ABSTRACT

Title: Modest reflections on the future of Literary Scholarship in Kenyan schools and universities.

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- We live and learn but not the wiser grow - Edgar Allan Poe
- "An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all." - Oscar Wilde

Can literary and cultural scholarship remain relevant and justify their existence in the school curriculum amidst the forces of market liberalism that have diminished the importance of the Humanities?

To re-phrase your question: Should schools and institutions of higher learning concentrate on teaching young people skills they will need for work or about Life and Society?

Kenyans today strongly believe that schools and colleges should teach citizens skills they need for work rather than humanities and liberal subjects that teach them about life and society. This attitude may be due to prevalent economic hardships and emerging depression - that skills more likely to secure employment are increasingly prized most highly. Whereas some educationists argue that schooling needs to be more closely aligned to the direct needs of the economy, this paper proposes and argues that it is equally important to train young people in the skills of expression and analytical thinking that give them an understanding of their historical and cultural heritages. There is a paradox in Kenya's education system. To deal effectively with the rapidly changing technology, one has to be innovative, flexible and adaptive. Yet if the student comes out frequently incompetent and unsure when dealing with anything of substance, then these ethics are not built on sound analytical skills inculcated by Humanities disciplines. A foolish notion has been projected that Humanities disciplines are distinct and separate from teach other and from the sciences. And a literary scholar, for example, has no business delving into History, Neuroscience or Genetics, or Architecture. Yet literary scholarship intersects with all these disciplines! The future of literary scholarship is multidisciplinary and comparative across diverse disciplines, societies and cultures.