



THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS VS THE SUCCESS OF THE DEGREE?

By: Titus Ngatia

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The Degree Of Success Vs The Success Of The Degree?

The ongoing heated political debate in Kenya about the requirement of a university degree as per the law for aspiring gubernatorial and presidential candidates has brought about a healthy and much needed discussion on matters *QUALIFICATIONS* and *COMPETENCIES* of public leaders.

First and foremost, which qualifications? And within those qualifications, what *COMPETENCIES* are we really in pursuit of relating to leadership positions? Where is room for professional development outside of one being admitted to a university degree? What of TVET graduates and other tertiary merits attained in tertiary institutions? Entrepreneurial career paths? Experiential real-life career learning? What of those who are auto-didacts and outliers like the *late Richard Leakey* or the *late Bob Cullimore*? *I find that fixating attention exclusively to the presence or absence of a University degree amounts to a considerable alienation of a large assortment of COMPETENCIES/PROFESSIONAL MERITS gained by individuals in the course of their career paths. Should we review that law and broaden the scope with a view to searching for SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES without necessarily pigeonholing it to 'degree certificate' only? I would imagine for instance that an accomplished entrepreneur who can build enterprise from scratch into a large group of companies would easily be in possession of the Competencies one would need say to be governor or President. In the 21st century, we ought to consider that things are disruptive, dynamic, and not necessarily rigid and linear as in the previous centuries. It is the COMPETENCIES and CAPACITY that we are in search of. Is it not? People like the late Richard Leakey had no need for undergraduate degree in his domain as he had attained the requisite COMPETENCIES within Palaeoanthropology by way of apprenticeship and real-life experiential learning from his Father. He may not have had the traditional 'degree certificate' in the strict sense of the word but had mastered his craft with erudition. All this is not to conveniently give incompetent politicians a through pass BUT rather to help us reflect, develop a robust and much more dynamic rubric that will be able to CAPTURE the FULL SPECTRUM of Talent, Skill, and Capacities that the framers of the constitution desired within our unprecedented, technology powered 21st Century.* I firmly believe that their goal was to arrive at **COMPETENT LEADERS**. *What COMPETENCIES are we searching for in the Leaders we seek?*

A degree certificate, while important, is not exclusive evidence of a person's *COMPETENCIES* especially when it comes to general positions like Leadership or entrepreneurship or art etc. **For the record, according to UNESCO, between the year 2010 and 2030 there will be more academic degrees churned out by universities than since the beginning of the entire formal education system.** Thus, as is already happening now in Kenya, *academic inflation* will be such that a degree (undergraduate) will soon become like a Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) certificate. It will be deemed that everyone has his or hers. It will not be a

statement of unique value outside of being complemented by relevant *DEMONSTRABLE COMPETENCIES, SKILLS, and CAPACITIES*. For Example, currently I know of certain Engineering firms in Kenya that prefer working with polytechnic diploma holders as they find them being more practically exposed to the field of work compared to certain university graduates who they consider being green and versed with only theory and wanting when it comes to practical work. It is *COMPETENCIES* that make room for an individual. A degree certificate is a good thing but way more is needed in the REAL world of work. *What COMPETENCIES are we searching for in the Leaders we seek?*

The scope of human skills, abilities, intelligences, and Capacities is extremely broad and cannot be exclusively captured only by the matrix of a degree. Hence it essential to broaden the scope of assessment especially on general positions such as leadership, and entrepreneurship.

A University education is great. By all means one should attain it if they chose to. The scope of MEASUREMENT/ASSESSMENT of Competencies, is what I am passionately arguing, **MUST NOT BE LIMITED** exclusively to a university degree in the same rigidity that a builder uses a plumb line in construction. It must be flexible and attracted towards diverse *COMPETENCIES* possessed by a given candidate. Moreover, an A on paper may not always mean an A in *COMPETENCIES and SKILLS*. There is also the issue of cramming and rote learning and people may produce the As under pressure without intimate grasp or exploration of the content nor real life interaction with the subject. Furthermore, there is equally the issue of 'fake degrees' and a times the line is so thin. It may be impossible to prove say Politician X, Y or Z's degree validity though OFFICIALLY they may very well be certified graduates and in possession of THE DEGREE CERTIFICATE. I am not opposed to university degrees. I am opposed to making them the high watermark of human achievement or the Plumb line/SI UNIT measure of a person's capacity/intelligence or abilities. Human intelligence and Capacity are broad and diverse. I would even rather that there be a professional body tasked with ascertainment of whether or not an individual possesses the Capacity they may claim on paper. This professional body would thus be CERTIFYING a person's STATED *COMPETENCIES* and VALIDATING PRIOR LEARNING in a wholistic caption of a person's TRUE capacities and real skills and Competencies

Outside of the ongoing drama about the degrees and whether they be genuine or not, we will need after elections to come back to this topic with sobriety and wisdom. My admonition to country is in the words of Alvin Toffler: ***'The illiterate person of the 21st Century will not merely be the person who cannot read or write BUT equally the one who cannot Learn, Unlearn and relearn.'*** Let us welcome an even richer debate on this hot topic. Hopefully in a wholistic and detailed fashion in a way that benefits posterity in the next 50 years.



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Titus Ngatia is a Kenyan entrepreneur and advisor on Emotional Intelligence (EQ). He is the Founder and C.E.O of *Effortless Insight Africa*, transforming Africa through Education and Entrepreneurship. Currently the convener of the conference Future of Education & Work in Africa 2023. The conference will culminate in the unveiling of an Incubation Hub focused on EdTech, Innovation, Research and Design. He served in the *National Steering Committee on Curriculum Reforms* and the Academic Board of the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD).

He was selected Judge in the *Global Creative Business Cup* (Copenhagen), by the Creative Business Network (Denmark) & sponsored by *Mercedes-Benz* which entailed Innovative startups from **80+ countries**. His company was among the 250 Kenyan companies invited to the inaugural *EU- Kenya Business Forum* as part of the *EU Global Gateway strategy*.

He is multilingual, speaks fluent French having attended the *Universite d'Orleans*, France and holds a *B.A in International Relations* from the *United States International University- Africa (USIU-A)* and is currently *M.A in International Relations* with a concentration in *Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*.



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