Critical Perspectives on Free Primary Education in Kenya: Towards an Anti-Colonial Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper is a reading of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in Kenya through the lenses of critical theory/pedagogy. The study critiques the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government for adoption of the Freirian banking model to design and implement the policy. The paper argues that such a model has ended up marginalizing the voices of other FPE stakeholders and sustaining educational inequalities in the country. The paper also examines how neoliberal policies like Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) have influenced and shaped the FPE policy, and other educational reforms in the country. Such policies are read as colonial projects functioning to produce particular meanings and serving the interests of the dominant stakeholders—top government leaders and transnational capital markets. The paper concludes by theorizing an anticolonial pedagogy that aims at transforming FPE to an educational program that works to serve the interests of the local populace. The anticolonial pedagogy theorized also proposes strategies that different government and education stakeholders can employ in order to resist and counter the colonial, neo-colonial and neo-liberal structures and ideologies that continue to be perpetuated in the country.

Key words: free primary education, colonial, anti-colonial, neo-liberal

Introduction

The ushering of the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government into power in December of 2002 was a political revolution long awaited by many Kenyans. Marking the end of the Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U) party's 40 year rule and president Moi's totalitarian leadership of 25 years, the new N.A.R.C government with its rhetoric of economic revival seemed to appeal to millions in the country, especially the rural and urban poor who had been for years at the receiving end of an ailing economy. Many Kenyans were

keen to see the economy improve after years of steady deterioration in standards of living with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth reaching an all-time low of zero in 2000. After taking office in 2003, the new NARC government embarked on an economic recovery process by preparing a broad nationwide development framework, the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS). Some of the development programs under ERS included Free Primary Education (FPE) and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). These two programs were created to specifically target poor populations in the country. The CDF was established through the CDF Act as a public kitty aimed at funding development projects at the grassroots level. The parliament approved a considerable amount of funds drawn from the government revenue to be set aside to mitigate poverty, and finance development projects at grassroots level as determined by members of individual constituencies.

Arguably though, the immediate and greatest impact of the NARC government was felt in the education sector with the introduction of free and compulsory primary education. NARC's FPE agenda was construed to provide a socio economic equity by narrowing the education access gap in the country. The argument was that children from economically poor families were unable to meet schooling costs and thus the government was to overcome this hurdle by meeting operational and development costs, in addition to supplying instructional materials to all public primary schools (Muyanga et al 2010; Sifuna 2005a). Further, the introduction of FPE in 2003 was in line with meeting the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of universal education access by 2015. To the Kenyan locals, the FPE program epitomized the true essence of the new government's progressive programs since it promised children from poor economic backgrounds an opportunity to acquire basic education.

Since the introduction of FPE in 2003, there has been a burgeoning of research evaluating the policy's success, failures, and implications on the Kenyan education sector, and particularly on targeted populations. A study by Bold et al (2010) reports that while inequality in education access declined with introduction of the 2003 FPE, there has been massive transfer of pupils from public to private schools. The study reports that this has been attributed to decline in education quality in public schools. A study by Tooley et al (2008) in the Kibera slums of Nairobi corroborates Bold et al (2010) findings by reporting that children from the

slum, one of the poorest in city, are not reaping the expected benefits of FPE. Instead, parents are opting to enroll their children in private schools where they are required to pay tuition fees. The argument is that public schools started performing poorly after the introduction of FPE was reiterated. A study conducted by DARAJA Civic Initiative in 2006 revealed that in Kibera and Korogocho slums, up 48 percent of school going age children were not enrolled in schools. In a related study by the Ministry of Education through Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS), it was established that 59.9 percent of children in Nairobi province alone were not attending school (in Falling Short, 2007:17).

Muyanga et al (2010) study reports that the increase in primary school enrolment for children belonging to the poorest 20 percent of households after introduction of FPE was not statistically significant, yet primary school enrolment rate improved for children hailing from higher income categories. Similarly, Sifuna (2005a:8) reports that while there was a 22.3% national increase in enrollment in 2003, this was not the case in 2004. He notes, for example that, the districts that had recorded more than 20% increase in enrollment, many hardly recorded more than 5% in 2004. In a related study among the pastoralist communities in Kenya, (Sifuna (2005b: 511) reports that, while the introduction of FPE improved participation in these communities, the dropout rate is still very high in these regions compared to the estimated national dropout rate of 5.4 percent. Another common finding that runs through the research cited above is that although the FPE improved education access, it also increased learning problems, for example, congestion in classrooms, increased teacher-student ratio, lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities, inadequate instructional and pedagogical preparation by teachers to teach diverse learners, and added responsibilities for head teachers and school administrators to dispense FPE funds without relevant financial management training.

These findings raise critical questions on whether the free primary education policy as an educational practice has been implemented in the interests of the Kenyan majority poor, and geographically marginalized groups. If yes, I seek to understand how the poor were specifically targeted. The questions guiding my critique of FPE are: was the FPE policy or program designed to provide educational equity, promote democratic participation and social justice for the poor and marginalized groups? Did NARC leaders have an educational vision based on the needs and aspirations of the Kenyan poor and marginalized groups? To answer

these questions, I employ critical perspectives in order to read the policy's explicit and implicit language. My hypothesis is that the FPE agenda was not conceived in the interests of the marginalized groups and the poor. I maintain that, while the FPE agenda may have been conceived with a good intention of meeting the needs of the economically and geographically marginalized, its major impediment has been what Dei (2004:2) describes as failure by many African leaders and the vanguards of the society to develop a vision that does not privilege short therapeutic benefits. Such a vision, Dei notes, fails to take into consideration the long-term implications in 'mis-education' of Africa's children.

Literature review indicates that the 2003 FPE policy was an impromptu, highly politicized project implemented as part of a fulfilment of a social contract between NARC leaders and the Kenyan electorate (Muyanga et al 2010; Sifuna 2005a; Bold et al 2010) During the political campaigns in 2002, the NARC political leaders made a pledge to Kenyans to provide free primary education if elected into office. The new government had to honor its promise. After taking office in December of 2002, the FPE was implemented in January 2003. There was not time to come up with an educational vision informed by the lessons and years of resilience under the country's economic recession and Moi's dictatorial leadership; or a vision that took into consideration the people's understanding of their place in the world; or a vision that would seek to make the FPE agenda a collective initiative and a responsibility of everyone (Dei, 2004:2). Based on the studies reviewed, it is safe to conclude that the FPE policy was a political gimmick used by NARC politicians to lure the masses to put the new government into power.

By reading FPE policy against the backdrop of Kenyan colonial and post-colonial history, I want to further argue that while FPE has a de-colonial element, at least at a theoretical level, as an educational program, it has fallen victim to neoliberal policies and world capitalism that characterize the current global order. By this I mean, although Kenyan leaders have time and again demonstrated the political will to break away from colonizing and imperial educational practices and policies, they continue to find themselves bound in supporting education programs, development policies and practices that maintain the status quo and serve the interests of top leaders in the country and transnational capital markets. Thus, the use of critical perspectives helps to not only expose the policy's colonial, imperialistic, capitalistic

and political motivations, but also reveal the ensuing subjectivities, and social relations it has made (im)possible since its implementation.

Kincheloe (2008:11) posits that education is not neutral and thus critical perspectives should be used to reveal the political dimensions of educational practices. Critical theory/pedagogy provides me with a language of critique in order to name the implicit colonial, neo-colonial and imperialistic power structures and forces that continue to oppress, exploit and cause suffering to the economically and geographically marginalized Kenyans through FPE. Critical pedagogy challenges, disrupts and shatters the identified power structures and forces that support the FPE policy's status quo. Further, critical pedagogy, as applied in this study, is inline with Giroux's (2009:235) proposal which urges critical pedagogues to address educational and political issues related to teaching and schooling as part of a wider effort to rejuvenate the global fight for social justice and democracy. Guided by Dei's (2004:1-6) perspectives on critical pedagogy in Africa, I argue that educational reforms in Kenya must not be driven by the need to conform to international education standards and stipulations, or by global market interests. Rather, they must arise from the needs and aspirations of the local population. Kenya, as a sovereign state, should not feel compelled to conform to dictates of international educational initiatives and goals. As mentioned above, the FPE implementation was inline with meeting the EFA or MDG goals of universal education access for all by 2015. While this is reasonable, Dei warns that when developing countries, like Kenya, choose to conform to dictates of international, capitalistic, market driven aims of education, they must be prepared to contend with the ideological, economic, social, spiritual and political implications that come with it.

Implementation of FPE was also in accordance with the argument that every child has a right to education. However, as review of literature has shown in our foregoing discussion, many children from poor backgrounds are still not enrolled in school. Parents of many of them in the Nairobi slums, interestingly, are opting to decline the free education and seek to enroll their children in private schools which they can barely afford. The critical question then becomes, why do parents prefer this option? McLaren (2011), like Dei, cautions that provision of education should not be driven by the notion that every child requires education. Rather, governments and policy makers should realize that children don't just have a right to education, but a right to good education, and not corporate education. The decision by poor

parents in Kibera to have their children attend private schools is not unpremeditated; it is a reflex. The parents understand the need for their children to acquire corporate education that will allow them to compete in global capital markets. Such an action by parents is a response to neoliberal policies that have been "imposed" in the country for over three decades now where privatization of education has been necessitated by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). SAPs are policy directives by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) conceived with the aim of helping developing countries have sustainable government expenditure in their social sectors. McLaren (2011) explains how privatization of education is linked to the said neoliberal policies:

The move to privatize education can be traced as far as the World Bank and transnational efforts to weaken teachers unions and create international standards to put students globally into a lockstep with the needs of transnational capitalism, and the directives of the transnational capitalist class (Socialist Web Zine).

My argument should not be seen as a critique of Kenya's adoption of EFA/MDG goals and other development initiatives. The vision is noble and necessary. In fact, I applaud the government for launching the Kenya Vision 2030 in 2009, a long-term development blueprint for the country aimed at transforming Kenya into a newly industrializing and middle-income country. But, will Kenya, as a sovereign state, be able to theorize and develop strategies of attaining the projected goals with an understanding of her position within the global economy?

My critique of 2003 FPE policy aims at theorizing an anticolonial pedagogy that provides all Kenyan FPE stakeholders (the government, teachers, parents, students, interests groups etc.) with a language of resistance that counters the western colonial, imperialistic and capitalistic practices and policies that continue to be imposed on developing world. An anticolonial discursive framework according to Dei (2009:251) must begin by studying issues of colonialism, racism, and oppression while also focusing on the experiences and knowledges of the oppressed. Such an approach, he notes, should focus on critically examining how dominant and colonizing groups continue to benefit and enjoy privileges accruing from oppression of others. To come up with an anticolonial pedagogy, throughout this paper, I

engage in a critical reading of features of the 2003 FPE policy in order to question and make sense of how the marginalized populations were targeted by FPE.

Dei's (2004: 15) and (2009:251**)** anti-colonial discursive framework for Africa provides me with tools to imagine a new FPE policy for Kenya. Six keys points from his framework guide my reading of the current policy: (1) A critique of issues emerging from colonial relations and experiences—racism, oppression and domination; (2) Acknowledgment of locally produced knowledge and knowledge as emanating from multiple sites; (3) Seeing or treating marginalized people as subjects of their own experiences and with particularized histories; (4) Questioning institutional power structures and the dominance of certain practices on schooling; (5) Problematizing the continued marginalization of certain voices and experiences; (6) Investigating the critical role of schools in reflecting the worldviews of the communities in which they are located.

From an historical viewpoint, I briefly compare the 1970 FPE with the 2003 FPE in order to locate and engage in a critique of the policy's features, which seem to be grounded in colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial relations. The paper concludes by theorizing an anti-colonial FPE policy that recognizes the values, needs, voices, interests and aspirations of the Kenyan locals. Further, the anticolonial pedagogy theorized hopes to raise critical awareness among marginalized FPE stakeholders by helping them realize their role as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power answerable (Giroux 2009: 235). In the end, the anticolonial pedagogy should be able to guide all stakeholders by showing them how they can work together through a democratic participation to transform the FPE policy to be critically pedagogical, and to also work towards transforming education and schooling in Kenya.

Limitations of FPE Policy in Targeting Marginalized Populations

The critical question I need to address under this section is how the poor and marginalized populations were targeted through the 2003 FPE policy. As much as one would want to be persuaded that the policy was implemented in the interests of the Kenyan poor, the question of how they were targeted as beneficiaries needs to be critically interrogated. The FPE implementation involved a capitation payment to all public schools amounting to Ksh1, 020 (U$14.57) per child per annum. This amount was disbursed based on the number of pupils

enrolled in each school. The capitation payment is characterized by broad targeting approach which does not target individuals directly but rather targets services or commodities consumed heavily by the poor, such as primary education and primary health care (Muyanga et al, 2010: 136).

The limitation of this method is that it is difficult to determine how the poor would be specifically targeted through FPE and allow them access to equality of education opportunities. I make this argument considering the fact that poverty in Kenya varies according to regions. At the national level, poverty stands at 48% (Republic of Kenya 2007). According to the 2003 economic survey report, 50% of the population in all provinces in Kenya, except the Central province, is poor. Nyanza and Rift valley provinces have the highest contribution to rural poverty with each making a contribution of 23%. North Eastern, the region with the highest number of people living in poverty, contributes only 3% to national poverty (Republic of Kenya, 2003). These poverty incidences show differentials at the provincial levels, yet further heterogeneity is manifested at the district levels. For example rural poverty incidences in Central province considered the least poor, range from 10 per cent to 56 percent across its 171 locations. This shows that regions considered non-poor from a national perspective have incidences of households that are critically poor (Republic of Kenya, 2004).

I highlight these indicators to argue that these are key poverty dynamics that the FPE should have taken into account if indeed it hoped to target children from economically poor families. Simons (1992:142) underscores that 'equal opportunity is defined in reference to an individual's position within given state or market-regulated social forms. Within a given form, it means equal access to comparable opportunities provided within that form; be it a job, education, housing, protection etc'. If there is no mechanism to determine different poverty levels for diverse pupils, groups or regions, it is difficult for the FPE program to specifically target the geographically marginalized regions, populations or individuals. The DARAJA Civic Initiative Forum echoes similar sentiments by noting that inequalities in FPE implementation have been perpetuated 'by concentrating public resources in areas that are relatively developed, at the expense of slums' (Falling Short, 2007:25). The blanket implementation which fails to take each child's socio-economic differences into account not only works to disadvantage children from poor families more, but amounts to government's

ignorance of poor children's economic and educational needs—what Books (2000) calls 'poverty-blind discourse.' The design of FPE policy clearly shows that the program does not target the poor. Thus, critical theory/pedagogy questions FPE's definition of educational equity.

Gender inequality was also not addressed through FPE implementation. Onsomu et al (2004:22) observe that over the last three decades, the government has faced numerous challenges in an effort to reduce gender inequality in the country. Some of the challenges they cite include high poverty levels, impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic on learning, constrained budget allocations, lack of favorable learning environment for female students, internal inefficiency in primary schools, low completion and transition rates to secondary education. The study further observes that although gender parity has been realized at the national level, significant regional disparities in primary education access for girls exist:

> Between 1999 and 2003 for instance, North Eastern Province recorded the lowest enrolment rates for female pupils of between 31 percent and 32 percent, followed by Nairobi province (44 percent) and Coast Province (46 percent). Other provinces recorded near gender parity in 2003 (2004:22).

Interestingly, like poverty, no measures or guidelines were put in place to address these gender disparities during FPE implementation.

Another FPE challenge cited by teachers was in the handling of over-age students. Teachers interviewed in the 2005 UNESCO study observed that mature youth who could have benefited more in adult education programs instead opted to enrol in primary education:

> The "any age" admission policy had resulted in many over-age pupils who were finding it difficult to adjust in classes with younger pupils. Newly enrolled over-age pupils were found in all the schools. Many of them had been working as house-helps (especially girls) or engaged in other forms of child labour. Teachers complained that some of the older pupils who had been working or married found it hard to follow rules and obey teachers (UNESCO, 2005:37)

According to the report, many of these marginalized students had to be placed in classes that did not match their intellectual levels. This unfortunately led to high drop out rate for this

specific group because of inability to cope or failure of teachers or regular primary school system meeting their needs. Further, UNESCO (2005) study reports that teachers lamented that they were not prepared to cater for the needs of disabled children, those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

In spite of research findings suggesting otherwise, the NARC government continues to persuade Kenyans and the world that FPE policy has been successful in providing equal educational opportunity for all. It was interesting to see the government highlight isolated cases to emphasize how the program was successful in targeting the marginalized groups. The story of the late 84-year-old pupil, Kimani Maruge, is a case in point. The government leaders and Kenya's educational vanguards in collaboration with United Nations organized Maruge's visit to New York in 2005 to highlight how the FPE program was broadly targeting demographically differentiated and marginalized groups. However, the same government was not keen to attend to Maruge's plight when he became an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) following Kenya's 2007 post election violence. I highlight Maruge's case to argue that although FPE tried to target the over-age populations who had been discriminated in previous education programs, no measures were put in place to ensure the students' retention. Further, the visit to New York raises critical question of whose interests FPE policy serves—the local populace or the international community. In the next section I want to discuss how FPE policy has historically been imbued, dependent and driven by colonial and imperialistic power structures, relations and forces.

Colonial and Imperial Relations, Structures and Power in FPE

FPE program first cropped up in the Kenyan education system in 1971, a decade after Kenya gained its independence from British colonialists. In summarizing the objectives of the FPE program then, and as explained by the then country's ruling party Kenya African National Union (KANU) manifesto, Sifuna (2005a) notes that the aim was to expand educational opportunities for populations marginalized during the British colonial rule. Jomo Kenyatta (the then president of Kenya) isolated specific regions to be targeted. Specific districts in North-Eastern, Rift Valley and Coast provinces were identified where tuition was abolished for seven years of primary education. However, Sifuna observes, a radical change was made in 1973 when the president made a presidential announcement during the celebration of "Ten Great Years of Independence" where tuition fees were abolished for lower primary classes,

from grade one to four in all the districts in the country. The program also provided a uniform fee for every pupil. The claim made by the government was that the country had almost achieved the economic capability to provide universal free primary education. This declaration had serious implications in the education sector:

> The presidential decree providing free education in the early classes was one of the most dramatic political pronouncements of the Kenyatta era since it took planners and the public unaware. The financial implications as well as the various methods for its introduction were not subjected to close scrutiny. In January 1974, the Ministry of Education had to rethink its priorities in order to cope with the staggering rise of pupil enrolment (Sifuna 2005a: 6)

Kenyatta's decree compares to the 2003 FPE political pledge, which became translated into a policy without systematic planning. Unfortunately for the 1970s FPE, the country's poor economic performance could not financially sustain most of the proposed education programs, and thus started seeking support from developed world. Dei (2004) notes that many African countries emerging from colonialism struggle to address issues and questions related to comprehensive schooling, economic development, nationhood and independence as they attempt to break away from colonial structures. He observes that striving to address the aforementioned issues against the backdrop of transnational global economy, and continued dominance of Western values in determining what constitutes valid knowledge, African leaders find themselves faced with the inevitability of dependency on the West (2004:3). Consequently, the 1970s FPE policy was riddled with problems of financial in-sustainability leading to increase in drop out rate among the poor. To address this problem, in the early 1980s, new school funding approaches of cost sharing were introduced in the country through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS), as directed by the World Bank and IMF.

These two international financial bodies argued that African economies were characterized by structural imbalances and weaknesses that were the main causes of Africa's under development (Dei, 2004:24). Expected to be a temporary "bitter pill" in its first years of implementation, SAPS unfortunately continued to be hard to swallow for many marginalized poor communities in Africa. Dei (2004:38) observes that many of the African countries that adopted SAPs became poorer with many being forced by economic circumstances to make dramatic cuts in education. He notes in particular that in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 1988, the overall percentages of the GNP in education fell from 4.9 per cent to 4.5 per

cent. It is important to mention here that it is not my intention in this paper to enumerate the negative implications of SAPs in African countries. In fact, this topic has thoroughly been explored (See Dei 2003, 2004; Kincheloe, 2008; Gatimu 2009; Emeagwali 2011; Bello 2005; Stiglitz 2002, 2010; Okolie 2002; Sardar 1999; Gyimah-Boadi 1991; Panford 2001; Pickett and Singer 1990; Sandbrook 1993; Sahn 1994; Weisman 1990; Adepoju 1993). Rather, I want to point out that SAPs are a colonial project. I use the term colonial the same way Dei does—not to mean "foreign" or "alien" but as "imposed" or "dominating". The decision by Kenya to adopt SAPs opened its doors to the West: giving up its sovereignty in many sectors—economic, social, political, and other. As such, its development initiatives have been imbued with western imperialist ideologies that are always never apparent to the leaders or local populace. In discussing the implicit meanings and language of SAPs, Emeogwali (2011:3) writes:

> The SAPs had some common ideological assumptions, implicit and explicit aims and general conditionalities. The Imposed conditions included the forced devaluation of the domestic currency, privatization of the ownership of industries, liberization of trade, and the removal of subsidies on health, education and social services, in general. Expectedly, the last requirement often led to declines in school attendance, sometime along the lines of gender, and so, too, increased mortality because of the removal of subsidies on health.

As mentioned above, one of the requirements of SAPs in Kenya was for people to cost share in social services sectors like education and health instead of the government footing all the bill for services offered. Families without financial ability to cost share were in essence excluded from participating in the educational experience, leading to decline in enrollment rates. Ngware et al (2007:3) writes:

> The first enrolment shock occurred between 1984 and 1985 and GER declined from 107 to 99 percent. In 1989, there was a second shock and the GER declined from 98-92 per cent. Thereafter, there was a more gentle decline till the GER reached around 88 percent in 1993. These shocks were explained by decline in government financial support to schools occasioned by the Structural Adjustment Policies.

Thus, SAPS continued to widen the education access gap in the country prompting the NARC government to re-introduce free primary education in a bid to allow children from poor families access educational opportunities.

While the NARC government can be applauded for this initiative, Kenyans doubted whether the new government would strive to exercise sovereignty in implementing its development initiatives. Sifuna (2005a: 3-4) notes that, as was the case for the 1970s FPE, the cost of 2003 FPE implementation was beyond the government's education budget, raising serious doubts on the viability of the FPE experiment and its possibility to expand educational opportunities for marginalized groups. Similar concerns are raised by Muyanga et al. (2010) where, while acknowledging the government's budget increment on education by 17 percent in the 2003/2004 fiscal year, they note that many Kenyans continue to express doubt about the affordability of education if it was to rely solely on domestic sources of funding. The fear of financial dependency on international community to finance FPE lingered, given the country's past over reliance on donor community. The NARC government did not seem to breakaway from this practice. It had FPE financing figured out, or was it already figured out for them?

When the program began, the World Bank gave the Kenyan government a grant of Ksh 3.7 billion. The British government through the Department for International Development supported the project with Ksh 1.6 billion. Other donors included the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Swedish government and UNICEF (Muyanga et al., 2010:128). What is never communicated to the ordinary citizen or what Kenyans refer in Swahili, as the local *Mwanainchi* is the conditionalities that come with the said "gifts", for example, whether they are grants or loans. Over the years, the Kenyan government under Moi and K.A.N. U leadership seemed to follow the accounting principle of "going concern" which assumes that the government, like a business entity, will remain in existence long enough for all the assets of the business to be fully utilized and to settle its debt obligations. Hence, procuring loans from the international bodies means that future generations will be responsible for re-paying past loans. Unfortunately, such grants and loans, puts future Kenyan generations trapped in economic debt with no economic development to show for it. This is particularly true considering the fact that in the recent past, incidences of corruption and embezzlement of funds meant for the FPE by government officials have been reported. With the NARC government not keen to prosecute government officials implicated in corruption, the donors are threatening to withdraw their future support of the program. This not only raises questions on future funding of the program but also issues of fairness for future generations to re-pay loans that benefitted only few and powerful individuals in the

society. Dei (2004:39) offers his critique of financial reliance on developed world and its implications:

> Reliance on external donor agencies for the implementation of various aspects of educational reforms has led critics to question whether these reforms, in the final analysis, are not promoting dependency on the international financial community. Like other critics, I see a contradiction and a contrast between the state's professional aim to develop self-reliance and the nation's continued dependence on foreign financial institutions for survival.

Like Dei, I argue that dependency facilitates empire-building practices. With its unstable economy and in dire need of foreign aid, Kenyan leaders are likely to fall into the trap of indoctrination by the Western empire. Such empire building practices, according to Dei (2009:251) are racist and colonial and have historically had a strong relationship with how state policies and practices are designed. Accordingly, they create exclusions and hierarchies, which determine how rewards and punishments are distributed, as is the case with FPE.

Towards an Anti-colonial FPE policy

Critical pedagogy in Africa according to (Dei 2004:26) should be aimed at transforming what has recently come to be labeled as education "crisis" in Africa, towards a pedagogy of hope and possibility. Dei posits that one of the impediments to development initiatives in Africa is a failure to recognize the role cultural and social values play in promoting social change. In addition, African reformists fail to realize that any change being introduced in their countries means an altering of the social, political, economic, and cultural institutions and structures. As such, development should not be seen as an increase in physical and human capital, like provision of school facilities and instructional materials, as the FPE program assumes, rather, change should be seen as transformation of society.

The introduction of FPE meant that Kenyans were making a significant transition from years of dictatorial leadership under Moi and K.A. N.U, economic recession and cost sharing funding practices introduced through the Structural Adjustments Programs. It was important for the government to help all the stakeholders, especially those directly targeted by FPE—students, teachers and parents, to make sense of the educational change being introduced. This process should have been gradual: taking a holistic as opposed to an atomistic approach. Instead of focusing on a single entity like free primary education, the government should

have looked into other related factors that go hand in hand with the need for education. McLaren (2011) observes that one of the assumptions made by educational reformist in our contemporary society is that, once an individual is given the right to education, all the other rights such as the right to a decent job, the right to adequate food and clothing will take care of themselves. He notes that this should not be the case, rather, each right must remain separate, having an independent status and not dependent or seen as an outgrowth of another right.

Accordingly, FPE policy needed to be implemented simultaneously with policies that address poverty and other related issues discussed earlier. For instance, according to Muyanga et al (2010:143), factors that prevent children from poor backgrounds from attending primary school go beyond the inability to pay school fees. Besides poverty, there are other exogenous factors that affect individual persons, groups or communities, which the government did not assess or take into consideration. In the Nairobi slums for example, factors like poverty, child labor, displacement and lack of schools and teachers have been cited as factors that led to low enrolment and poor quality education in slums (Falling Short, 2007:17). Communities in North Eastern and other banditry prone communities like those in cattle rustling areas will be more concerned with security for their families and livestock. Parents would worry about the safety of their children walking to school unaccompanied before taking advantage of free education.

Similarly, and as (Sifuna, 2005b) observes, while nomadic communities might esteem free primary education, their nomadic lifestyle does not allow them to reap the full benefits of FPE. In terms of gender, cultural values and gendered roles in the society play a significant role in influencing girls' access to education. Such factors include patriarchy, early marriages, favoritism of boys over girls by parents in terms of determining who needs access to education, physical and sexual harassment by male teachers and boys, poor or unfriendly toilet facilities, need for girls to work to supplement family income, among others factors (Onsomu et al., 2006:8-9). All these are significant factors that influenced how these communities accepted and/or rejected FPE. NARC leaders needed to take a holistic approach to assess and address the needs of different communities, groups and individuals. Such an assessment involves investigating people's lived experiences, which can only be revealed by having a dialogue with them in their localized context, that is, in their historical,

geographical, social-economic and political setting. This is a critical process in understanding the important issues that matter to different communities, what (McLaren, 2000: 3) refers to as issues related to questions about peoples' lives and the social factors that determine the economic conditions of their everyday existence.

The above process would have been possible if the government had allowed all stakeholders to actively participate in making sense of the new educational reality, a process that should have been collective, and a shared goal, which allowed all the voices of stakeholders to be heard. On the contrary, the NARC government adopted an autonomous stance in formulating, designing and implementing FPE policy. A review of literature shows that the NARC government did not consult with other stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, NGOs and special interest groups) in the designing and implementation of the FPE program. The study conducted by UNESCO revealed that:

> Teachers, parents, school committee members and pupils learnt about the FPE through the media, the 2002 General election campaigns and through the provincial administration. They also learnt about it through circulars issued by the Ministry of Education. Some learnt about it through church and community leaders and local NGOs. There was consensus though that after the initial euphoria, there was lack of a sustained and comprehensive communication strategy for FPE. In particular, there was lack of information on the roles of the various stakeholders – teachers, parents, school committee members, sponsors and local donors (UNESCO, 2005: 7)

The authoritarian pedagogy adopted by NARC government follows what Freire calls "banking system of education" where NARC political leaders imposed the program on the locals without a regard of how their contribution in design and implementation of the policy might mean to them. In theorizing an anticolonial education program, Freire (1970:95) advises that one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action or program, which fails to respect the individual circumstances or particular worldviews held by the people one hopes to help or empower. This is because no matter how well intended, Freire writes, such a program constitutes "cultural invasion".

The financial and administrative running of schools has been cited as a one of the challenges of FPE implementation. Before the introduction of the FPE, the cost sharing programs

allowed school administrators, teachers, parents, non-state providers and special interest groups to be directly involved in the financial running of schools. Through school committees, school management boards and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs), schools were able to charge building and miscellaneous levies to meet added financial costs. Sifuna (2005a: 5) observes that they also had the mandate to privately hire teachers to make up for teacher inadequacy caused by the teacher-hiring freeze by the government. While school management board or committees could address some of the problems brought about by FPE and improve the state of learning, Sifuna (2005a) observes, they could not do so because of the government's ban on school levies. At the same time, conditions laid down to request concessions to institute levies are so cumbersome that they hesitate to embark on the process. Under the same breath, Muyanga et al (2010) note that the FPE funds allocated for repairs and maintenance are not adequate. This leaves parents with limited alternatives because:

> If parents wished to charge additional levies, school heads and committees would have to obtain approval from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The request to charge any levy has to be sent to the District Education Board by the Area Education Officer, after a consensus among parents expressed through the provincial Director of Education, a process that primary heads consider bureaucratic and tedious (2010:3)

Moreover, community involvement through *Harambees*, community based self-help events that involved school fundraising and community development, has been abolished with the NARC government coming into power, making parents and local community involvement in their schools constrained. I highlight these examples to show how the FPE policy limited the other stakeholders' agency to challenge institutional frameworks that support the policy's power structures and language of domination. Government imposition of conditionalities mentioned above shows how the system fails to provide opportunity for other stakeholders to be involved. Such conditionalities compare to those imposed by donors, for example, through SAPS. The FPE banking model refused to acknowledge the viewpoints, voices and language of other stakeholders, treating them as empty slates and technicians who needed to just accept and implement the policy as it were without question. This epitomizes FPE power discourses, which disabled the other stakeholders reading of all damaging effects of the policy. Importantly then, there is a need for all stakeholders to get involved in revising and transforming the current language and pedagogy of FPE policy.

Dei's (2004: 19) anticolonial framework emphasizes the importance of inclusivity where hearing voices of different actors and subjects becomes a crucial process in designing educational reforms. Such reforms, Dei writes, should be guided by questions like: What do students learn and why? What do educators teach? Who is teaching, how and why? What is the relevance of education? Where is the place and role of qualitative research? In the next section of this paper, I explore some of the roles different stakeholders can play in order for them to contribute to not only transforming the FPE policy, but also future educational reforms in Kenya.

Teachers' Role in FPE Design and Implementation

Giroux (1988:121) writes that, today teachers do not count when it comes to critically examining the nature and process of making educational reforms. Literature review on the FPE program reveals deplorable learning environments, teachers overburdened by the increased enrollment of diverse student body, and declining performance in public schools. In such circumstances, teachers are likely to be blamed by their communities and political leaders of incompetency, laziness and lack of commitment, and as the main contributors to decline in education quality. To change any educational practice, program or policy, teacher's participation is paramount. Their participation in any transformative educational enterprise however requires them to develop what (Giroux and McLaren, 1987:278) calls "a language of possibility" that is effective in breaking domination subtleties and thinking within and outside schools. For teachers to counter FPE's language of domination and power, they first need to understand how it has been used to dominate and regulate their lives, and the lives of their students. Teachers must first be politically informed and engaged participants who are critically aware of how the past and current political ideologies have impacted on particular educational decisions, practices and their professional practice. Kincheloe (2008:11) observes that education is a political activity and teachers cannot claim to be politically neutral, for when they do so, they explicitly support the dominant ideology. Taking their role a notch higher, Dei calls upon teachers to engage in activism work:

> We should consider who (or what agenda) is best served by the maintenance of the discursive divide between teaching and activism. Who benefits from teachers' collective refusal to engage as activists, citing professionalism and objectivity? A denial of the inherently political implications and possibilities of education guarantees the supremacy of certain stories, histories, cultures, knowledge's, and experiences to

> the detriment and exclusion of others (Dei, 2009:256)

In his/her day-to-day teaching, a teacher plays various roles. Datta (1984:92) identifies some of these roles as a disciplinarian, a parent substitute, a judge, a confidant and a mediator of learning who guides children through the educational process. The role of judge and mediator can be taken up by teachers to not only evaluate the appropriateness of some of the government's politically motivated policies but also judge their usefulness, relevance and responsiveness to their students' lives, experiences, realities and needs.

Teachers in Kenya are known to engage in political revolutions to change their economic circumstances. Through their union, Kenya National Teachers Union, (KNUT), their leaders have raised critical consciousness amongst fellow teachers where a push for higher pay for teachers has been realized. Teachers have also been influenced to take political stances in national politics, for example their participation in national and constitutional referendums. Critical pedagogy calls upon teachers to have the same spirit and engage in actions that serve the interests of their students. Kenyan teachers should take a critical stance individually and collectively by emphasizing the fact that the subjectivities, histories, cultural, and social-economic backgrounds of their students cannot be interpreted through a monothilic reading like the one adopted by FPE policy.

Further, McLaren (2011) observes that teachers have a responsibility to educate their communities about the ongoing educational crisis. Such a move is to not only win parents on their side but also to form strong alliances to fight against repressive administrations. One way for teachers is to recover the PTAs and school committee boards, and to work in solidarity in countering FPE's language of domination. Working in unity, teachers and communities gain power to decide what governmental decisions, projects and policies to support, question or reject. Sifuna (2005a) observes that teachers, educators and administrators are usually aware of the negative consequences brought about by unplanned programs like was the case of FPE. However, because of the "culture of silence" that they internalized during Moi's regime, teachers shy away from raising any concerns fearing the consequences that may accrue from such an action. Macedo (1995:35) however notes that teachers and administrators act this way because they are either victims of a "big lie" (like FPE), or are aware of the ideological mechanisms inherent in certain educational programs or

polices. He further adds that, as much one might want to give them the benefit of the doubt, their naiveté is never innocent but ideological because they have invested in a system that rewards them for reproducing same practices and not questioning dominant mechanisms designed to produce power hierarchies. Macedo's observation has manifested itself in Kenya. Recently, hundreds of primary school teachers, ministry of education officials and cabinet ministers have been prosecuted or sacked after being implicated in corruption and embezzlement of FPE funds (Oduor and Mkawale, 2011). This is an indication that teachers are in cahoots with NARC government to oppress and marginalize students.

In proposing the role of teachers in reforming FPE policy, I invoke Book (2009) appeal to everyone involved in education to have a continuous reflection on the needs and the rights of poor children. Such a reflection, she notes, will provide them with an ethical basis when setting educational priorities and decisions, while bearing in mind that they have a responsibility to ensure that children from poor backgrounds do not suffer from the social policies and practices they rationalize and sustain. Echoing similar sentiments, McLaren (2011) adds that there is no one universal approach to critical pedagogy, rather, teachers and educators should seek a 'pluriversal' approach that allows them to develop approaches that take into consideration the contextual and specific needs of their communities with an awareness that their struggles are driven by their commitment to change the circumstances of the oppressed and to create a post-capitalist future.

Government's Role in FPE Design and Implementation

The government's role needs to be re-examined. As the major stakeholder responsible for implementing educational policies, it should re-think the procedures it follows in designing and formulating the said policies. The executive, comprising the president and the ministers have the power and discretion to formulate and implement polices sometimes even without consulting other important players or those directly targeted by the policies. The bureaucrats working under the executive facilitate the process of policy implementation sometimes denying other stakeholders the opportunity to contribute, oppose or question proposed policies. Howlett and Ramesh (1995) observe that in modern society, a government bureaucrats' role goes beyond that of a servant since the law confers wide discretion on individual bureaucrats to make decisions on behalf of the state. The tragedy in such a scenario is that policy agenda setting and deliberation can occur in secrecy within the

bureaucracy cocoons denying other policy actors the opportunity to critically examine the proposed policies.

However, the legislative arm of the government can make the executive accountable and responsible for any policies they formulate. Parliamentary committees in Kenya have been established to review all the proposed legislations. By performing its role, the legislature can shape not only how policies are designed but can also influence how they are implemented and executed. The legislature can also influence budgetary allocation for projects in marginalized regions, for example, it can influence where and how the FPE and CDF funds are allocated and disbursed. The legislature can help the executive identify and address other issues that directly or indirectly affect FPE realization like poverty, health, security, child labor, early marriages, displacement just to mention a few. This is a critical opportunity for the legislature to advocate for needs of economically marginalized regions.

The other role of the government is to address teacher shortage in the country. The government should employ more teachers to cater for the projected increment of student enrollment ensuring all the marginalized regions are equally staffed. The government must put in place incentives to encourage and motivate teachers to work in geographically marginalized and hardship areas. Such incentives may include reasonable income and salary allowances, improved working conditions for teachers and their families. Schools, with help of their communities, should be given freedom to employ teachers to cater for teacher inadequacy if they have the capability to do so. Professional development initiatives for teachers should also be designed to equip them with diverse pedagogical approaches to work with diverse students and also to prepare them to deal with any change in education programs and policies.

In the next section, I propose the need for government to use diverse research sources in designing and formulating of educational and development policies. I particularly emphasize the need for critical research practices.

The Role of Research in Informing Education Policies

Policy makers should invite diverse ways of knowing to help them in the design of policies. This is what Kincholoe (2008) calls a “bricolage” of research, which encourages diverse

methods of inquiry. The government should conduct research to ensure that policies arise out of perceived need and not out of vacuum. Such research will also help the government ensure that benefits accruing from the formulated policies do not exclude certain individuals and groups. So who, how and where should this research be conducted? The Kenyan government will always esteem research by professional bodies or "think tanks" because they emphasize instrumentalist rational approaches to research and/or use positivistic research methodologies. Macedo (1995:42) describes positivism as a belief system or paradigm that makes claims to objectivity, truth, and certainty in defense of a scientific basis for the study of culture. Unfortunately, the positivistic approaches to research, in most cases, end up essentializing practices, experiences and homogenizing groups.

Critical researchers' role is to challenge the use of positivistic methods in education by promoting diverse methods of data collection and interpretation. Moreover, the over reliance by government on particular research bodies raises doubts on the very truth and objectivity they claim, prompting any critical pedagogues to question the extent to which the research facts reflect the realities and interests of the majority. Think tanks are expected to be "neutral" and not to be seen as aligned to the government or a political party. The government however can use its discursive power to validate particular research strategies, narrative formats and modes of representation or by ensuring that research findings are presented following a particular ideological framework (Kincheloe, 2008: 56; Macedo, 1997:42).

Critical research acknowledges the critical power of difference, what Kincheloe (2008:134) sees as helping critical researchers and pedagogues develop new and diverse ways of seeing, new modes of consciousness, new forms of knowledge, and new ways of acting in the world. This proposal calls for policy designers to listen to different voices: of parents, teachers and others. In the case of free primary education, teachers should have been resource persons to offer the FPE designers valuable advice based on their wealth of experience working with the children who were to be the target beneficiaries of the program. Most primary school teachers in Kenya teach in their local communities and understand many of their students needs, even beyond the classroom. More than any other stakeholder, teachers have a better understanding of the day-to-day classroom and schooling realities.

The acknowledgement of diverse ways of doing and seeing cannot ignore the role of civil society, community based organizations, Non Governmental Organizations, humanitarian and faith based organizations among other interest groups. The significant work they have done and continue to do for marginalized communities cannot be ignored. DARAJA Civic Initiatives Forum for example identifies a number of community organizations that have contributed in funding and running of schools in Nairobi slums (Falling Short, 2007:20). These are valuable research avenues that the government can rely on to get important data and understand the needs of specific marginalized groups. They can also recommend viable approaches to targeting different marginalized groups. Another special interest group is the media. The media played an important role in passing information to the locals about the design and implementation of FPE policy (UNESCO, 2005:30). As both a special interest and advocacy group, its research capabilities cannot be gainsaid. News reporters collect critical information from marginalised regions. In their reporting of problems, the media add some analysis and suggest possible solutions that may influence policy design in significant ways.

Towards a Financially Sustainable FPE

A survey by Oxfam in 2003 noted that Kenya needed approximately $137 million to realize the EFA goals by 2015 (Vos et al, 2004:5). Given the economic instability and inflation that has characterized the country in the recent past, economic dependency still looms. Such dependency should however be discouraged by all means. Dei observes that 'the international financial community's domination of the development discourse ensures that African governments gear their domestic economic and social policies to suit the prescriptions of the West and those of international finance capital' (2004:24). The government should seek external funding from development partners only when there is a dire need. This will not only avoid perpetuation of Western empire but will save future generations from being trapped in economic debt. The government should try to make the best out of our limited finances. Development partners and non-state providers, also known as NGOs, willing to provide financial and material support should be encouraged to do so. However, they must be vetted and approved by parliament to ensure the resources are not skewed towards particular regions. The government and school committees should track how the monies are disbursed and used. In case of misappropriation, the culprits should be prosecuted accordingly.

The government should establish an effective revenue collection system. Kenya has the potential to meet its budgetary obligations if it improved its revenue collection efforts. At the same time, the government should come up with projects that can be met by the country's revenue. Consequently, the government should make adequate budget allocation not only in primary education but also in secondary education to ensure improved primary to secondary school transition for needy students. Administration of FPE funds on the other hand requires a multifaceted approach. The government should not have the financial autonomy to control primary school budgets or running of schools. Similarly, the head teachers as well should not have the sole mandate to purchase schools supplies and financial administration of schools. School committees and PTAs comprised of parents, teachers, and local interest groups like faith based and community organizations should actively participate to determine how schools should be run based on the localized circumstances of each school. Membership of these school management committees should be inclusive cutting across, gender, age, academic qualification and religious affiliations. These groups should be empowered to make head teachers and school administrators accountable, and question any hegemonic practices head teachers and administrators may exhibit, be intellectual or ideological. CDF committee members should work collaboratively with school committee's boards and PTAs to develop objective criteria to selecting needy students for financial support. The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) should be utilized in supplementing FPE funds. Such support should be guaranteed to ensure needy children transition to secondary schools.

Concluding Remarks

This paper proposes the need for maximum participation of different actors in Kenya for realization of the country's education reforms, and in particular for critical transformation of FPE policy. Using the lenses of critical pedagogy, the role and responsibilities of each participant and their extent of involvement and participation has also been explored. An anticolonial pedagogy of FPE policy proposed in this paper underscores the importance of ethical and moral responsibility of all stakeholders. The paper emphasizes the importance for each player to reflect on what they can do to end the suffering of the marginalized and poor children in order to allow them to have access to educational opportunities. All stakeholders must work together by having constant dialogue with each other, and allowing each participant to share their experiences, values, aspirations, needs and knowledge.

My critique of FPE was to underscore that its major shortcoming has been the adoption of what Freire (1970) calls the banking-planning model, which takes a top down approach. I have argued that the FPE project was not as successful as projected because it failed to consider people's "view of the world", that is, it was not critically aware of the needs of the people it sought to empower. Thus, the FPE became a program that was "preaching in the desert" to some of the targeted groups. Freire observes that people who come up with programs and policies that target the masses, they should first investigate the people's 'thematic universe', which involves the investigation of people's thinking. "I cannot think *for others"* Freire says "or *without others*, nor can others think *for me*" (1970:89).

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