

Transformation of Rwanda's Education after 25 years The Implementation of Creativity in Education

Note: This article is based on the research study on Creative Teaching in Higher Education by Prof. Vince Sinining and Gerard Ntakirutimana.

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 claimed almost a million lives. It led to the destruction of the country's education system. Much of the educational infrastructure was destroyed. Schools themselves were sites of mass atrocities. It was reported that seventy-five percent of teachers were killed, fled the country, or were imprisoned on genocide charges.

Two months of the end of genocide, in July 1994, schools were re-opened. General responsibility for education was with the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). The Ministry's primary objective was to offer all Rwandans an equal opportunity to enjoy qualitative education through creative teaching and shaping them into educated citizens equipped to contribute to the country's socio-economic development.

Twenty-five years later, the education system in Rwanda has fully transformed itself with new strategies and innovations introduced by the government. The traditional teacher centered, transmission model of learning has gradually changed to a more facilitative approach to teaching that is learner centered and where the teacher becomes the facilitator and mentor. This shift from an "instructional" to a "learning" paradigm has changed the role of education from a "place of instruction" to a place to "produce learning". Moreover, given greater democracy in learning, the teacher became the co-creator of new education system.

The transition from teacher-centered to student-centered approach is slow but in progress. Concerning the traditional attitudes towards knowledge transfer by teacher-centered approach, many teachers in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels continue to practice the direct instruction strategy in their teaching methods. Direct instruction is a term often used to describe a variety of whole class expository teaching techniques. It is sometimes referred to as "chalk and talk" – a teacher-centered approach in which the teacher delivers the academic content in a highly structured format, directing the activities of students and maintaining a focus on academic achievement. In higher education, the commoditization of education arguably changed the learner's perception of the learning contract from an active engagement with learning to the passive purchase of a qualification in the higher education market place, which can then be traded for a good job.

Amongst other aspects, the MINEDUC is responsible for developing strategies and national programmes and coordinating collaborations with international partners. The Rwanda Education Board (REB) is one of the MINEDUC's key bodies. It was established in 2011 as the result of a merger between 5 organizations: the Rwanda National Examination Council (RNC), National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Student Financial Agency Rwanda (SFAR), General Inspection of Education (GIE), and Teacher Service Commission (TSC). All tasks formerly carried out by these 5 organizations now fall under the responsibility of the REB. The Higher Education Council (HEC) is another important Ministry of Education body. Amongst other aspects, the HEC is responsible for the quality of higher education institutions and the organizational structure and performance of the higher education system, as well as providing advice on higher education policy.

For the past 25 years the education system in Rwanda continues to adopt effective strategies from student-centered to competence-based curriculum, and integrates innovative practices such as creativity in the teaching and learning environments

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Creativity in primary and secondary education in Rwanda has been integrated in the system as teachers are adopting the student-centered approach in teaching and the Rwanda Education Board has provided various training programs to teachers in competence-based curriculum where learners are encouraged to be creative in order to enhance various skills that will prepare them to become effective and productive learners, as well as develop core competencies in self leadership, entrepreneurial and innovative mindset.

In higher education, the concept of creativity remained a controversial topic. Part of this controversy is due to the tension between emphasizing innovation and risks, or emphasizing productivity and accountability. Yet, incorporating the teaching and learning of creativity in institutions of higher education is essential if educators are seeking to equip their students with tools that help them succeed in their futures. Beyond higher education, our graduates need to be creative in order to survive and prosper in an ever-changing world.

Experts in the field offer different conceptions on creativity. The term creativity in education is widely used but the meaning varies. According to Fields and Bisschoff (2013) creativity becomes a force of great value when it is applied to causes that benefit humankind and the world at large. In the business world, Kagame (2014) said that entrepreneurs use creativity to solve everyday problems to provide products and services, and to make use of limited resources. In learning and in teaching, the traditional teacher-centered transmission model of learning has now shifted to student-centered model where learners are prepared to be creative in an increasingly complex environment. Learners need the skills and creative approaches in order to cope successfully. Kagame further argued that developing countries including Rwanda need to encourage creativity in order to improve the quality of life of the people. However, in order to enhance creativity among the learners, creative teaching practices from the teachers are needed.

On the importance of creativity in higher education, the EUA Creativity Report 2006-2007 recommended: (a) universities should look towards the future in all their activities, rather than being grounded in the past; (b) the high level of expertise of the university community in diverse fields should strive towards “being one step ahead” of the times by going beyond established knowledge, questioning time-honored ideas and trying not only to solve current problems but also be proactive in identifying issues of future relevance; (c) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should work towards developing internal quality processes that support the creativity agenda by being geared towards the future and avoid over-bureaucratization.

Norman Jackson of the Higher Education Academy reiterated that if creativity is central to being, then higher education needs to understand what it means to be creative in the many disciplinary domains in which students are taught. Jackson emphasized the need to raise awareness of what creativity means in these different contexts and encourage educators to support forms of learning

that will enable students to develop the forms of creativity that are most appropriate for their field(s) of study and practice.

In 2020, it is projected that 82,000 young Rwandans will attend higher education. The kinds of training and education they receive are essential so they can contribute to the Country's development. Graduates are expected to have the skills and competencies required to fill in qualified manpower in the labor market, as well as to achieve the national goal to increase innovation. But this can only be achieved if Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) can provide a quality education based on educational expertise and effective learning conditions.

To help achieve the national goal to increase innovation, creativity is considered the driving force in improving teaching and learning, as well as a cure for a wide range of problems. But creativity in teaching and learning can only occur if creative teaching is practiced in the classroom. Furthermore, Fields and Bisschoff (2013) suggested creativity as an important factor in the development of students in higher education, as universities continue to face the challenges of staying relevant and highly competitive. Strategic documents related to higher education in the European Union consider creativity as a required precondition for its development.

European Commission's Europe 2020 document recommended that in order to achieve innovation, EU's strengths in design and creativity must be exploited. The European University Association (EUA) initiated a project called "Creativity in Higher Education" designed as an exploratory activity to enhance understanding of the concept and to contribute to the advancement of the European Knowledge society by identifying good practices and providing higher education institutions and their major external stakeholders with operational recommendations on how to foster creativity.

In Rwanda, the transformation of higher education is progressing positively as the government is working towards improving the quality of teaching and learning. The country has become a hub of innovation in African Higher Education with strong government support and the presence of leading institutions such as the Carnegie-Mellon University, African Leadership University, The University of Global Health Equity, the African Institute for Mathematics and Sciences, Oklahoma Christian University, Kepler and the Southern New Hampshire University's Global Education Movement (GEM), and the African German Entrepreneurship Academy, among others.

The University of Rwanda (UR) is the leading university of the country with highly trained instructors, excellent programs, and improved facilities with the support of bilateral partners and international donors. Since the tragic event in 1994, UR has transformed itself into a Center of Excellence in many fields and creative teaching has been considered an important practice in delivering quality teaching and learning.

On the impact of Creativity among entrepreneurs in Rwanda, Kagame (2014) conducted his research study on the *Critical analysis of the obstacles to business creativity among small and medium enterprises in Rwanda*. His research resulted to the following conclusion: (a) creativity is important for entrepreneurship; (b) through creativity business owners will be able to come up

with new ways of improving existing products or develop new products that are on high demand in the region market; (c) SMEs survival will depend on how business owners are creative ; (d)obstacles to creativity can be minimized by encouraging business education among SMEs owners; (d) there is no doubt that SMEs contribute tremendously to Rwanda's development.

The importance of creative teaching in higher education cannot be ignored if we need to produce competent and skilled graduates. If instructors practiced creativity in teaching, creative students will be produced and thus can subsequently achieve the national goal to increase innovation.

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