hatred. Globally, a major purpose that education has been identified to achieve is national cohesion and integration. The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors, identified four pillars of learning that are very important in the 21st century (Njengere, 2014). These are:

- i. Learning to know: to provide the cognitive tools required to better comprehend the world and its complexities, and to provide an appropriate and adequate foundation for future learning.
- ii. Learning to do: to provide the skills that would enable individuals to effectively participate in the global economy and society.
- iii. Learning to be: to provide self-analytical and social skills to enable individuals to develop to their fullest potential psycho-socially, affectively as well as physically, for an all-round 'complete person.
- iv. Learning to live together: to expose individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony.

It is the pillar of learning to live together that focuses on issues related to cohesion and integration. The Kenya Government lays a lot of emphasis on using education as a vehicle towards the achievement of national cohesion and national integration. Indeed, the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on 'A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research' identifies the national philosophy of education as "Education and training for social cohesion as well as human and economic development" (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Thus 'cohesion' is a major purpose of education and training in Kenya.

## Findings and Discussions

One key mandate of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission is to ensure ethnic diversity in public employment. For example, Section 7 of the National Cohesion and Integration Act, 2008 that States in Part; “All public establishments shall seek to represent the diversity of the people of Kenya in the employment of staff. No public establishment shall have more than one third of its staff from the same ethnic community.” The nexus between ethnicity and university development has compromised governance, too. Chancellors, council members, vice-chancellors and other senior administrators are often selected from an institution’s immediate surrounds. This means that appointments are happening along ethnic lines, sometimes with no consideration of merit. The representation of ‘local community’ in employment at universities as at February 2012 is shown in Table 1.

Based on this data, NCIC promised that they would use it to develop ‘Policy on Inclusive Employment in Kenya’. In addition, the Commission was to engage the management of the Ministry of Higher Education, Universities and Constituent Colleges on the ethnic imbalances in the institutions with a focus on their areas of strengths and weaknesses – and asking them to make deliberate efforts to comply with the constitutional requirement on ethnic diversity in public institutions and the need to comply with the NCI Act, 2008. Today a number of questions still linger: Is the policy on inclusive employment in place? Do universities that failed to comply with the NCI Act 2008, comply with this policy

today? Has the change been felt? I ask these questions because it disturbs my mind to see the recent scenes like the local politicians attempt to remove a University vice chancellor in office by force.

**Table 1: Representation of 'Local Community' in the Employment at Universities**

<b>University</b>	<b>V.C/Principal's Ethnicity</b>	<b>Local Community</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Bondo University College	Luo	Luo	84.3
Meru University College	Meru	Meru	83.0
Kisii University College	Kisii	Kisii	79.1
Pwani University College	Swahili	Mijikenda	71.0
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology	Luhya	Luhya	68.9
South Eastern University College	Kamba	Kamba	67.5
Kabianga University College	Kalenjin	Kalenjin	57.6
Moi University	Kalenjin	Kalenjin	55.0
Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology	Luhya	Kikuyu	49.7
Kenyatta University	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	38.0
Laikipia University College	Kamba	kikuyu	36.7
Mombasa Polytechnic University College	Mijikenda	Mijikenda	28.2
Egerton University	Kalenjin	Kikuyu/Kalenjin	25.9/25.8

**Source: NCIC (February, 2012)**



According to NCIC (2011), the percentages of employment in the universities and constituent colleges of the Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo, Kisii, Embu, Kenyan Europeans, Kenyan Asians, Nubi and Taita communities are higher than their national population ratio (as per the 2009 National Census). Some of the differences such as that of the Embu community are however negligible (0.13%) while others such as that of the Kikuyu community is significant (about 11%). The communities whose representation in the universities' employment is less than their population ratio include the Somali (with the highest underrepresentation, at 6%), the Kamba, Mijikenda, Turkana and Maasai. The same trend is becoming common in academic appointments and promotions. This causes huge tension. The University of Eldoret erupted into war and conflicts in February 2015 because locals felt they had been short changed in promotions in favour of those from other ethnic groups and harshly disciplined compared to those from other ethnic groups. Almost same time, there were similar conflicts in Egerton University and University of Nairobi concerning recruitment of the vice chancellors and management conflicts that are ethnic inclined. In the same year, Moi and The Masaai Mara Universities were closed after students' ethnic clashes due to elections and soccer match respectively. There is need for appointing authorities to stop managing universities by focusing on ethnic demands and political rewards. All appointments should be done by merit.

## **Author's Views**

Education is meant to shape morals, mentality and culture in in society. Therefore, education should play a vital role in social change. Scholars in higher education institutions have the power to lead society towards certain desired direction. This is so that educational institutions and educators can attempt to move society in the right direction so that we do not continue to influence society without knowing how. Therefore, whatever is done in higher education institutions, has a great impact to the society at large. It is these educational institutions and the high caliber professionals with the highest qualifications on earth (PhD) that should shape the society and not vice versa. We should refuse the analogy that the society is divided along ethnic groups and therefore the universities are also divided. If the society is divided, then our remedy should be found in the university by carrying out research and establishing why there is division; then design academic programmes to heal the situation. Higher education institutions should be the source of hope and should not seem desperate for ideas, which are sought, from politicians. Politicians should run to universities for solutions of their personal and communities' problems. It is disheartening for professors to hide in their ethnic cocoons and plead for favour from politicians who are not as educated as they are. Universities and colleges should be avenues of reducing or solving ethnic tensions and discrimination in societies among other social evils.

It is believed that the more educated an individual is, the more the positive values he/she acquires and applies the same in society. Having this in mind and higher education institutions being managed by highly qualified professionals, evils like ethnicity being used to award scholarship opportunities within the universities and discrimination during recruitment, appointment and promotions should not arise. If they arise then how can we be sure that even the grades awarded and degrees conferred are not based on ethnicity! Indeed, it is in these institutions that we expect highest level of integrity. A university should be an example in enhancing cohesion and integration. The problem with university expansion as an ethnic territory in Kenya is that the institutions never get to evolve and attract the requisite academic capital that can place the institutions as vehicles for development. I am tempted to believe words of Mazrui that:

“While ethnicity has always been a factor in the Kenyan university system, what is happening now at university (campuses) is greater ethnic consciousness of each other rather than greater sensitivity to intellectual nuances, as seen in increasing instances of academic ethnic cleansing resulting in members of the university community desiring to transfer to ethnically friendly campuses. Instead of universities being arenas of universal values and intellectual fraternity, they seem to be deteriorating into beehives of ethnicity”. (Mazrui, Daily Nation February 28, 2008).

Expansion of higher education should therefore continue but there must be deliberate efforts to inject value systems in the institutions.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that higher education is still a very important vehicle for fostering national cohesion and integration in Kenya while at the same time offering an alternative solution to social problems. However, there is need to reflect a little more on the strategies that can be adopted to enhance inclusiveness and integrity. Finally, the highly qualified managers and staff at the university and the administration of the higher educational institutions on the planet should serve as examples and exhibit more professional ethics.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the situation of cohesion and integration in higher education institution in Kenya, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Managers of institutions of higher learning should not only offer courses with pleasant titles like peace studies and conflict resolution but also lead as examples and role models in recruitment, appointment and promotion processes;
- ii. The NCIC should formulate and enforce relevant policies that can help enhance cohesion and integration in Kenya;

- iii. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in collaboration with Commission of University Education (CUE) should formulate and enforce policies that enhance ethnic integration in the institutions of higher learning; and
- iv. The political class in the country should keep off the operations of universities because they are meant to be semi-autonomous government agencies and instead allow them to become the envisioned agents change.

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