

Book Review

The Burden of Educational Exclusion: 'Understanding and Challenging Early School Leaving in Africa'

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In *The Burden of Education Exclusion: 'Understanding and Challenging Early School Leaving in Africa'* Jacques Zeelen, Dorothy Nampota, Josje van der Linden and Maximiano Ngabirano (eds) have compiled a book that explores a somewhat awkward topic in the substantial struggle against poverty in Africa. The book provides a fresh look at problems associated with early school leaving, and proposes reforms by means of first-person accounts of those who have lived through the experience. In the process, the book clearly mirrors the consequences of being excluded from the mainstream educational channels. It is difficult to face the problems associated with early school leaving, particularly for communities who have few resources and who often live under difficult circumstances, both politically and socially. Zeelen *et al.*'s choice of writing style narrates the difficult story in an easy-to-read manner while confronting tough issues with accounts from first-hand victims of this vicious circle.

The editors all have a great passion for research on education. From the University of Groningen, the University of Mzumbe in Tanzania, the University of Malawi to Martyrs University in Uganda, the authors and editors have combined passion and excellent knowledge to give a glimpse into a subject which policymakers would love to avoid, probably due to the many problems associated with early school leavers. This passion, as revealed in the materials compiled, will surely help policymakers consider the bigger picture of early school leaving, in particular on the African continent.

The book is divided into four parts, with a total of sixteen different accounts from various communities across Africa and The Netherlands. Each part has an overarching theme: policy and curricula, globalisation, tradition and conflict, exclusion and gender, and intervention. Part One provides a detailed account of policies and strategies that have been employed to combat early school leaving. From the Tanzanian experiences through Uganda and Lesotho to The Netherlands, the authors have explored different strategies employed by countries to deal with this problem. The chapter summarises important findings such as the lack of a language of instruction that speaks to the local people, poor perspectives after school completion, social problems that force young adults to adopt other income-generating activities than schooling, and the lack of proper counselling on education and what that may mean for the future.

Part Two begins with an evaluation of education in the context of Africa and provides background to early school leaving. It explores globalisation, tradition and conflicts, and their impact on education. This part tackles early school leaving head-on by introducing the reasons behind the phenomenon. It suggests that early school leaving is directly linked to culture, social and political conflicts, and developments elsewhere which impact on communities beyond country and continental borders, commonly referred to as globalisation. In a world divided more by technology than ideology, global events have far-reaching consequences, in particular for societies whose environment is not yet conducive to personal development and to using education as an instrument to foster development. This unsettling state of affairs allows for young people to shun education due to the lack of opportunities, ignorance or having no peaceful environment where education can flourish.

Part Three is the shortest of the four parts in terms of themes but carries the core message of the book. Gender and educational exclusion have far-reaching consequences because they often conspire with culture to exclude seemingly intelligent members of society. Particular to this part is an account of a specific case on girls in Uganda. This part also sheds light on boys' drop-out behaviour and how that has been bizarrely aided culturally. It is a good summary of an interface between culture and gender and, if not well managed and communicated, their often destructive result in aiding division perpetuates early school leaving. It appears that policies put in place by governments do not fully integrate local beliefs and culture in order to deal with early school leaving in a partnership.

Part Four consists of four themes. It offers specific cases relating to the implementation of solutions in order to reduce early school leaving, retention and intervention. This is an important part of the book's validity and currency. The proposed solutions are practical and supported by research on specific situations in Africa. The South African BASWA project, Kenya's access and retention of school leavers and Malawi's implementation of non-formal education are one-stop knowledge material for policymakers and education researchers.

The book's powerful introduction will get any first-timer deep into the early school leaving phenomenon. It sets the tone for all the themes by offering reasons for the need for a strong and collective policy on early school leaving and research needed to support the basis for tackling this problem. The book's conclusion reiterates the need for a partnership between policymakers, community members and researchers. The authors' biographies and affiliations can be found at the end of the book.