

Intellectual agency and curriculum reform: The contribution of Bethwell Allan Ogot to basic education in Kenya (1964–2025)

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<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.3.116>

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how Bethwell Allan Ogot contributed to the evolution of basic education in Kenya from 1964 to 2025. Although Ogot is recognised as being a prominent figure in African historiography and higher learning leadership, his long-term impact on primary and secondary education has been minimally tackled systematically. This paper fills that gap by examining the influence that the intellectual work of Ogot, his advocacy of curriculum, his publishing projects, and his involvement in the education policy argument had on the content, orientation, and purpose of basic education in post-independent Kenya. The research is also based on the interpretive paradigm and uses historical research methods to collect, analyse, and present data. The main sources are oral interviews, Kenya National Archives records, school and institutional records, and church records, and secondary sources are books, journal articles, and theses, among other published resources. Internal and external criticism was applied to all the sources to make sure that they are historically credible. Critical policy historiography and theory of development are also used to inform the analysis, which allows Ogot to place his interventions into the wider context of post-colonial education reforms, Africanisation of knowledge, and nation-building agendas. The results demonstrate that Ogot had concrete contributions to basic education by his support of African-centred history education, leadership in indigenous textbook publishing, encouragement of oral tradition as a valid pedagogical tool, and continued work with community-based schools. Ogot impacted the realm of scholarship but also put into practice interventions that transformed the way Kenyan learners engaged with history, citizenship, and national identity. The article adds to the education history as it foreshadows personal intellectual agency in curriculum reform and shows the usefulness of the biographical method to the explanation of post-independence educational change.

Keywords: African-Centred Knowledge; Bethwell Allan Ogot; Basic Education; Curriculum Reform; Educational Policy; History Education; Historiography, Post-Independence Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Basic education held a pivotal position in the post-independence development agenda in Kenya, as it was a major site where citizenship, national identity, and historical consciousness were created, in the curriculum at independence in 1963. The inherited colonial education system, especially in the primary and secondary levels, was influenced by the curricula that supported European histories, values, and epistemologies and marginalised African experiences and indigenous knowledge regimes (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna & Otiende, 1994). Though colonial schooling was not practiced in one way, its prevailing orientation restricted the range within which African learners experienced their own past and social realities.

The reforms that were initiated after independence, which most prominently took place after the Ominde Report of 1964, attempted to overcome these constraints through increasing access, reframing the curricula, and reevaluating the role of schooling along national development priorities (Ominde, 1964; Sifuna, 1990). The teaching of history at the basic level of education became one of the disputed areas in this reform atmosphere. Africa had been frequently represented in colonial syllabi as a historyless continent that perpetuated and strengthened the hierarchical convictions of civilisation and progress (Rodney, 1972; Mazrui, 1986). The process of reclaiming the African history in schools thus became not only an academic one, but a wider political and cultural venture in relation to nation-building and formation of post-colonial identities (Ochieng', 1985; Zeleza, 1997).

The intellectuals in Africa were instrumental in criticizing models of education inherited and expressing alternative pedagogical visions. Other intellectuals like Julius Nyerere and Ngugi wa Thiong'o had pointed to the importance of education that would be African histories, African languages, and African values so that critical, independent citizens were generated (Nyerere, 1967; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). This broader discussion of decolonisation education has been amply recorded, but little has been said about how these conceptions were varied into practical interventions at the level of basic education, by individual scholars in Kenya, in the form of curriculum advocacy, textbook production, advisory work, and in working with schools.



Bethwell Allan Ogot is a good example of such an intellectual whose work cuts across history, education, and policy. His work in the fields of African historiography and leadership in higher education is a long-established phenomenon (Ochieng' & Ogot, 1989; Spear, 2004), but his lifelong interest in basic education has never been systematically studied. However, the work of Ogot as a scholar, participant in curriculum discussion, supporter of indigenous publication, and advisor to reforms in the education sector had a major influence on the way history and social studies were being conceptualised and taught in Kenyan primary and secondary schools since 1964 (Ogot, 1967; Ogot, 1972; Ogot, 1999).

Contribution in this article is viewed in the intellectual and institutional sense. On the intellectual level, it is the contribution of Ogot in legitimising the historical knowledge of African-centred history, oral tradition, and indigenous views as foundational learning at the school level (Vansina, 1965; Ogot, 1967). At an institutional level, it involves his involvement in curriculum discourses, textbook writing, education commissions, and community-based education programs that influenced the material circumstances under which learners came to know about history (Sifuna, 1990; Ochieng', 2005). The measure of influence is determined by evidence of policy work, publication output, use of texts and curriculum concepts, and the statements of teachers and institutions who have come into contact with his work.

Notably, symbolic influence, which includes the Ogot as a well-known public intellectual espousing the African-centred education, and structural impact, which involves the actual alteration of the content of the curriculum, the production of textbooks, and the pedagogical direction in basic education, are distinguished in this study. Although reforms in the education sector in Kenya have been examined by looking at state policy and institutional frameworks, there is a danger that these two approaches overlook the intellectual agency in defining what was taught and taught in a way that it was taught (Bogonko, 1992; Mutula, 2002). This has added to a partial understanding of the way the change of curriculum has taken place outside the official policy announcements.

The article fills that missing gap by analyzing the contribution made by Bethwell Allan Ogot in enhancing basic education in Kenya between 1964 and 2025. It examines the impact of his intellectual writings, curriculum promotion, publishing projects, and interaction with schools on the impartation of history and the overall purpose of basic education in post-independent Kenya. The situational context of Ogot interventions in broader educational reform and knowledge Africanisation processes identifies the importance of the individual intellectual agency in facilitating curriculum change and adds to the historiography of Kenyan education.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Since its independence, Kenya has undertaken several reforms to transition basic education from a colonial tool of social control to national development, cultural identity, and citizenship. The available literature on Kenyan education has thus paid great attention to policy frameworks, institutional reforms, curriculum restructuring, and access pointers (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna & Otiende, 1994). Although this literature has been useful in recording the structural change, it has paid minimal attention to the role of individual African thinkers in determining the contents and the pedagogical direction of basic education, especially in teaching history at the primary and secondary levels.

Bethwell Allan Ogot is commonly considered one of the best African historians and a key advocate of Kenyan and African historiography. Nevertheless, the available literature has focused more on his works in the academic sphere and his contributions to higher education, and little has been done on his persistence in the field of basic education. However, beginning in 1964, Ogot became an active critic of Eurocentric school curricula, a supporter of African-centred accounts of history, a defender of oral tradition as a pedagogic tool, and a partisan in textbook writing and curriculum controversies that involved primary and secondary education. This lack of specific studies on such contributions has led to an incomplete picture of the process through which historical knowledge was reoriented in favor of Kenyan learners during the post-independence era. This gap is critical to filling in on the contribution of intellectual agency to curriculum change and in building a more comprehensive history of basic education in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To establish the contributions of Bethwell Allan Ogot to the development of basic education in Kenya between 1964 and 2025.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The paper is informed by two theoretical frameworks that are complementary, Critical Policy Historiography and Development Theory, namely its post-colonial developmentalist variant. These frameworks, combined, offer an analytical point of view to the work of Bethwell Allan Ogot on the contributions to basic education by placing curriculum reform, historical knowledge, and pedagogical practice in larger contexts of political, ideological, and developmental consideration. Rather than treating education as a neutral or purely technical enterprise, these frameworks foreground

education as a contested space where power, knowledge, and national aspirations intersect. They are therefore well-suited to analysing how Ogot's intellectual interventions influenced the content and orientation of basic education in post-independence Kenya.

2.1.1 Critical Policy Historiography

Critical policy historiography focuses on the dynamic between power, policy, and historical knowledge, which claims that education policy and curriculum are not neutral but are influenced by hegemonic political and ideological interests. The framework comes in quite handy when examining how colonial education policies have organised school curricula to advantage Eurocentric histories and disadvantage African histories and knowledge regimes (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992; Bogonko, 1992).

In this sense, the work by Ogot regarding the participation in basic education can be viewed as an intellectual intervention process, directed at breaking the colonial historical discourses enshrined in the primary and secondary school curricula. His demand for African-centred history conflicted with inherited syllabi that only showed Africa passively, without history or with a lesser culture. Ogot helped to interpret the ideological background of the teaching of history in post-independent Kenya by insisting on the inclusion of African experiences, oral traditions, and other locally based histories in the school curriculum (Ogot, 1967; Ochieng', 1985). Critical policy historiography can also be used to study the way in which the ideas of Ogot were interplayed with post-independence curriculum changes, especially those changes that attempted to localise content in the wake of the Ominde Report (1964). His intellectual involvement in education policy discussion bore the wider conflict of who owned knowledge on history and how the same knowledge was passed to young learners who were attending school in Kenya.

2.1.2 Development Theory

The study adopts a post-colonial developmentalist strand of development theory, which views education as a central instrument for nation-building, social integration, and long-term socio-economic transformation in newly independent states. In this perspective, basic education extends beyond skills acquisition to include the formation of citizenship, historical consciousness, and cultural identity (Yesufu, 1973; Sifuna, 1990). This strand is especially applicable to the Kenyan post-independence case, in which education was clearly tied to the national developmental agenda, the Africanisation process in the institutions, and the building of a unified national identity. Reform education was based on development needs that aimed at changing schooling as a tool of colonial socialisation into a source of national unity and self-identification.

Ogot has a lot to do with this post-colonial developmentalist perspective in terms of basic education. His support of the inclusion of African and Kenyan history in primary and secondary education was founded on the ideology that the knowledge of history was a crucial part of nation-building and civic duty. He looked at education as the process of empowering students to learn about their history and find their place in the national past and contribute positively to the development that came after independence (Ogot, 1972; Ogot, 1999). In the Kenyan case, state-based reforms furnished policy guiding the change of the curriculum, but Ogot's intellectual interventions furnished most of the content-based and pedagogical rationale of African-centred history in basic schools. The development theory, therefore, assists in placing his work in a greater national agenda that connected education, historical sensitization, and post-colonial developmental concerns.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical literature about the contributions made by Ogot to education may be categorised into three topics pertinent to this research: his contribution to the historical knowledge, his impact on the reforms of the curriculum in basic education, and his contribution to the development of the African-centred historical consciousness of the school learners.

2.2.1 Ogot's Scholarly Contributions and School History

The work of Bethwell Allan Ogot was a groundbreaking contribution to the rewriting of the content of African history to be taught in schools. His most famous book, *History of the Southern Luo* (Ogot, 1967), was a breakthrough in colonial historiography because it was written from an indigenous perspective of African history. Despite being mainly an academic text, it had ramifications for elementary education by showing that African cultures had a multi-layered history that could be recorded and incorporated into the school curriculum (Spear, 2004). The oral tradition as a source of historical information was given a legitimate status by Ogot, who opposed the colonial privileging of written archives (Vansina, 1965). This paradigm shift was vital in the field of basic education, in which simplified and locally appropriate historical accounts were required to teach and learn effectively. Through the validation of oral history, Ogot increased the scope of pedagogical materials to be used by history teachers and curriculum developers (Ogot, 1967; Diop, 1974).

2.2.2 Ogot and Curriculum Reform in Basic Education

The effect of Ogot was not only on the scholarly work but also on the debates of curriculum reform at the primary and secondary levels. He had always believed that school history must mirror African experience and help build national identity instead of re-creating the colonial worldviews (Ogot, 1972; Ochieng' & Ogot, 1989). His thoughts were used in the general post-independence period to Africanise the curriculum via the Ominde reforms and other syllabus reviews (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994). According to scholars, the problem of curriculum reforms in Kenya was characterized by a lack of structure, such as colonial heritage, a lack of textbooks, and ideological opposition (Bogonko, 1992). In this regard, the intellectual leadership of Ogot served to legitimize African-centred content and promote the creation of textbooks and teaching aids that were based on Kenyan history. His input was not limited to the implementation of policies but also to the creation of an intellectual atmosphere that facilitated curriculum change.

2.2.3 African-Centred History and Post-Colonial Schooling.

The work of Ogot should also be viewed in the context of the general decolonisation of knowledge in African education. The fact that the African viewpoint is central to his teaching of history echoed the decolonisation of the mind and the idea of restoring cultural self-esteem through schooling (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). According to Zeleza (2003), African historians tried to re-take historical agency by contesting colonial histories, a task in which Ogot was at the center of the project. Ogot helped shape the historical consciousness of Kenyan students by affecting the conceptualisation of African history to be taught in schools. This input associated fundamental education with broader post-colonial objectives of nation-building, citizenship creation, and cultural revitalization (Mamdani, 1996; Mkandawire, 2005).

2.2.4 The Country of Origin of Ogot in Primary Education.

The legacy of Ogot in basic education is his intellectual promotion, over a long period, of African-centred education and historical pedagogy. His work also had an impact not just to the historian but also to the teacher, curriculum developers, and policymakers who were interested in the role of history in schooling. Ogot assisted in reinforcing the African experience and legitimising native knowledge systems by foregrounding African experiences and establishing a new understanding of basic education as an intellectual empowerment process instead of the colonial socialisation process (Ochieng', 2005; Sifuna, 1990). Regardless of this impact, the literature has paid much attention to the contribution of Ogot in higher education and historiography, yet his contribution in basic education has not been fully discussed. This paper addresses that gap by exploring how his intellectual input influenced the content of the curriculum, the orientation of pedagogy, and historical cognizance in post-independent Kenyan primary and secondary schools.

Collectively, the empirical literature has placed Ogot as a giant in the African historiography and the post-independence education ideology. It exposes, however, a very evident gap: his long-term involvement in the field of basic education, as an area in which historical knowledge has been simplified, institutionalised, and passed on to young students, has not been systematically surveyed. The available literature is biased towards privileging higher education, policy frameworks, and academic production without paying adequate attention to the ways Ogot's ideas have informed the content of the curriculum, pedagogical orientation, and historical consciousness of primary and secondary education. This essay fills that gap by exploring the contributions of Ogot as a founder of basic education with reference to curriculum advocacy, textbook development, the legitimisation of oral tradition as a teaching resource, and the long-term intellectual engagement. In doing so, it can focus more on the issue of individual intellectual agency in molding post-independence basic education in Kenya rather than institutional reform as the sole factor.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In this research, the qualitative research paradigm and interpretive paradigm were used to assess the role that Bethwell Allan Ogot played in the development of basic education in Kenya between 1964 and 2025. The historical approach was suitable since the research aimed at not measuring outcomes but how the curriculum orientation, educational thinking, and policy influence had changed with time. This design allowed one to reconstruct and interpret the interventions of Ogot in the wider framework of post-independence education reforms and Africanisation of school curricula. It was the interpretive paradigm that allowed the analysis of meanings, ideas, and intentions that were entrenched in historical texts, policy documents, and intellectual discussions surrounding the issue of basic education. Following the accepted historical methodology, every source had its share of external criticism, which determined its authenticity and provenance, and internal criticism, which determined its credibility, consistency, and contextual meaning (Gottschalk, 1969). This procedure was successful in making sure that the roles of Ogot in the foundation of

education were evidence-based and well-established in the historical and ideological circumstances in post-independent Kenya.

3.2 Study Area and Sources of Data

The research took place in Kenya, and the developments in the basic education after independence became the main empirical setting. Primary data comprised of archival records that were obtained in the Kenya National Archives and other institutional collections. These comprised curriculum reports, education commission documents, policy papers, official correspondence, and other documents on reforms in primary and secondary education after independence. The published literature by Bethwell Allan Ogot, such as books, essays, and edited volumes, peer-reviewed journal articles, education histories, and scholarly commentaries on the subject of curriculum reform, history education, and African-centred pedagogy in Kenya, was a source of secondary data. The sources have been chosen due to the fact that they shed light on the intellectual stance of Ogot on school-based history education and his activity in the national discussions on education and citizenship. Besides this, oral historical information was gathered by interviewing the chosen informants with firsthand or indirect experience of Ogot's interaction with basic education, which included former co-workers, education practitioners, and community members related to institutions in which he had exercised his influence.

3.3 Selection of Oral Informants and Data Collection Procedures

The selection of oral informants was done using purposive sampling, depending on their relevance to the study objectives. The criteria used to select the interviewees were: that they had interacted with Ogot professionally or in an institution previously; had been involved in curriculum development, textbook production, or school governance based on his ideas; and had a long-term presence in the Kenyan education sector. Snowball sampling was applied selectively to find additional informants who had specialised or contextual knowledge that could not be found in the archives. The oral interviews were based on the semi-structured interview guide that enabled the informants to think about the role played by Ogot in the basic education, and still gave flexibility to expand and clarify. The interviews to be held in 2024 and 2025 were also strategically planned as they would provide a retrospective view of the overall impact of Ogot on community schools, especially his involvement in curriculum arguments and his involvement in publishing on education. These oral testimonies were not focused on as independent forms of evidence but as interpretive supplements of archival and documentary evidence. To overcome the possibility of memory bias, oral evidence was corroborated with the contemporary written materials, such as policy documents, published materials by Ogot, and institutional records. In cases where differences existed, preference went to corroborated evidence or distinctly contextualised meanings, as is customary to African oral historiography (Vansina, 1985).

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic historical analysis using the approach of chronological reconstruction and interpretive analysis was used to analyze data. Archival records, published sources, and interview transcripts were reread and coded multiple times to determine the recurring themes connected to curriculum Africanisation, history education, national identity, textbook development, and post-colonial educational reform. The interpretation of these themes using critical policy historiography was done by placing these interventions of Ogot within the wider context of power dynamics, ideological politics, and policy discourse that informed the provision of basic education. Education was framed through development theory (in its post-colonial and nation-building mode of orientation) to construct it as a means of cultural regeneration, the development of a citizenry, and national development over the long term. The combination of these frames allowed examining both the structural framework of the educational change and the contribution of individual intellectual agency to it.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

There were ethical standards that were followed when conducting historical research. The use of archival materials has been carried out under the institutional guidelines, and all the resources have been referenced correctly to give credit to the intellectual property. All oral informants provided informed consent and were not identified, unless they agreed to be identified expressly. It did not take the chance of selective or decontextualised use of evidence, and interpretations were represented accurately to showcase historical actors and contexts. The research was ethical as it followed the principles of transparency, accuracy, and scholarly integrity, where both the documentary accounts and the living informants were ethically responsible.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Contribution to Basic Education, 1964 to 2025

The time right after Kenya gained independence in 1963 was one of the most radical in the education history of Kenya. It was extensively known that education was the main driving force of national unification, economic growth, and Africanisation of leadership in all social aspects (Bogonko, 1992; Court and Ghai, 1974; Ojiambo, 2009). The independent state had a pressing challenge of unravelling colonial education systems, which were racially stratified, economically discriminatory, and intellectually based on Eurocentric worldviews (Buchmann, 1999; Sifuna, 1990; Rodney, 1972). Curriculum reform, teacher expansion, and equitable access were presented in the policy documents of the early independence period, the Ominde Commission Report of 1964 being the most notable among the most important in the country (Ominde, 1964; KNA/ED/1/14/32; Republic of Kenya, 1981). It is in this fluid and demanding space that African intellectuals, scholars, church leaders, and policy actors took new roles in defining the course of basic education (Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson, 1996; Lulat, 2005; Sifuna & Otiende, 1994).

Ogot came at a time when many African scholars were subordinated to their colonial masters, a time when he was among the few African scholars whose intellectual orientation, academic training, and engagements in the public domain placed him in a position of impacting the national discourse on education reconstruction (Liyai, 1998; Spear, 2004; Weidman, Bag, and Maseno, 2020). Even though his main contribution was in the area of historiography, he played a significant part in the field of basic education (1964-2013) and advisory and symbolic roles (up to his death in early 2025). Based on his education at Makerere, St Andrews, and Oxford, Ogot joined the few African academicians who advocated an educational system that supported African histories, identities, cultures, as well as developmental goals (Ogot, 1999, 2001; Ogot and Ochieng', 1995). His thought encroached upon more general post-independent discussions about the production of knowledge, Africanisation and the necessity of reforming the curriculum in such a way that the knowledge content taught in schools would be relevant to local experiences instead of replicating colonial knowledge production (Mazrui, 1978, 1986, 1990; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Sifuna, 1990).

Outside the realms of formal policy, Ogot always stressed the organic connection between basic education and general social change. In his general lectures, as well as conference papers and informal mentoring of young scholars and teachers, he claimed that primary and secondary education played a crucial role in the success of university reforms in terms of their strength, cultural base, and inclusion (Ogot, 1999, 2011; Ogot & Ochieng', 1995). The testimonies of oral people working at the university also confirm that he repeatedly claimed that basic education was the cornerstone of a meaningful university system and that without a curriculum that was based on African realities, higher education would remain intellectually dependent and out of touch with social reality (O.I. Wanyande, 28/10/2024; O.I. Mukhwana, 3/11/2024; O.I. Mutua, 4/11/2024).

His impact on elementary education thus worked on a few levels. At the national policy level, he was involved in commissions and working parties whose recommendations influenced teacher preparation, the examination system, and curriculum orientation. His expertise in native publishing and educational trusts in the publishing industry influenced the writing and distribution of school reading materials and textbooks. In the community, his lifelong participation in schools like Luanda A.C. Primary and St Mary School, Yala, was a demonstration of his belief that intellectuals had a civic duty to enhance the education of the rural community. The combination of these functions made him a negotiator between the state policy and institutional reform and the realities of the local school.

In this section, we look at the contribution of Ogot to basic education in three dimensions that are related to each other. To begin with, it places his work in the context of post-independence educational reform in general, referring to the structural limitations and ideological arguments within which his interventions occurred (Section 4.3.1). Second, it evaluates his initial interest in curriculum controversies and national commissions and textbook publishing politics between 1964 and 1969, demonstrating how he contributed to the expression of an African-centred vision of basic schooling. Third, it discusses his institution-building and community-level activities, such as his activities with rural schools and local education boards, and evaluates the challenges, controversies, and constraints that surrounded these activities (Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4). Through the following dimensions, the section shows that through the contribution of basic education, Ogot was not operating on the margins but in the centre part of a wider project he had of decolonising knowledge and ensuring that education corresponded to the post-independence ambition of Kenya.

4.1.1 Historical Context of Basic Education in Early Post-Independence Kenya

The first decade following Kenya's independence in 1963 was characterised by hard work to overcome and destroy the image of a racially stratified colonial system of education. Basic education under British rule was not aimed at becoming a tool of the universal development of human beings, but was a machine to create a semi-skilled work force which was germane to the requirements of the colonial economy (Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1925; Buchmann, 1999; Sifuna, 1990). The African children received minimal literacy, basic arithmetic, and crude vocational training that enhanced colonial relationships and discouraged critical or political awareness (Bogonko, 1992; Natsoulas, 1998).

The system discriminated against education in a structural balance between Europeans and Asians and gave Africans poor-quality education due to their low socio-economic status (Eshiwani, 1993; Court and Ghai, 1974; Berman, 1992). Kenya had an unequal structure of curriculum, quality, and opportunity during independence (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994; Ojiambo, 2009). It was thus urgent that the new African government needed to rebuild rudimentary education based on national hopes of unity, economic development, and human dignity (Republic of Kenya, 1981; Sifuna, 1990).

The first significant effort to define these new priorities was undertaken by the Kenya Education Commission of 1964, headed by Professor Simeon H. Ominde. The Ominde Report criticised the colonial curriculum as culturally alien and socially divisive and placed an appeal to the country to restructure its education system into national integration, development of African identity, and the production of skilled human resources needed to modernise (Ominde, 1964; KNA/ED/1/14/32). It recommended the abolishment of racial segregation in education, the intensification of teacher education, staffing on an Africanisation basis, and the inculcation of African history and culture in the curriculum (Ominde, 1964; Sifuna, 1990; Eshiwani, 1993). Even though the implementation of the report was a break with the colonial order in terms of ideology, the report was not fully implemented due to structural constraints such as insufficient funding, scarcity of trained teachers and the prevalence of the Cambridge examination system that restrained local pedagogical innovation until the 1970s (Eshiwani, 1993; Sifuna & Otiende, 1992; Sifuna, 1998).

Urgent educational reforms were also influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of early independent Africa. On the continent, leaders like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Leopold Senghor all believed that education needed to be the foundation of cultural recovery and economic revival (Nyerere, 1967; Nkrumah, 1964; Ajayi et al., 1996). In Kenya, Africanisation was, however, not a smooth and silent process. There was a debate among policymakers on whether Africanisation meant expatriate staff replacement, localisation of content in curricula, or restructuring of knowledge to give African epistemology an advantage (Sifuna, 1990; Mazrui, 1995, 2000).

The following issues are reflective of tensions in historiography: scholars like Otiende (as discussed in (Sifuna, 1995; Sifuna & Otiende, 2006) point to the survival of colonial institutions as a constraint to the reforms of the first decade, whereas others, including Court (1980) and Eshiwani (1993), see the period as one of guarded but fruitful transition as instigated by African intellectual agency. Among the most politically charged issues in such a turbulent landscape was the control of the production of curriculum and textbooks. Even in the early years of independence, the content taught in Kenyan schools was still influenced by the colonial publishing industry, which was dominated by British publishing firms like Macmillan, Longman, and Heinemann (Kelly & Altbach, 1978; Mazrui, 1995). Textbooks continued to be the instruments of Eurocentric discourses that excluded African histories and world perceptions (Rodney, 1972; Diop, 1974; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Any attempt to create locally written material was opposed by the foreign publishers, who were also worried about losing their dominance in the market.

These companies enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the school textbook market, and this created a structural obstacle to educational indigenisation (KNA/MOE/GE/58/64; KNA/PR/7/31; KNA/MOE/HE/3/41). It is in this fertile land, as will be seen later, that new African-owned publishing enterprises, such as the East African Publishing House and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, emerged as important tools of asserting intellectual independence (Ogot, 2011; Ogot, 1999; Mazrui, 1995).

The post-independence government was facing deep-rooted structural constraints regardless of reformist optimism. The issue of teacher shortage was also burning, as by 1963, less than one-fifth of the primary school teachers had professional training (Eshiwani, 1993; Sifuna, 1990; Spear, 2004). The government was limited by financial restraints to develop infrastructure or even have sufficient learning resources (Mwiria & Nyukuri, 1994; Wangenge-Ouma, 2008). There were regional imbalances, particularly between previously advantaged regions of the settlers and the marginalised rural divisions (Bogonko, 1992; Republic of Kenya, 1997). There were also sociocultural tensions that complicated the efforts to make reform; there were clashes between the missionary interests, conservative administrators, and communities fearful of fast change, and the need to integrate African cultural content (Buchmann, 1999; Strayer, 1978; Ward & Stanley, 2000).

These limitations provide a critical context for the assessment of the works of individual researchers who attempted to impact policy and practice at this time. This situation provided space for African intellectuals to influence the discourses of elementary education. As the nation did not have enough experience in the field of curriculum development, analysis of education policies, teacher education, and designing texts, the contribution of scholars to the creation of new educational philosophies and institutional orientation grew significantly (Ajayi et al., 1996; Sifuna & Otiende, 1992; Weidman, 2020). Their involvement was a more general continental process, where African scholars were able to identify themselves as researchers but also as nation-builders (Mkandawire, 2005; Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1995; Mazrui & Wondji, 1993).

It was here that Ogot started to have a substantive interest in the basic education sector of Kenya. His orientation to African history, approach to training in oral tradition, and his ascending intellectual authority placed him on the national discourse over content, purpose, and direction of basic education (Ogot, 1967, 1972, 1980; Ogot and Were, 1968; Vansina, 1965, 1985). However, his interventions were influenced by the modern situation as well as its structural

and ideological demands, including the subsequent Gachathi (1976) and Mackay (1981) policy changes, which were still grappling with issues of curriculum relevance, equity, and national development (Republic of Kenya, 1976, 1981; Sifuna, 1990; Ojiambo, 2009).

4.1.2 Early Engagement with Basic Education, 1964 – 1969

Between 1964 and 1969, Ogot's engagement with basic education intensified through policy consultations, curriculum debates, and educational publishing. Although formally a university-based historian, he participated actively in national discussions on education reform, arguing that curriculum transformation was inseparable from broader struggles over epistemic authority and cultural independence (Ogot, 1967; Ogot, 1972).

The fact that he was appointed to national working parties, such as the 1969 Working Party on the Establishment of National Universities, shows how his influence was indirectly felt in basic education by influencing system-wide coherence between primary and secondary education and tertiary education (KNA/ED/1/14/78). According to the records of the archives, these debates focused more on teacher preparation, continuity of curriculum, and harmonisation of schooling with the national development objectives.

One of the main lines of the influence of Ogot was educational publishing. He was the champion of textbooks and supplementary readers that were authored locally to pre-empt African historical experience, formulating them in 1965 as Chairman of the East African Publishing House (Kelly & Altbach, 1978; Mazrui, 1995). By 1972, EAPH had released about 500 books, several of which took their places in the Kenyan school curriculum. This was a structural intervention in the curriculum provision in that it questioned the domination of the British publishers and reorientation of the knowledge system through which the content of schools was being disseminated to the learners (Ogot, 1999; Ogot, 2011).

This was highly associated with his participation in the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, which integrated both educational publishing and social redistribution by using scholarships and support of schools (KNA/PR/7/31). All these were not only philanthropic but also an expression of the belief by Ogot that curriculum reform needed the imposition of authority over production, distribution, and access to educational material. Archival documents make it clear that this stand made him go head-on with foreign publishing houses, and the political economy of curriculum reform comes out (Mazrui, 1995).

4.1.3 Community-Level Educational Development and Institution Building

Ogot added value to basic education beyond the national policy and publishing by contributing to the community-level on a long-term basis. His experience in Luanda A.C. Primary School, St Mary's Yala Secondary School, and Jubilee High School explains how intellectual advocacy was converted into institutional development.

At the Board of the Mexican cinema Luanda A.C., he headed infrastructural improvements, sanitation, and governance reforms at the time, while he was a Board member at the cinema since 1995 (Luanda A.C. Board Minutes, 1995-1997; O.I. Oketch, 23/10/2024). The same interventions in St Mary Yala were aimed at recruiting teachers, modernizing the laboratory, and diversifying the curriculum, which led to the positive changes in academic performance and the stability of the institution (O.I. Okoth, 3/11/2024).

To a greater degree of institution building, the establishment and growth of Jubilee High School in 1984 was more direct. Ogot showed that private efforts can be used to augment the objectives of the government to educate the masses by converting a little private school into a respectable secondary school (Ali, 2022; Moi University Archives, 2005). Such initiatives were streamlined by the Yala Jamii Foundation, which granted bursaries and learning resources to underprivileged students, strengthening the system of education as a means of social mobility and not elite reproduction. Notably, this research identifies the difference between personal philanthropy and the impact of structure. Although bursaries and school improvements were a show of individual input, Ogot was able to introduce these as a part of governance frameworks, curriculum arguments, and sustainability of the institution over the long term.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The paper has looked at the role played by Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot in the evolution of basic education in Kenya between 1964 and 2025, which included curriculum reform, educational publishing, policy involvement, and building institutions at the community level. The results show that Ogot played a significant role in the fundamental education that lasted beyond academic scholarship into the restructuring of the school curriculum, instructional resources, and the priority of education during the post-independence era. The analysis demonstrates that Ogot contributed greatly to the Africanisation of elementary education by his unrelenting critique of Eurocentric curricula material, and by his support of the integration of African history, African oral traditions, and African knowledge systems in the primary and secondary school curricula. His academic works gave intellectual rationale to African-centred history

in schools, and his involvement in curriculum deliberations and leadership of indigenous publishing projects put these concepts into learning practice. His interventions had an impact on the way Kenyan students were exposed to their history, culture, and citizenship. In theory, the research paper shows that state policy and individual intellectual agency both influenced the process of post-independence curriculum reform. The paper presents the relationship between Ogot and historical knowledge, policy of education, and nation-building using critical policy historiography and development theory. In terms of methodology, the research adds to the history of education by applying a historical-biographical method, which incorporates archival source materials, published literature, institutional documents, and oral testimony to differentiate symbolically influential, structurally influential, and community-level practice. At the community level, Ogot transferred national education ideals to a practical intervention by school governance, infrastructure building, and the enhanced support of disadvantaged learners. Although structural limitations and political pressures constrained his efforts, the study establishes that his contribution to basic education formed part of a broader post-colonial project of decolonising knowledge and reorienting schooling toward national and cultural relevance.

5.2 Recommendations

According to the results, some recommendations can be made. To begin with, the policymakers and curriculum designers in the education sector must go further and enhance African-centred content in elementary education, especially in history and social studies, by utilizing local knowledge systems and localized scholarship that was pioneered by thinkers like Ogot. Second, the local educational publication should be further promoted so that curriculum change is maintained with the use of available, contextual, and relevant textbooks and learning resources. It is also important to strengthen indigenous publishing in order to lessen the dependency on epistemics. Third, teacher education programmes should be based on critical pedagogy and African historiography that will provide educators with skills that will allow teaching history in a manner that contests colonial narratives in ways that may foster critical citizenship. Lastly, the works of additional African intellectuals on the contributions of basic education should be considered in future studies by comparing and profiling their works, in order to gain a deeper insight into the agency of individuals in transforming education in the post-independence period.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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