

Harambee approach: towards decolonising East African education through capturing social-cultural ethos

Evelyn Wandia Corrado

Abstract: In Kenya, the cultural practices and experiences of both children and teachers are marginalised in the education system. The education system remains predominantly authoritarian with an underlying colonial framework. Often, in local and global spaces, there is an exclusion of the vital experiences and knowledge that East African students acquire from collaborative daily lives in their homes and communities. These crucial skills should be integrated into their classroom learning to decolonise education and liberate the engagement of East African students. This model of learning, which is based on the Harambee approach, is a proposal based on my ethnographic PhD study conducted in a rural community in Kenya. The study included interviews and a focus group with teachers, and observations of students. The proposed concept captures the need for all key stakeholders to participate actively in policymaking and practice review, to accommodate the needs of all students and their teachers. The Harambee approach includes the social-cultural experiences of children. Additionally, dialogic engagement would be an inclusive strategy to emancipate the autonomy of students.

Keywords: Dialogic pedagogies, Harambee concept, decolonising education, East Africa.

Note on the author: Dr Evelyn Wandia Corrado is a lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Roehampton. She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her background is Psychology (MSc & BSc) and Sociology of Education. Her PhD study evaluated the extent to which dialogic pedagogies can be applied in the Kenyan education system within available ‘pedagogical spaces’ to enhance learning, and equip students with skills for emancipation and active participation in local and global spheres. She grew up in Kenya and has great social cultural understanding of the African context, which informs her research. She previously worked in the UK Mental Health Sector for almost a decade and at Middlesex University as an academic tutor.

evelyn.corrado@roehampton.ac.uk

Introduction

Previous studies by [Corrado & Robertson \(2019\)](#) and [Twum-Danso Imoh \(2016\)](#) have challenged the representation of African childhoods as marginalised. Most African childhood experiences are comfortable, diverse, and filled with rich social-cultural experiences which are often excluded in discussions about education, media, and politics ([Corrado & Robertson 2019](#)). To liberate the misrepresentation of African childhoods, there is a need to reconceptualise education practices in East Africa to alleviate children's participation in local and global forums. The proposed Harambee approach is a recommendation from my PhD research in a rural community in Kenya which is similar to many other parts of the country and East Africa more generally ([Corrado 2020](#)). The Harambee approach aims to decolonise the education system in Kenya (and other East African contexts) and liberate the voices of students.

The Harambee term is a Kiswahili word with a distinctive meaning in East Africa, especially in Kenya. It was officially used by Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya. Harambee's discourse aimed to unite all Kenyans as they embarked on the process of self-government and building their nation. The term 'Harambee', captures the African historical spirit of togetherness in social, political, and economic areas ([Kenyatta 1965](#)). As a result, the term resonates with Kenyan roots, making the concept understandable and acceptable, but also applicable and understood in other East African countries.

The Harambee spirit has been upheld in the education sector, where communities have built schools and collected money to educate disadvantaged students, as mentioned earlier. The aim is to help disadvantaged families and communities access school-based education in order to overcome social inequalities. In the 1980s, when the 8-4-4 system (8 years primary school, 4 years secondary, and, 4 years at university level) of education was introduced, Harambee secondary schools were established to provide access to education for those students who did not achieve a high enough grade in their KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) exam or who could not afford to pay the high costs of boarding schools. Generally, the system of Harambee penetrates through most aspects of the daily lives of Kenyans. Most have been part of Harambee, both as givers and as recipients of money or beneficiaries of facilities built through collective efforts ([Corrado 2020](#)). According to the global index on the most generous countries, Kenya is in twelfth place, globally ([Charity Aid Foundation 2018](#); [Telegraph 2017](#)). This is due to the importance placed on generosity within the Harambee spirit.

The legacy of the Harambee spirit is not without limits. Occasionally, some individuals have taken advantage of the system to extort money from others. Others have mishandled the funds collected, which has had an impact on the spirit of Harambee ([Corrado 2020](#)). But here I argue that Harambee continues to weave through the

Kenyan social-cultural and political and even economic fabric. Additionally, it is alive in educational practice. It can be seen as one of the Kenyan values that should be upheld while working towards promoting the strengths of Kenyans, rather than falling into the trap of concentrating on the negatives (Cohen 1994; Diop 2014).

For Kenya to meet the learning needs of its students and reach the set-out policies for Vision 2030 concerning the provision of high-quality education (the Republic of Kenya 2015), there is a need to reconceptualise the educational approach. In this article, I reconceptualise a theoretical and practical approach that could use dialogic pedagogy in education spaces to progress learning experiences for students.

Dialogic engagement in this article refers to the use of exploratory talk in teaching and learning. Dialogic pedagogy is not seen as an end-state for learning, but an idea of developing practice towards goals where students can learn to develop agency through fostering a deeper level of interactions in their lessons (Mercer 2000; Alexander 2008). Furthermore, drawing on Freire's argument, I argue that silenced humans can use dialogue to liberate themselves from any kind of oppression when they develop critical consciousness (Freire & Macedo 1970). This kind of critical consciousness is needed in students' learning in East African contexts as it is key to helping students speak up in class and beyond.

Literature review

Nxumalo & Cedillo (2017) argued that the process of decolonisation acknowledges that there are existing colonial ideologies in education that need reviewing in order to provide a balanced and inclusive education. Scholars like Thiong'o (1986) and Oelofsen (2015) have called for the decolonisation of African minds and intellectual institutions. Decolonisation starts by identifying the colonial aspects that need to be critically reviewed (CHE 2017). This revision in education should be in areas such as the content of curriculum and syllabus, the language of instruction, and pedagogical practices. East African education systems today need to become more 'African-centric' than 'Eurocentric,' which I contend could be achieved through the implementation of my proposed Harambee framework. Indeed, the Harambee framework aims to make the content of the curriculum more culturally relevant through the inclusion of cultural tools and using pedagogies that empower students. The proposed Harambee approach should additionally challenge the use of imported pedagogies and policies. It should promote the voices of key players in East African education and meet the needs of their students. Tabulawa (2013) claimed that the use of foreign practices has not been successful in Africa. Hence, there is a need to contextualise education systems and practices, through the understanding of social cultural theory and dialogic pedagogy theory discussed in this section.

Historically, Africans passed on knowledge and skills from one generation to another informally. This system of informal education was through storytelling, riddles, songs, and participation. Mentoring of the younger generation was utilised to pass on different skills either by family members or older adults through active participation and collaboration (Kenyatta 1965; Adeyemi & Andenyika 2003; Rogoff 2003). Additionally, peer cooperation was also encouraged (Were & Wilson 1968). However, in the early 19th century, formal education was introduced to East Africa (similar to other African countries) by colonial governments for the purpose of providing basic skills such as literacy and mathematics. These basic skills enabled some Africans to take on subordinate roles such as cooks, office messengers and lower-primary teaching assistants within the labour market established by the colonial system (Rogoff 2003). Similarly, the Christian missionaries provided formal education to help converted Christians (Africans) read Bibles and evangelise their communities. The provision of formal education to Africans was limited up to the primary level, while the secondary and tertiary levels were only accessible by people from Asian and White ethnic groups within these contexts. This segregated system originated from colonial ideologies, that viewed Black people (especially Africans) as less intelligent compared to other races (Poncian 2015; Corrado 2020). Consequently, most Africans just acquired basic knowledge and skills and worked in subordinate roles such as domestic workers and guards.

In the early 1960s, most East African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania gained independence, and education was made free for all races at all levels. As a result, many more Africans could access secondary and tertiary education. Post-independence, the East African countries tried to incorporate their pan-African ideologies into their education. The pioneer of this movement was Tanzania's president, Julius Nyerere, who advocated for an education centred on self-reliance, which met the needs of the people (Kassam 1995; Sifuna 2007; Ibbott 2014). Most of these ideologies aimed at incorporating African cultures and values into education systems and sought to overcome the biased colonial system. Since the independence of Kenya in 1963, there have been several commissions seeking to ensure that education meets the needs of students (Wanjohi 2011). Some of the commissions are notably: the Ominde Commission (1964), the Mackay Commission (1981), UWEZO Assessments (2012), and more recently, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Republic of Kenya 2017). These commissions have aimed to make the education system in Kenya progressive. However, they have not fully included the collaborative daily lifestyles experienced by many students. According to Ackers & Hardman (2012), education in East Africa still widely uses old methods of teaching which are authoritarian and exclude the values linked to the local context. These practices could be traced to the colonial roots which undervalued African knowledges and experiences, and according to Njoya (2017) limited the intellectual participation of students.

In East Africa post-independence, only Tanzania successfully incorporated the use of a local language, Kiswahili, as a language of instruction in schools. Kenya only included Kiswahili as a subject. However, there has been more emphasis on using English for teaching instruction, whilst learning Western languages was favoured over local languages in Kenyan schools (Thiong'o 1986). Although in policy Kenya has recently advocated for the use of local languages in learning (Republic of Kenya 2017), this shift is not reflected in classroom practices (Corrado 2020). Subsequently, there is a need to decolonise the education system. The inclusion of local languages in education (Thiong'o 1986, cited by Ngugi 2018) is an important means of decolonising the minds. Said (1993; 1995) argues that the language of instruction in teaching disseminates specific cultural values. These values have an invisible power to reinforce ideologies and practices that influence people and societies (Bernstein 2003). The colonial education policies and practices are mostly Eurocentric. As a result, they promote the use of Western languages such as English and French even though most students in East Africa use local languages in their daily lives to communicate with others. Consequently, these local languages should be included in classroom learning to help decolonise the education system. Otherwise, the exclusion of cultural and socio-economical relevance in African education will continue to see school-based education alienate not only many students, but also the contexts from which they come (Ibbott 2014; UNESCO 2015; Njoya 2017).

In my PhD study, I further applied dialogic pedagogy as a theoretical perspective because it promotes students' participation in their learning. According to Mercer (2008) and Alexander (2008), students who use dialogic pedagogies can integrate their previous life experiences in learning. Furthermore, students who use dialogic learning gain confidence while participating actively in learning spaces and beyond. According to Freire & Macedo (2012), when there is a dialogue in learning and social contexts, the 'silenced' individuals voice their ideas, thus liberating themselves from disadvantaged positions. For many East African students, where the method of instruction remains authoritarian (Ackers & Hardman 2012), the incorporation of dialogic pedagogy might be empowering. Specifically, it will enable these students to start addressing their issues and illuminate their authenticity and creativity. Drawing on Corrado & Robertson's (2019) and Corrado's (2019) work, it is critical to have a balanced reflection of the African context. As noted earlier, the incorporation of cultural tools would make education more relevant to the worlds of students. In most instances, the African cultural relevance in education is usually omitted in 'Eurocentric' based systems (Schweisfurth 2014; Corrado 2019; Twum-Danso Imoh 2020).

The proposed Harambee approach builds on Kenyan children's experiences and contextual needs. It draws on multiple facets of East African people, which include their pre-colonial traditions, their experiences in colonial and post-colonial eras, and their future ambitions. In this recommendation, I propose an education that validates

the Harambee fundamentals of collectivism. Subsequently, the Harambee framework aims to decolonise education systems through incorporation of dialogic engagement with all key players in education and through a review of both curriculum and teaching practice practices.

Methodology

My PhD study was ethnographic research which was conducted in a rural community in Central Kenya, where I observed the engagement of teachers and students for the purpose of understanding daily classroom practices (Corrado 2020). I further observed students in their local church as they engaged with their parents in religious activities which is a common occurrence in the Kenyan community. For my observations, I utilised field notes, photos, short video clips- for five weeks. In addition to my observations, I conducted interviews with five male teachers, and a focus group to obtain information on the teachers' pedagogical practices. The interviews and a focus group were semi-structured and were audio-recorded.

In my study, thematic analysis was used to reveal recurring themes emerging through participants' perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and observed actions that were obtained from the collected data. Although thematic analysis can be messy and time-consuming (Flick 2007; 2014), it was very helpful for me since it facilitated a deeper understanding of the human experience and, in this study, a deeper and richer understanding of teachers' teaching experiences and professional pedagogic choices.

The schools selected for my research were typical rural, government-funded schools, similar to the majority of primary schools in Kenya. The main school in this study was Baraka School (pseudonym). I spent May 2016 in Baraka, where I undertook most of the observations and all the interviews with teachers, and where I conducted a focus group discussion. I also took photos of the school. The participants who took part in the study were all men, even though all teachers were invited to take part. The teachers' chosen pseudonyms were Kuria, Mike, Pius, Gathenya, and Kim. Participant observation was conducted in classrooms for students aged 10 to 12 years, who were predominantly taught by male staff. While in Kenya, I visited my former primary school Elimu (pseudonym) to undertake complementary observations. I was in Elimu school as a pupil as well as all my family. My mother, now retired, worked as a teacher for three decades in Elimu school. Despite Elimu School and Baraka School both being government-funded and in the same region, their resourcing is quite different. Elimu school was better resourced since most students came from middle-class backgrounds as opposed to children in Baraka who came from low-income backgrounds. I further observed children in their local church which I will call Maendeleo while they engaged in church activities. BERA (2011) guidelines on ethical

considerations were well-thought-out and ethics forms completed and approved by the University Board prior to data collection. Respecting the context was highly considered throughout the study including, the need to create rapport and seek verbal permission prior to collecting data.

My study revealed that the current education system has great strengths yet, it is faced with challenges that need to be addressed. One of the setbacks apparent in my study was the lack of relevance of classroom learning to the lives of the students. In addition, it was apparent that the education system still has colonial practices which are authoritarian and discourages the active participation of both students and teachers in their classroom learning. There is a lack of participation of students, parents, and teachers in major decisions in education, especially those from lower economic backgrounds, paving the way for inequality in the system. At the same time, the social-cultural and economic values and needs are not well reflected in the syllabus, which disadvantages the students in their learning and beyond their learning where they need to be equipped for lifelong success. As a result, the recommendations led to this Harambee approach proposal which is fully discussed in the following section.

Findings

Drawing on my observations in Maendeleo church, the children engaged collaboratively with their peers and adults in various activities. These activities required talent, skills, and self-determination. A good example is of a young child of about 10 years old, observed reading a Bible chapter in a local language (Gikuyu) to a congregation of about 1000 people. At the same time, two young children between 5–10 years were observed, leading the congregation in prayers, while their peers sang collaborative songs to the congregation alongside their parents. The efficacy and skills demonstrated by these young children were evident. This is unlike the recurring global representations of African children which foreground them as primarily victims who are in need, with little ability to solve problems, or with the minimal capability to participate or give back to humanity (Corrado & Robertson 2019). Another good example in my observations was at Baraka school, where students, alongside their teachers, planted trees as part of a conservation activity. These students were determined to be part of the local and global solutions to environmental conservation. Corrado & Robertson (2019) have argued that African childhoods have been marred by biased misrepresentations in global discourses, which ignore these aspects of children's lives. Hence, there is a need to show the diversity of experiences and skills in these children's realities such as the examples noted above. Moreover, it would be important to validate the rich social-cultural values, experiences, and support, that these children have, which should help to redefine their positioning. The resolution should be completed through education.

Regrettably, the old colonial practices still haunt education systems in East Africa which silences the participation of students in formal spaces. For example, in a school like Baraka the participation of students in their learning is restricted by authoritarian pedagogies. This leads students to adopt a position of silence in formal spaces in education, politics, and business. The Harambee approach aims to build on the social-cultural experiences of students and contextualises their learning needs, to liberate their involvement. The Harambee approach aims to shift power through using a bottom-up approach to help decolonise the education system and contextualise practice.

The application of the Harambee approach is discussed in the following sections. I demonstrate the need to contextualise the social experiences of students in their learning, as well as apply dialogic pedagogy. In addition, I discuss how the concept recommends the promotion of reflective practice for teachers and the need to involve key players in a collaborative way that upholds the Harambee strategy.

Contextualising students' social experiences

That students in Kenya have varied experiences acquired outside their classroom learning emerged clearly in my study. Indeed, some of the students in their time outside of school help their parents in home management and are involved in practical activities in the community. In my investigations, as noted earlier, I observed some students at Baraka School planting trees as a conservation exercise. Added to that, I saw these students engage in athletics training without their teachers' supervision as they prepared for a competition against neighbouring schools. These kinds of engagements demonstrated the efficacy and collaborative skills of students. Similar observations were made in the community church where I observed children get involved in Bible readings, conducting church services, and singing in collaboration with their peers and parents. This kind of participation outside of the classroom seems to develop valuable skills and knowledge that could be included in classroom learning. Students should be able to discuss and reflect on these activities. As proposed by Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere (cited in [Kassam 1995](#); see also [Ibbott 2014](#)), students should relate their learning to their environment and be able to bring their outside skills and experiences into the classroom. When students relate their classroom learning to their lives, this can be considered 'good' education that can help meet the needs of these students within their context ([Tabulawa 2013](#)).

Through the Harambee approach, a collective contextualised learning would include the specific needs recognised by Kenyan teachers. For example, practical subjects such as home science, art and craft, music, and business education would be made available in the curriculum and taught in schools. At the moment, although some of these subjects are available, they are not a priority because they are not examined. This is significant because as the school system is exam-based, teachers and

pupils concentrate on passing exams. Still, my study recognised that students who are not academic may have other talents that could be supported by these subjects. However, these have, hitherto, been ignored. To overcome this issue, there should be a platform for these subjects to be included and promoted. Moreover, the learning of all subjects should be not only theory-based, but should also include practical learning. The Kenyan teachers who participated in the study noted that when practical work is involved in learning, the students are actively engaged and learn more. They are also able to bring their outside experiences into classroom learning, and vice versa (Nyerere 1968; Freire & Macedo 1993; Ibbott 2014). Most of the teachers interviewed in this study agreed that science subjects need experiments. They recognised that most other subjects could have practical exercises which teachers would have to plan purposefully. One of the English teachers noted that they can have debates, use their dictionaries, or do word searches, where students are more involved and also learn a great deal. Indeed, most of these practical uses involve plenty of dialogue and discussion. They can overcome the formal setting of the classrooms and break down any barriers.

The promotion of local languages in the curriculum would help students to learn positively in languages that they are confident to speak (Thiong'o 1986). From my observations, students actively used local languages in informal settings. In addition, at times, teachers used local languages in their classrooms to elaborate concepts for the purpose of promoting understanding. One of the participants, Pius, explained the situation as thus: '... because most of them are still using their mother tongue so when they come to school, English becomes like a foreign language to them.' That demonstrates that most children from rural areas were not confident in English. The consequence of this was that they were limited in their classroom engagement. Nonetheless, these children could converse with their teachers in local languages. Thus, it is important to use these languages in learning. The application of local languages also helps to create a cultural understanding and could promote classroom dialogue, since students are using a language in which they are confident. Moreover, the exclusion of African languages from the curriculum sustains the universal view that African cultures, values, and learning tools are backward and non-academic, an issue that has been previously raised by Thiong'o (1986). This may negatively affect the confidence and self-esteem of students. However, through inclusion, a reversal effect might be projected, most notably, boosting students' confidence to engage actively. When they learn in their local languages, they may be inspired to learn other languages. This inclusion of local languages may further help with the identity emancipation for students in Kenya. Since most students associate their use of local languages with informality and being uncivilised, ideologies drawn from the colonial period projected African languages and traditional practices as backward (Diop 2014; Ngugi 2018). To overcome such prejudices and promote balanced identities, it is imperative to include local languages in education (Corrado 2019). Moreover, currently, Kenyan local languages are useful in careers such as journalism,

which some students might choose for future careers. Therefore, the incorporation of local languages, even in upper-primary education, could challenge stereotypes, promote local languages, and pave the way for future engagement in the labour market.

Applying dialogic pedagogy

Some teachers were aware of the limitations of traditional teaching approaches. This was raised by a teacher called Gathenya who noted that teaching only on the blackboard does not help students to understand:

I think when you involve the students, for example, I am also a mathematics teacher, I was thinking sometime back the reason I know so many things and I remember them it is because I went beyond that. For example, a certain concept is because I had seen it myself, that is why I can remember it even today. When you just teach on the blackboard and then go out and do not do something else the child will not remember it again, but the minute you involve that child to do something, maybe you have another lesson in the week and they do questions, questions, and answers maybe like a group competition, they will ask one another.

All the teachers interviewed in Baraka seemed to agree that by going into discussion or demonstrating with learning aids, students are involved in diverse ways in their space for interactions, and learning is advanced. They also stipulated that dialogue could be beneficial to their practice; for example, their students become more confident and have better comprehension. [Wilkinson *et al.* \(2016\)](#) assert that the use of dialogue helps students to make sense of their world and to solve problems intellectually, making a focus on dialogue in learning vital.

The proposed Harambee approach would help to perpetuate the trajectory needed in Kenyan classrooms by engaging both teachers and students in active dialogues in their classroom learning. These kinds of practices would encourage the use of both local and foreign languages in classroom learning. It would include practical exercises in lessons and the incorporation of outside experiences. Indeed, the use of a pedagogy that encapsulates these experiences would help to promote productive learning for students, since they are actively involved, and the learning captures their lives and prepares them for their future. By using dialogue in the classroom, some of the Basic Education Curriculum goals would be met ([Republic of Kenya 2017](#)). Indeed, when the students apply the Harambee concept in their classroom dialogue, they will have discussions and practical engagement, enabling them to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, reflection skills, collaboration skills, and self-expression. These skills would equip students cognitively, socially, and psychologically.

The use of the Harambee concept could help to break through students' socio-economic barriers to participation. Overall, dialogue in the classroom should promote collaboration, both asymmetrical and symmetrical ([Freire & Macedo 1993](#); [Mercer](#)

2000), breaking down the barriers between students and teachers and also between students. Consequently, the use of dialogue in classroom learning can help with emancipation (Freire & Macedo 1993). Indeed, through classroom discussion, as students start tackling issues, they will ask questions that relate to their lives in the classroom and beyond. They might start to discuss inequality issues in their settings and start to challenge local and global hegemonies. Furthermore, the current incorporation of information technology and the high use of mobile phones in Kenya make most students more aware of global issues. As a result, they have started to participate in social media discussions which are part of their daily life. Hence, they may continue to engage in dialogue further, even in their classroom interaction space. I observed some teachers using their mobile phones to download music and incorporate it into their teaching. IT education could make interaction space both contextualised and globally engaged. The students will be able to ask and answer questions at their local level and also be involved in global debates. They will be able to contest injustices (Freire & Macedo 1993; hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995). They could also illuminate their views, work, and contexts, using these platforms to voice their concerns and raise awareness.

Promoting reflective practice

The teachers at Baraka School identified a need for advanced pedagogies in their practice. They unanimously agreed that although they predominantly used monologic pedagogies, there was a need for new pedagogies. They noted that there was no communication between them and the training colleges and mostly there was little consultation by the Ministry of Education or education researchers. They noted a need for innovative pedagogy that involves the views of teachers being listened to, to help to capture their needs. Even so, one cannot ignore the conflicted mindset of teachers: since their background is authoritarian, some felt that their authority should not be compromised. Thus, there is a need to engage with teachers reflectively as they learn new pedagogies to deal with issues that might impair their progress. Other research has shown that mindset and previous experiences of teachers can limit changes in the space of interaction between this group and their students (Gillborn 2008; Alexander 2010; Wilkinson *et al.* 2016). In this Harambee approach, it would be vital for teachers to have a platform from which they can reflect on their practice and, also, plan for progressive teaching. Moreover, the teachers in Kenya appeared keen to work with other key groups to devise superior teaching and learning tools for their settings. Therefore, the entire approach should use spaces that facilitate interaction between all key players, including parents, the Ministry of Education, the government, training colleges, and education researchers.

From my study, there was an emerging consensus that professional development is needed in Kenyan schools, such as post-teacher training for the advancement of teaching and learning practices. Training should be continuous throughout a teacher's career, since new research and progressive classroom practices keep emerging. Hence, updating the skills of teachers is critical. The teachers in Baraka School appeared willing to be trained in pedagogies that relate to their context. Harambee pedagogical approach should promote a space for self-reflection in professional practice through discussions and reflections. After my interviews with the teachers, it was evident in my observations that teachers were engaging students more actively in their teaching. The teachers appeared to have used my interviews as a platform for dialogue, enabling them to reflect on their practice. They were also able to be creative within their setting with the resources available. Indeed, in one of the classes observed after the interviews, the teacher organised a group competition where students asked each other questions. The set-up was in two circles, and the students appeared to actively engage more than previously observed. This active involvement in their learning recurred in other classes that I observed after the interviews. Therefore, it was possible that the teachers had time to reflect during that time and modified their subsequent space for interaction.

When teachers feel supported by the government and society and are equipped with skills for engaging pedagogies, their autonomy can increase. One of the main issues identified was the low self-esteem of the participating teachers (Corrado 2020). They felt that their practices were not good enough for all their students and they felt unsupported. Teacher Mike stated that 'the curriculum should be improved and made to help this child because curriculum as it is now, it is only teaching the child only to pass an exam.' However, they were still able to teach, and the students learned what was expected. Such challenges of inequalities, marginalisation, and professional difficulties mentioned by teachers in the study (like Mike above) are not only experienced in Kenya, but are also discernible in other parts of the world, including the UK as revealed by Gillborn (2008). Therefore, these teachers in Kenya need to know that these challenges are not limited to their context. This notwithstanding, these teachers should be supported by their schools and the Ministry of Education to address their contextual challenges. Moreover, teachers should be equipped to practise autonomy in their classrooms to increase their creativity and activity.

Teachers should also be willing to unlearn counterproductive practices (Cochran-Smith 2009; McWilliam 2008). According to Mike, teachers in Kenya are aware of several methods of teaching. However, they only use the same familiar style. Although most teachers did not want to admit it, my observations supported this view. The teachers predominantly used teacher-centred methods. Teacher Mike admitted that '*they fall back on known territories.*' According to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009), teachers need to unlearn some practices to embrace new ones. Hence, in training

teachers on new pedagogies, it is important to identify how the unproductive methods can be dealt with, to avoid relapse.

Key players collaboration

From my study, it emerged that consultation at ground level seemed to be absent from some areas, as mentioned earlier. The teachers in my interviews felt left out of curriculum development and the allocation of funding for their school. Similarly, the needs of teachers were unmet, and they felt overlooked, which created tensions. The tensions appeared to recur across other groups as I have outlined elsewhere (Corrado 2020). For example, this happens at the society level between teachers and the parents, when parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are asked to give financial support to fund resources not provided by the government. Likewise, there were tensions between teachers, the Ministry of Education, and the government concerning remuneration, training needs, school funding, and curriculum development. Furthermore, when the government in Kenya appears to undertake directives from global organisations on policy issues and practice, their actions can generate social, economic, and historical tensions (Said 1995; Maathai 2009). As a result, there is a need for the liberation of all the ‘silenced groups’ to find solutions to these tensions and encourage better working relations. This requires communication within, and across, the groups, initially to challenge hegemonies and address tensions, and thereafter, to endorse positive plans. From my analysis, reflecting on improving communication was a major theme that recurred in the interviews.

Ideally, the communication across the groups should be dialogic, where all participatory bodies are heard promoting a Harambee spirit. Indeed, when groups have dialogue, they will be able to forge cohesive working relationships. They may produce a moral lens with a better understanding of circumstances and aid emancipation too (Steinberg & Kincheloe 2010). Together, these groups can identify areas of concern and identify solutions. Also, in unison, they can plan sustainable goals that are effective in Kenyan schools. For instance, parents would be able to understand how government funding works and identify if there are some teaching and learning resources that they need to provide resources for. The teachers and the Ministry of Education would be able to plan and promote good education practices, such as pedagogies to meet the needs of students. The government and Ministry of Education would be able to include teachers in matters of funding, curriculum development, and all other areas that relate to their profession. The move might boost the morale of teachers. Moreover, specific resource provision and support for advanced teaching practice could be offered, where open communication is fostered. Eventually, the practices of both teachers and students will improve interaction, since they will be funded adequately, and their teachers will be motivated and resourced for advanced practice.

Possibly, the inequalities in schools and society can be addressed, after effective use of pedagogical spaces.

Through the Harambee approach key players should be equally included in the process. The approach could help to bridge the social, economic, political, and global differences that impact Kenyan education and society. At the same time, the key groups would be able to identify their strengths and promote them through dialogue in spaces or interaction. Moreover, they could confront the negative perceptions and identities that unjustly impact their autonomy. This would encourage the use of creativity and independence by the key groups in education and their societies. As a result, the 'invisible' marginalised groups (such as teachers, poorer parents, and students) could use pedagogical spaces to explore their agency, creativity, and participation. Furthermore, Kenyan groups (students, teachers, and society) may utilise these spaces to challenge local and global domination through the use of dialogue for emancipation.

Application of Harambee Concept in East Africa

In East Africa (like other African countries), private schools have higher social status than public schools (Akyeampong 2009; Corrado 2019). Private schools are well funded and have resources that teachers and students can use in their classrooms. These disparities can be identified in Kenyan schools, as was evident in my study. Nonetheless, all students require a high-quality education where superior practices are upheld, regardless of social, economic, and political status. Each East African country needs a platform for dialogue in order to identify the needs of a particular context. This will contribute to addressing underlying inequality issues. Correspondingly, in countries that borrow policies from other countries with little consultation on the ground, the needs of students remain overlooked (Tabulawa 2013). Thus, similar to Kenya where dialogue could be applied, there may be opportunities in other East African countries to formulate practices that are advantageous at the local level and further compete globally. Moreover, education systems need to work and benefit the people, and they need to be culturally relevant. Therefore, addressing both micro-issues and macro-issues is essential, through engaging all key players from all levels of the education systems (Harber 2014). Moreover, education in East Africa should prepare students with skills to meet both short-term and long-term goals, from the personal to the local and global levels, starting with their classroom practice. Furthermore, their cultural and policy spaces should support relevant and advanced education practices that promote learning for all students.

On the other hand, the East African Community (EAC 2021) which includes countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi among others, has focused on finding local solutions to political and economic matters. The East African Community aims to uphold sovereignty and ensure formerly colonised countries move away from their

dependency on developed countries, which at times has disenabled them (Maathai 2009; Harber 2014; Corrado 2020). Maathai (2009) advocated for African countries to break the yoke of control from developed countries and global organisations and uphold autonomy. The global hegemonies have dominated Africans economically, culturally, and politically for many years, limiting their autonomy and progress (Said 1995; Maathai 2009; Schweisfurth 2014; Harber 2014; Corrado 2020). I argue that this need for East African community liberty may well include developing contextualised education systems that engage students actively, creatively, and autonomously.

East African countries can individually and/or collectively start by improving their teaching and learning practices. The aspects of Harambee can be incorporated through the use of pedagogical spaces by key groups (government, teachers, parents, society, and students) which could help them to address hegemonies and further draw up progressive resolutions. Discussing hegemonies and utilising pedagogical spaces through the inclusion of the 'silenced groups' is the way forward for many countries, especially in East Africa. Without effective and collaborative communication, such inequalities will persist, influencing classroom practice negatively. Thus, this proposed Harambee approach might be a solution not just for Kenya, but for other East African countries to decolonise their systems, as they uphold the autonomy of their students.

Conclusion

Drawing on my PhD ethnography study, it was evident that Kenyan childhoods have diverse and valued social-cultural experiences. These dynamic involvements are experienced by many African children but are often overlooked in the global representations. Therefore, the current systems of education in Kenya and other East African countries need to capture this valuable knowledge and skills. Hence, there is a need to decolonise practice. The Harambee approach has outlined strategies to support the autonomy of students and liberate their positioning both locally and globally.

The Harambee approach is an original decolonising framework that contextualises classroom practices in Kenya. Besides, Harambee addresses the local and global hegemonic issues that impact classroom practices. The approach stipulates the need for all key players to engage dialogically in their education system to uphold the students' autonomy. The Harambee approach empowers students through the inclusion of their cultural tools and further contests inequality and misrepresentation. Harambee concept could go beyond classroom engagement as it aims to equip students to participate actively in their world.

This was a small-scale study. Therefore, more context consultations are needed. The strength of my research was observing students in their classrooms, within their schools, and also in their community. Another advantage was engaging with teachers

in a rural community whose voices are often overlooked which was a strategic shift power by alleviating unheard voices. The Harambee approach could be a valuable emancipation tool of the Kenyan education system and other East African contexts.

References

- Ackers, J. & Hardman, F. (2012), *Reforming teacher education in East Africa: Moving beyond the 'teacher-centred' versus 'child-centred' debate: Triennial on Education and Training in Africa* (Tunisia, Association for the Development of Education in Africa).
- Adeyemi, M.B. & Adeyinka, A.A. (2003), 'The principles and content of African traditional education', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35(4): 425–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-5812.00039>
- Akyeampong, K. (2009), 'Public-private partnership in the provision of basic education in Ghana: Challenges and choices', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 39(2): 135–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920902750368>
- Alexander, R.J. (2008), *Towards dialogic thinking: Rethinking classroom talk* (York, Dialogos).
- Alexander, R.J. (2010), 'Speaking but not listening: Accountable talk in an unaccountable context', *Literacy Journal*, 44(3): 103–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2010.00562.x>
- Bernstein, B. (2003), *Social class and pedagogic practice. The structuring of pedagogic discourses*, vol. 4 (London, Routledge), 63–93. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203011263>
- British Educational Research Association (2011), *Ethical guidelines for education research* (London, BERA).
- Charity Aid Foundation (2018), *CAF world giving index 2017. A global view of giving trends*. Available at: www.cafonline.org (accessed 31 March 2018).
- CHE (2017), 'Council of Higher Education: Decolonising the Curriculum debate': *Briefly speaking* Vol. 3: 1–12.
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S.L. (2009), *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation* (New York, Teachers College Press).
- Cohen, R. (1994), *Building peoples' strengths: Early Childhood in Africa* (Bernard Van veer).
- Corrado, E.W. (2019), 'Using ethnocentric dialogic education to develop the autonomy of children in Africa: A Kenyan study', *Journal for Critical Education and Policy Studies*, 17(3): 82–131.
- Corrado, E.W. (2020), *Exploring dialogic approaches in teaching and learning: A study in a rural Kenyan community*. PhD thesis (Unpublished), Middlesex University. <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/30615/>.
- Corrado, E.W. & Robertson, L.H. (2019), *Discourses/3. Kenya: Challenging negative perceptions around the 'African child'* (Switzerland, Springer), 169–86. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14556-9_12
- Diop, B.B. (2014), *Africa Beyond the Mirror* (London, Ayiebia Clarke publishers).
- EAC (2021), *East African Community: Integration Pillars*; www.eac.int (Accessed 18 June 2021).
- Flick, U. (2007), *Managing quality in qualitative research* (London, Sage). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209441>
- Flick, U. (2014), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*, 1st edn (London, Sage).
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1970), *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York, Continuum).
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1993), *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York, Continuum).
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (2012), *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York, Continuum).
- Gillborn, D. (2008), *Racism and education: coincidence or conspiracy?* (London, Routledge). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203928424>
- Harber, C. (2014), *Education and international development: Theory, practice and issues* (Oxford, Symposium).

- hooks, b. (1994), *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (London, Routledge).
- Ibbott, R. (2014), *Ujamaa: The hidden story of Tanzania's socialist village* (London Crossroads Women Centre).
- Kassam, Y. (1995), 'Julius Nyerere', in: *Thinkers on education* (Paris, UNESCO).
- Kenyatta, J. (1965), *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York, Vintage).
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995), 'Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy', *American Educational Research Journal*, 32: 465–491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Maathai, W. (2009), *The challenge for Africa* (London, Arrow).
- Mackay (1981), 'The Mackay Commission Report and recommendations', <https://kenyacradle.com/mackay-commission> (Accessed April 2021).
- McWilliam, E. (2008), 'Unlearning how to teach', *Journal of Innovations in Educational and Teaching International*, 45(3): 263–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290802176147>
- Mercer, N. (2000), *Words and minds: How we use language to think together* (London, Routledge).
- Mercer, N. (2008), 'The seeds of time: Why classroom dialogue needs a temporal analysis', *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(1), 33–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508400701793182>
- Njoya, T.M. (2017), *WE the people: Thinking heavenly acting Kenyanly* (Nairobi, World Alive Publishers).
- Ngugi, M. (2018), *The rise of the African Novel. The politics of language, Identity and Ownership* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9724578>
- Nyerere, J.K. (1968), *Ujamaa: Essays on socialism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Nxumalo, F. & Cedillo, S. (2017), 'Decolonising place in early childhood studies: Thinking with Indigenous onto-epistemologies and Black feminist geographies', *Global studies of Childhood*, 7: 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610617703831>
- Oelofsen, S. (2015), 'Decolonisation of the Africa Mind and intellectual landscape', *Phronimon* Vol. 16.
- Ominde, S.H. (1964), *Kenya Education Commission report* (Nairobi, Government of Kenya).
- Poncian, J. (2015), 'The persistence of western negative perceptions about Africa: Factoring in the role of Africans', *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 7(3): 72–80.
- Republic of Kenya (2015), *National plan of action for children in Kenya 2015–2022*. Available at: www.childrenscouncil.go.ke (accessed 3 April 2018).
- Republic of Kenya (2017), *Basic education curriculum framework: Republic of Kenya*. Kenya: Institute of Curriculum Development. <https://kicd.ac.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CURRICULUMFRAMEWORK.pdf> (Accessed 26 January 2022).
- Rogoff, B. (2003), *The cultural nature of human development* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Said, E.W. (1993), *Culture and imperialism* (London, Chatto & Windus).
- Said, E.W. (1995), *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin).
- Steinberg, S. & Kincheloe, J. (2010), 'Power, emancipation, and complexity: Employing critical theory', *Power and Education*, 2: 140–151. <https://doi.org/10.2304/power.2010.2.2.140>
- Schweisfurth, M. (2014), 'Towards culturally contextualised pedagogies in African schools', *International journal of Education Development in Africa*, 1(1): 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/46>
- Sifuna, D. (2007), 'The Challenge of Increasing Access and Improving Quality: An analysis of Universal Primary Education Interventions in Kenya and Tanzania since the 1970s', *International Review Education*, 53: 687–99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-007-9062-z>
- Tabulawa, R. (2013), *Teaching and learning in context: Why pedagogical reforms fail in sub-Saharan Africa* (Dakar, CODESRIA).
- Thiong'o, N. (1986), *Decolonising the mind* (London, James Currey).
- Telegraph (2017), *Which are the world's kindest countries?* Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk (accessed 1 April 2018).
- Twum-Danso Imoh, A.O. (2016), 'From the Singular to the Plural: Exploring Diversities in Contemporary Childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa', *Childhood*, 23 (3): 455–468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216648746>

- Twum-Danso Imoh, A. (2020), 'Situating the rights vs. culture binary within the context of colonial history in sub-Saharan Africa', in J. Todres & S. King (eds.), *Oxford Handbook on Children's Rights Law* (Oxford, Oxford University Press). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190097608.013.22>
- UNESCO (2015), 'Early childhood care and education', available at: www.unesco.org (Accessed 13 March 2017).
- UWEZO (2012), *Are our children learning? Literacy and numeracy across East Africa* (Nairobi, Uwezo East Africa).
- Wanjohi, A. (2011), *Development of education system in Kenya since Independence*. Kenpro Papers. Available at: www.kenpro.org (accessed 1 October 2014).
- Were, G.S. & Wilson, D.A. (1968), *East Africa through a thousand years: A history of the years AD 1000 to present day* (London, Evans Brothers).
- Wilkinson, I.A.G., Reznitskaya, A., Bourdage, K., Oyler, J., Nelson, K., Glina, M. & Kim, M.-Y. (2016), 'Toward a more dialogic pedagogy: Changing teachers' beliefs and practices through professional development in language arts classrooms', *Language and Education*, 31(1): 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2016.1230129>

To cite the article: Corrado, E.W. (2022), 'Harambee approach: towards decolonising East African education through capturing social-cultural ethos', *Journal of the British Academy*, 10(s2): 135–152.

<https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s2.135>

Journal of the British Academy (ISSN 2052–7217) is published by
The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk