

**Democratization of Educational Opportunities in the 21st Century Africa:
The Transformative Role of Technology**
Keynote Address

By

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Africa is at a crossroads with the world's youngest and fastest-growing population. The International Labor Organization predicts that out of 600 million young people entering the labor market by 2030, one in three will be a young African. This staggering number underscores the urgency of the task facing African countries. These African youth are not just our future but the world's future. Africa must act now to ensure they have the skills to seize the opportunities of the 21st century. The quality, equity, and accessibility of education for African youth are not just local issues; they have global ramifications.

The role of teachers in preparing the African youth for the future workplace is fundamental. Ziauddin Yousafzai, a UN special adviser on global education, correctly stated that “teachers are nation builders” and “developing countries must invest in them properly”. Educational technology is fundamental to fulfilling teachers’ mission as nation-builders and bridging the digital divide between Africa and developed countries. Teachers will use such technologies to teach, inspire, and empower. They will use emerging educational technologies to fulfill the four pillars of education endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. These pillars, coined by Jacques Delors, a former UNESCO Director-General, are a framework and a roadmap to a future where African youth are not just participants but leaders in the global economy. They represent a holistic approach to personal growth, relationships,

and community building, and our African teachers should integrate these pillars into curricula and teaching methods.

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) defined educational technology as "the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources." Worldwide investment in educational technologies has surged in the past twenty years. These technologies can facilitate African development by boosting educational access and quality, providing skills training, reaching those excluded from education systems, improving the quality of knowledge and skills taught, and addressing socio-economic and gender inequalities. They can also help fulfil the four pillars of learning.

Learning to know involves acquiring knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities that prepare individuals to solve the problems they face in their societies. Africa is a member of the global community, and teachers must impart knowledge to enable African youth to maximize job opportunities in Africa and any part of the world. Teachers must be prepared to understand and leverage emerging technologies such as educational technologies, information technologies, nanotechnologies, biotechnologies, robotics, and artificial intelligence and their role in reshaping the future of Africa. According to the Brookings Institution, "it will take the average student in sub-Saharan Africa almost 100 years to catch up to the average student in high-income countries in terms of how many years of school she will attend and how much she will learn." Africa must embrace the idea that technological advances are unstoppable and could transform human societies in unthinkable ways. The only hope of leaving the continent a better place for future generations is for teachers to impart the knowledge and love of these technologies. Teachers must help African youth enjoy the right to know.

Knowledge must be utilized, and learning to do involves applying knowledge and skills in practical situations, developing expertise and competence, and building confidence and self-efficacy. Therefore, African youth must learn to translate knowledge into practice. They must learn to utilize their acquired knowledge to address Africa's problems by leveraging technology to promote entrepreneurship and small business management, engaging digital skills and ICT literacy to promote security and governmental accountability, using biotech to enhance crop yield, and ensuring food security, including health and wellness. African youth have the right to know that.

Knowledge of subjects and translating that knowledge into practice cannot promote sustainable human progress in Africa without promoting learning to be among African youth. Learning to be is about developing the whole individual. It involves discovering one's identity, values, and purpose, developing emotional intelligence and empathy, and cultivating self-awareness and self-acceptance. When teachers promote learning to be, African youth will embrace emotional intelligence, social skills, character training, values, and cultural awareness values that promote self-development. African youth have the right to know that.

Learning to live together entails building relationships and community, developing communication and conflict-resolution skills, and fostering understanding and acceptance. None of the three learnings can ensure our survival as a human species if we don't learn to live together. Learning to live together is a critical educational mission because it promotes collective well-being, without which conflict will threaten humanity. Social cohesion, diversity, and inclusion are values teachers must find ways to instill in students. African youth have the right to know that.

Bridging the technology gap in African education requires a multifaceted approach that addresses infrastructure, accessibility, and digital literacy. Here are some keynotes Africans must consider to effectively bridge the knowledge gap between the continent and advanced countries in the West. We must invest in

infrastructure by improving internet connectivity, computer labs, and mobile devices in schools. Devices must be made accessible and affordable, including digital resources like e-books and educational apps. Teachers, students, and communities need adequate and continuing digital literacy training on technology usage and digital skills. Providing free and open educational resources, such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and online libraries, is also essential.

African institutions must seek collaborations and partnerships with international organizations, governments, and private sectors to support digital education initiatives. Educators must create relevant local educational content and contextualized digital content that aligns with African needs. Initiatives for digital inclusion must target marginalized groups, such as girls and rural communities, to ensure equal access to technology. Governments must implement policy reforms prioritizing technology integration in education policies and budgets. Finally, monitoring and evaluating policies by tracking progress, identifying challenges, and adjusting strategies to ensure effective education is fundamental. By implementing these strategies, African education can harness technology to enhance learning outcomes, increase access to quality education, and prepare students for the digital age.

Think about these ten strategies and the four pillars of education and how to integrate them into your teaching as you deliberate today. Thank you for attending this conference and being a teacher at this critical time in Africa's history. Your commitment to improving your teaching is commendable. I urge you to continuously reframe your teaching to encourage curiosity, inspire innovation, and foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Above all, continue reinventing your teaching approaches to provide a transformative educational experience that distinguishes Africans in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Teachers must help African youth fulfill their right to know. They must help close the knowledge gap between Africa and advanced countries

in the West. No task is more sacred than that. No intellectual struggle is more worthy of this effort.

References

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