



## Africa Week 2022



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### **African Education: Modernity and Idealism of Africa written by Mr Pule Mmula**

#### **Bio:**

**Pule Mmula** is a final-year LLB student at the University of the Free State. He is an intern at SAGE South Africa, a debate coach at the University of the Free State Debate Society, and a speech and dialogue coach at Eunice School in Bloemfontein.

He is currently a Pan-African Universities Debate Championships quarterfinalist, a Battleground Pro-Am champion and second-best speaker, and the current South Africa National Universities Debate Championships champion. His current academic research is on the role of non-binary text in the law, and the development of non-gendered language.

#### **Abstract:**

The African landscape has for far too long been deemed archaic, ancient in history, and lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially when it came to the development of education in struggling African communities. Although this may be seen as true to Eurocentric thought, a development existed in social, cultural, and legal frameworks – i.e., the regional economic communities – recognised, among others, by the AU (such as the EAC, Arab Maghreb Union, Economic Community of Central African States), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely the diversification of markets, growth of knowledge systems such as higher education institutions, trade, and diplomacy. Although these are but mere stones on a hill, they have foundationally created an avenue of development in higher education throughout the continent – one I think is worthy of grandstanding celebration.

The starting point for evaluating and appreciating the efforts and chains of development, is by looking at academics and philosophers who have dedicated years of research at the crux of what makes for the ideal frame of learning. The likes of Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, who shaped unique features of philosophy, a counternarrative to the archaic nature of Africa being old in thinking, sociology, and linguistics in his book *The Invention of Africa*, or even Sophie Oluwole, who spent half a century researching the intellectual society that Africa has to offer – these are but a few beacons in African education that we look at, as well as the role they have played in our aspiration to construct a unique yet impactful view of higher education in a Pan-African setting. It would be wishful thinking to commend our past achievements while not realising the impact those voices have had on our daily lives.

Beyond the academic thoughts, we can also turn our eyes to the Centre for Collaboration in Africa established by Stellenbosch University, the African Economic Research Consortium under the sub-theme **Research Collaborations – domestic and international**, the African Research Universities Alliance, the University of the Free State Centre for Gender and Africa Studies in partnerships with the University of Ghana and others, the collaboration of Botho University in Botswana, and many more by the UFS. These are some of the continuous relationships formed and built upon the premise of holding and maintaining relations with other African institutions in the coming together of higher education and Africa. According to Dr Cornelius Hagenmeier, Director of the UFS Office for International Affairs, these partnerships and collaborative efforts are critical for the University of the Free State – the UFS wants to grow its partnerships, and therefore requested the Kenyan Education Attaché to connect the UFS with Kenyan partners – these are sentiments shared across the African terrain with directors, students, deans, rectors, staff, and those who live around the university, to have a melting pot of Pan-African-centred higher education.

Notably, the road to a brighter tomorrow need not end there. Jenipher Owuor from the University of British Columbia suggests – more in the Kenyan context, but we can learn from this analysis – that the best approximation to dealing with sustainable development in school curricula is to realise our local capacities under indigenous ideas and integrating this with formal education. What we can already realise, is that there is a place for community and cultural knowledge in spheres of higher education – valiant attempts that we can see today. Realistically speaking, how the Koves Faculty of Law requires an overview of historic and value-centred knowledge with every module. The emancipation of thought and idealism has been growing steadily, with unimaginable results. My valuation is on the need to celebrate the steps that have been taken and the roads paved by those who realise the need to celebrate our African education, that is, 1 225 institutions across the African plane.

A once eminent tool to colonise the African child is one best represented by schools of critical thought, the valuation of intrinsic capacities, and well-sought-out capabilities. African education, especially in higher learning institutions, has enjoyed great glory outside the confines of pre- and present unionisation Africa. For the most part, higher education was fragmented among nations, with the disparity being stark – a relationship of ‘states with more capital boast more robust institutions and research’ while those who are incapacitated suffer, and so the education provided is seen as subpar.

As we are constantly prompted to realise our positions in academic spaces, the privilege that the lotter of birth has given us, our realisation of what we aspire to have and what to be, the role we play in the grander feature of the society and community of higher education – one cannot wander too far from the crevices that we all share but overlook, the reality of our education system being set on the African continent, the intermingling benefits and drawbacks that we can realise, often impacted by management, critical thought, resources, and those who are part of these institutions. It is almost intuitively true that the appreciation of the advancement and robust form of education we receive has had many curves and, as we are aware, potholes. The sufficient response to create and enhance an African-centred harmony in ideology and in higher education is not too far from our grasp.

Let us not wallow in the feats we have created and neglect the shortcomings. It is wise to be awake to the fact that resource shortages, capital flight in less affluent states, saturated markets, and mismanaged institutions are tainting the dream of adequately celebrating how far African higher education has come.

I implore you, me, states, leaders, and activists to create strategies that will not only rival those of larger economies and states, but strategies that the African child can best relate to and that can best protect them, hone them, and equip them with enough capacities to make them successful, while embodying the reality, namely that African higher education ought to live within us for a long time. We are the generation that is comfortable with creating platforms of conversation – let us use those to further develop and see ourselves beyond the physical lens of colour, borders, language, and ethnicity.

Every day, as you walk, as you learn, as you engage various individuals and their realities, be cognisant of Africa Day not being a day on which we rock our traditional attire and ululate the coming together of all Africans – but as a step to reflect, rejoice, and remember that we are the sum of our efforts, that being African goes beyond what we can see, but rather what we embody.