

Chapter 8

Transformative Online Education & Social Equality: The Prospects for E-Governance and Democracy in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to examine the impact of e-governance to demonstrate the challenges facing transformative online education in promoting social equality in Africa, while also taking cognizance of the effect of prevailing socio-political and economic factors affecting the access to, the provision of and distribution of new technology and its effectiveness as a tool for promoting the latter (social equality) on the continent. However e-governance as a means of promoting greater participation through the internet and online facilities has become an important part of the new medium because it allows people to interact more with their government and provides transparency in governance. This chapter will therefore focus on the prospects for e-governance and democracy while noting that Africa lags behind in the institutionalization of online governance infrastructures and compounded by corruption, ineffective policy implementation and lack of effective online education programs. This chapter will examine the potential for growth in e-participation and e-democracy. It will illustrate how these challenges inhibit the prospects for effective transformative online education as a means to promoting social equality but a process that must be enhanced in order to sustain and consolidate democratic governance on the continent.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing impact of online education on societies across the world and its transformative effect in promoting social equality has become even more evident with the scope,

speed and trends of information technology. The process of experiencing a deeper consciousness and understanding of individual roles and actions brought about by transformative learning within the society will greatly impact governance and democracy. The acquisition of this new experience enhanced by new technology will continue to shape citizen's roles and relationship within

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the society and relationship between the governed and the governors. But like all new experiences, it faces new challenges and conditioned by some pre-existing variables in the environments, within which it exists. Education remains the effective tools to transform the learners and the society by bringing about necessary change in the society. And as a process, transformative education is therefore a viable tool for promoting change in any society. It (transformative education) is also an approach that allows the learner and eventually the entire society to acquire values and skills that will develop and shape their worldviews and encourage them to act individually or collectively so that they can improve social conditions and eventually eradicate the ills of society and promote social equality. The first part of this exercise involves a brief introduction of transformative online learning and its connection to the prospect of democracy and e-governance in Africa.

TRANSFORMATIVE ONLINE LEARNING

We will attempt to provide an understanding of transformative online learning through a review of major proponents of the construct while establishing its connection to the idea of democracy and e-governance on the continent of Africa. There has been a lot work done on the idea of transformative learning and according to Jack Mezirow, the theory combines various educational theories, models, and ideas about constructivism and social transformation and it is a primary goal of all adult education. In his posit, he proposed, as quoted by Agnes Apostol, that

- Transformative learning is the process of making meaning of one's experience. (Taylor 1998).
- Individuals are transformed through a process of critical reflection of their beliefs,

attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions (Cranton, 2002).

- Learning occurs by (1) elaborating existing frames of reference; (2) learning new frames of reference; (3) transforming points of view; or (4) transforming habits of mind. (Holistic Education Network of Tasmania, 2004).

Agnes Apostol also saw transformation as a process that involves not changing one's viewpoint to another but becoming aware of alternative perspectives (Apostol, A.S., 2007). It is with this in mind that many would agree that Africa at this point in time needs the infusion of alternative perspectives. With an environment, like in many other developing areas of the world, filled with poverty, social injustice, bigotry, terrorism, environmental degradation, economic disparity, gender inequality, corruption, inept leadership and unethical use of science and technology, transformative education therefore becomes more and more an indispensable tool for change. However, such an environment calls for education stakeholders to work collaboratively to create an effective and result oriented programs to make transformation possible. Peck in his work on the subject believed that transformative learning environment needs the support of enlightened educational leaders and school managers to initiate, foster, and maintain change in learners and institutions (Peck, 1994). He also believed that It must also receive the support of political and community leaders who may have to be depended upon to provide the capital and policies to facilitate the process of change within which transformation must occur. In addition, many experts call for integration of transformative learning into the education curriculum. For example, the Superintendents Commission of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) in a report recommended the integration of the four major thrusts of transformative education in the curriculum:

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