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FUNCTIONAL POLITICAL EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF AI JOB DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is transforming job landscapes across the globe, with particular implications for developing regions such as Africa. AI presents both opportunities and challenges for Africa's labour markets, with significant risks of job displacement in key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. While AI-driven automation threatens to exacerbate unemployment and inequality, Africa's ability to respond is hampered by weak political education systems, which leave citizens ill-equipped to engage with governance or advocate for policies that mitigate these disruptions. This article explores the intersection of functional political education and AI-induced job displacement, arguing that empowering citizens with digital literacy, policy awareness, and participatory governance skills is critical for an inclusive AI transition. The study therefore, highlights key challenges, including skills gaps, informal labour vulnerabilities, gender disparities, and foreign tech dominance, while examining case studies from South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya. It proposes policy solutions such as reskilling programmes, labour protections, and localized AI innovation to ensure equitable adaptation. One of the findings of the research revealed that 60% of Africa's workforce are highly vulnerable to AI-driven automation, risking mass unemployment. Ultimately, the article underscores that functional political education is not just a civic necessity but a strategic imperative for Africa to navigate AI's disruptive impact and demand accountable, inclusive policies. By prioritizing political literacy and inclusive policymaking, Africa can mitigate the negative impacts of AI-driven automation and harness its opportunities. On this basis, the research concludes that

functional political education can empower Africans to address AI-driven job displacement by fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and advocacy.
Keywords: Functional education, political education, AI, job displacement, Africa, digital literacy.

Introduction

The emergence of AI technologies has significantly impacted job markets worldwide, with automation threatening to displace millions of jobs. In Africa, the situation is compounded by existing structural unemployment, underemployment, and socio-economic inequalities. AI is transforming global economies, with Africa facing unique challenges due to its reliance on labour-intensive sectors. The World Economic Forum (2020) estimates that by 2025, automation could displace 85 million jobs globally while creating 97 million new roles—but only for those with the right skills. In Africa, where informal employment dominates (ILO, 2020), AI-driven disruptions could exacerbate unemployment and inequality. However, the continent's ability to respond depends on functional political education.

Functional political education can play a pivotal role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with these challenges, ensuring they are not passive victim of technological change. This paper explores the role of functional political education as a mechanism to address the challenges arising from AI-driven job displacement in Africa. By enhancing political literacy, individuals can better navigate the complexities of job displacement and contribute to policy-making processes that harness AI for socio-economic development. This paper presents a comprehensive view of the intersection between AI, job displacement, and political education tailored to the African context.

Though the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize various sectors, yet it poses a significant threat to job security, particularly in developing regions such as Africa. According to a report by McKinsey (2019), approximately 230 million jobs could be automated by 2030 in Africa, leading to heightened unemployment and economic instability. Amidst these challenges, promoting functional political education emerges as a crucial strategy for empowering citizens. This paper seeks to argue that a well-informed populace through functional political education can effectively respond to the shifting job landscape created by AI in Africa and other parts of the world. AI technologies have already begun to influence labour markets globally. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020) notes that while AI can create jobs, it disproportionately threatens roles involving routine tasks. This job displacement phenomenon demands attention, particularly in Africa, where a significant portion of the workforce is engaged in informal and low-skilled jobs. Africa's labour market is heavily reliant on agriculture, manufacturing, and services, with high levels of informal employment. A study by PwC (2018) indicates that up to 40% of jobs in South Africa alone could be at risk due to automation. The implications of this for a continent grappling with poverty and unemployment are profound, therefore necessitating urgent action.

Education is foremost a human basic need and it has played a vital role in the development of the developed countries of the world. Any country can reach the peak of development if it can educate its people. In the global knowledge economy, functional education has a crucial role in nurturing human capital. Functional political education refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that empower individuals to understand political

structures, advocate for their rights, and participate meaningfully in governance. It encompasses not only political literacy but also critical thinking and civic responsibility. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought transformative changes across various sectors, leading to job displacement and shifts in labor dynamics. Africa, with its unique socio-economic challenges, faces a pressing need to address the implications of AI on employment and ensure inclusive growth. AI technologies, from machine learning to robotics, have the potential to increase productivity but at the cost of jobs. This is why the 2019 report by McKinsey Global Institute that emphasizes that 375 million workers worldwide may need to switch occupational categories by 2030 due to automation cannot be taken for granted. In Africa, where a large proportion of the workforce is employed in vulnerable sectors, the threat of job loss is particularly acute (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019).

Conceptualization of key concepts

Various concepts will be conceptualized such as the concepts of political education, functional political education, artificial intelligence and Job displacement to give a better understanding of the research work.

Political Education

The concept of political education encompasses developing critical and analytical skills, understanding political systems, structures, and processes. This concept cannot be effectively conceptualized without clarifying the concept of education. Education is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction either in formal or informal settings. It is also seen as a purposeful activity directed towards transmitting knowledge or fostering skills and character traits. Freire (1970) cited in Yusuf, et al., (2023) contends that education is a major weapon of social change and should not be neglected by any human society that craves for development in all ramifications of the word. Education has been defined as a process by which individuals are assisted formally through proper direction and guidance to develop their capacities for their own benefit and that of the society (Okeke, 2003) cited in (Orikpe, 2013).

According to Scott (2020), education is a dynamic and transformative process that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence, preparing individuals to thrive in an ever-changing world. Biesta, (2019) contends that education is a complex, context-dependent process of learning and development, influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors. These definitions confirmed the fact that education is a long term process of learning that is influenced by different factors. Education as such is a purposeful, systematic effort to bring about learning, focusing on the development of the whole person – cognitive, affective, and social. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2019). For Reimers (2020), education is a lifelong process of learning, unlearning, and relearning, essential for personal growth, social mobility, and global citizenship.

Political education is an essential component of democratic education that prepares individuals to engage in informed, critical, and active citizenship, and to navigate complex political landscapes. The concept of political education is concerned with those aspects of the general education process which inculcates political values, principles, proscriptions and prescriptions within the culture of a given society or community. Azeez and Ebenezer (2017) cited in Chike and Nwachukwu (2021) defined political education as getting people to take part

in their government, to assume their responsibilities of contributing to the development of the society, to make them aware of their rights and defend them without fear, to harness and tap the latent forces in the people, to make them see politics as an essential aspect of the entire social fabric and to make them less vulnerable to induced influences in the political process. In this regard, political education cuts across the social divides.

Political education is a critical pedagogy that empowers individuals to analyze power relations, challenge dominant ideologies, and develop collective action for social justice (Giroux, 2020). Political education is a process of learning that fosters critical citizenship, democratic values, and active participation in shaping public policy and political institutions. It is an emancipatory practice that equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to challenge systemic injustices and create a more equitable society (Ladson-Billings, 2018). Freire (2018), concludes by asserting that political education is a transformative learning process that develops individuals' critical consciousness, political efficacy, and collective agency to address social and political issues.

Functional political education

Functional political education aims to empower citizens with critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills to navigate complex political issues and promote democratic values. It is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and values necessary for effective participation in the political process and civic engagement.

Functional is a term that is used to refer to something that is active. It was defined by Cambridge dictionary as, working in the expected or necessary way. To Idowu (1999) cited in Mogboh (2023), functional education is the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) to the fullest and consequently be able to contribute maximally to the development of the society. Arogundade (2011) cited in Mogboh (2023) adds that functional education seeks to prepare people, especially youth, to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers who will contribute to economic development and sustainable communities.

According to Biesta (2011), functional political education involves the development of political literacy, critical consciousness, and civic competence to enable individuals to participate meaningfully in the democratic process. Therefore, it focuses on practical skills and knowledge for civic engagement, including voting, advocacy, and community participation. Functional political education is a civic learning process that equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate effectively in democratic governance and civic life. For education to be functional, the approach must focus on developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills to empower citizens to engage in informed, rational, and constructive political discourse. (Manning, 2022).

In addition, Hahn (2019) contends that functional political education is a comprehensive learning process that integrates civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions to prepare individuals for active citizenship and community engagement. It is an essential component of democratic education that aims to develop citizens' political literacy, critical thinking, and participatory skills to enhance democratic governance. For Schutz, functional political education has gone beyond improving citizens' political literacy. To him, it is a transformative learning

process that empowers individuals to navigate complex political systems, challenge injustices, and promote social change through informed civic engagement (Schutz, 2017).

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The term Artificial Intelligence was coined by emeritus Stanford Professor John McCarthy in 1955; it was defined by him as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines". Artificial intelligence (AI) is a field of study that seeks to create computer systems capable of performing tasks that would typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation. It is a computer system capable of performing complex tasks that historically only human could do. A subfield of computer science concerned with the development of algorithms and techniques that enable computers to simulate human intelligence (Barr & Feigenbaum, 1981). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a multidisciplinary field of computer science and engineering that focuses on the development of algorithms and computational models capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks encompass a wide range of cognitive functions, including, but not limited to, reasoning, problem-solving, understanding natural language, perception, and learning from experience.

AI is often categorized into two primary domains: narrow AI (weak AI) and general AI (strong AI). Narrow AI refers to systems designed and trained for specific tasks, such as language translation, image recognition, and game playing. These systems utilize statistical methods, machine learning techniques, and vast amounts of data to generate predictions and make decisions within their designated domains. In contrast, general AI pertains to a theoretical form of artificial intelligence capable of understanding, learning, and applying knowledge across a variety of tasks and domains, exhibiting cognitive abilities comparable to those of a human being. In summary, artificial intelligence embodies a complex interplay of theoretical foundations, computational techniques, and ethical inquiries, aimed at creating systems that augment and potentially replicate the cognitive capabilities of humans, thereby transforming diverse aspects of society, industry, and everyday life. The study of how to build intelligent machines and how to make machines that can think and learn like humans (Nilsson, 1998).

Job displacement

Job displacement refers to the loss of a job due to technological change, organizational restructuring, or other factors, resulting in a worker's separation from their employer (McKinley, 2014). To Gandhi (2018), Job displacement occurs when a worker is involuntarily separated from their job due to factors such as automation, outsourcing, or company restructuring. While Jacobson, (2013) argues that Job displacement encompasses layoffs, downsizing, and restructuring, leading to job loss and potential long-term unemployment, Baily on his side contends that job displacement involves the permanent loss of a job, often due to technological advancements, globalization, or economic downturns, leading to unemployment or underemployment (Baily, 2018).

Job displacement refers to the involuntary separation of a worker from their job, often resulting from structural changes in the economy, industry, or organization. It occurs when workers are permanently separated from their jobs due to factors beyond their control, such as technological change, trade, or economic shifts." (Kletzer, 2001). Job displacement involves the

loss of a job due to external factors, including automation, outsourcing, or business closure, resulting in joblessness or career disruption." (Hershbein, 2017).

Challenges of AI job displacement in Africa using South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya as a case study

Africa faces significant job displacement due to AI-driven automation, exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges. The impact of AI on employment is indeed multifaceted, with various dimensions that include job displacement and transformation, skill requirements and education, inclusive AI design, government policies and support, job market dynamics, entrepreneurship, and remote work. Mondolo (2022) indicated that automation and AI technologies could lead to the displacement of specific routine and repetitive tasks, potentially resulting in job losses in some sectors. While specific jobs may be displaced, AI may also contribute to the transformation of job roles, creating new opportunities and requiring a shift in skill sets (Mehdi, et al., 2024).

Africa's labor market is dominated by low-skilled, routine jobs susceptible to automation. Agriculture accounts for 60% of employment in some regions in Africa. AI-powered drones, automated harvesters, and precision farming threaten manual labor (FAO, 2022). Robotics in factories (e.g., Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park) may reduce labor demand (World Bank, 2023). African manufacturing could shrink if automation outpaces skills development. Only 28% of Africans have basic digital skills and youth unemployment (60% in some countries) may worsen if reskilling lags (AfDB, 2023).

AI has contributed immensely to employment and job displacement at the same time. Guliyev (2023) cited in Mehdi (2024) contends that AI contributes to creating new job opportunities, particularly in areas such as AI development, data science, and AI-related services. Indeed, labor market dynamics change as employers seek candidates with a combination of technical AI skills and soft skills, fostering adaptability and creativity. AI technologies, from machine learning to robotics, have the potential to increase productivity but at the cost of jobs. According to a 2019 report by the McKinsey Global Institute, up to 375 million workers worldwide may need to switch occupational categories by 2030 due to automation. In Africa, where a large proportion of the workforce is employed in vulnerable sectors, the threat of job loss is particularly acute (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019).

The influence of AI on the job market has become an undeniable reality. For instance, 30% of workers worldwide fear that AI might replace their jobs within the next few years. Microsoft's 2023 Work Trend Index report in India, presents a staggering 74% of the workforce shares these concerns. These numbers underscore the palpable apprehension regarding AI's role in reshaping the world of work. With projections that AI could potentially replace around 800 million jobs worldwide by 2030, it's no wonder the world is brimming with anticipation. The economic forecast is equally staggering, with AI's estimated economic impact reaching a colossal $15.7 trillion by the same year. A closer look reveals that concerns about AI replacing human jobs are not unfounded. A substantial 35% of businesses have already integrated AI, while an additional 42% are in the process of exploring its adoption (IBM, 2024).

While the above doesn't necessarily equate to immediate job loss, the potential for workforce displacement becomes more significant as AI technology advances and becomes less dependent on human collaboration. According to IBM report of 2024, a notable 77% of

businesses are already integrating AI into their operations or actively exploring its implementation. The IBM data also shows that larger enterprises are twice as likely to embrace AI compared to their smaller counterparts. The reason behind this discrepancy lies in the financial capacity of larger organizations, which can allocate resources to research and development, enabling them to readily adopt emerging technologies like AI.

In South Africa, high unemployment and low-skilled labor vulnerability is the major challenge of AI job displacement. AI adoption negatively impacts low-skilled employment, which forms a significant part of South Africa's workforce (32.1% unemployment rate). A study using VECM analysis (2012-2021) found a long-term negative correlation between AI and low-skilled jobs, with AI investment directly causing employment declines. Example: Automation in mining and manufacturing displaces manual labourers, while AI-driven banking reduces teller jobs. This can be mitigated through reskilling programmes and labour policies (e.g., Sections 189/189A of the Labour Relations Act) aim to protect workers, but implementation lags.

Nigeria however presents unique Sector-Specific Displacement and Regulatory Gaps. AI automates routine tasks in banking (Chatbots, ATMs) and agriculture (AI crop monitoring), threatening low-skilled roles. Nigeria lacks robust policies to address mass layoffs or algorithmic bias in hiring. For instance, ride-hailing platforms like Bolt use opaque AI algorithms to manage drivers, reducing earnings and job security. Calls for ethical AI frameworks and upskilling initiatives (e.g., Zoho's emphasis on data privacy) are emerging, but infrastructure deficits hinder progress.

While Kenya's National AI Strategy (2025-2030) promotes job creation, AI-driven automation in agriculture (e.g., AI pest detection) and fintech risks displacing manual labourers and low-skilled service workers. For example, Chatbots in healthcare (e.g., Kenya's AI doctor consultations) reduce demand for human customer service roles. Digital Innovation Hubs (e.g., DigiKen) train youth in AI skills, targeting 4,500 direct jobs by 2027, but rural access remains limited.

All three countries of South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya face a digital divide, where displaced workers lack skills for AI-driven roles (e.g., cybersecurity, AI development). Ethical risks lies in Algorithmic bias in hiring (Nigeria) and wage suppression (South Africa's gig economy) exacerbate inequality. AI's displacement effects in Africa are context-specific i.e. South Africa's structural unemployment, Nigeria's regulatory gaps, and Kenya's rural-urban divide highlight the need for inclusive policies, reskilling, and ethical AI governance. While Kenya's strategy offers a model, scaling solutions requires addressing infrastructure and equity.

The role of functional political education in addressing AI job displacement in Africa

The role of education as the foundation of social, economic and political development is undisputed. All over the world education is seen as the bedrock for national development. The strengthening of the channels of functional political education is imperative to responding to the challenges of AI job displacement in Africa because functional education produces qualitative manpower for national development. Different nations in Africa have made efforts in using necessary and meaningful educational programmes to equip their youths with skills, knowledge, attitudes and values deemed necessary for them to preserve their values; function effectively and contribute to the overall development of the nation (Obiora, 2010 cited in Afolabi, 2024).

Omolayole (2002) as cited by Afolabi (2024) reported that functional education is practical, stimulating and continuous in order to aid transfer and sustainability of the required positive skills, values and attitudes acquired through learning. Therefore, addressing AI job displacement in Africa through functional political education is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach. Here's a structured outline focusing on key aspects on the role of functional political education in addressing AI job displacement in Africa**:**

1. Raising Awareness and Civic Responsibility: Educating policymakers and citizens about AI's impact on employment and highlighting the need for proactive measures is an important role that can be played by functional political education in addressing the challenges of AI job displacement in Africa. Also, voter education and engagement increase awareness about the political processes that influence labour laws and AI policies, encouraging individuals to participate actively in democracy. When African workforce is giving adequate awareness about AI technologies, their capabilities, and potential impact on various jobs will be improved and this can empower them to adapt easily to changes.
2. Informing Policy Decisions: Providing data-driven insights for evidence-based policymaking is another strategy for curbing AI job displacement in Africa. This can be done by encouraging policymakers to consider AI's social implications during planning of policies.
3. Creating a Policy Framework for Job Transition: Another role of functional political education in addressing AI job displacement in Africa is that it encourages advocate for policies that support job transition, including reskilling initiatives, social safety nets, and financial support for displaced workers (Kuczynski and Lutz, 2020).
4. Fostering Skills Development: Encouraging education and training programmes for emerging technologies by supporting lifelong learning and upskilling or reskilling. Implement educational programs focused on digital literacy and emerging technologies to prepare the workforce for new job demands is an important strategy for tackling AI job displacement in Africa.
5. Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Functional political education is practically inclined, innovative and pragmatic. It encourages entrepreneurial initiatives and support innovation hubs that create jobs in sectors less likely to be automated, promoting a culture of innovation and support risk-taking.

Discussion of Findings

From the secondary documents utilized by this research, three key findings on functional political education and the challenges of AI job displacement in Africa were synthesized from recent research and policy analyses:

1. AI Job displacement threatens key Sectors, but political education can mitigate risks: Agriculture, manufacturing, and services which employ over 60% of Africa’s workforce are highly vulnerable to AI-driven automation, risking mass unemployment. Functional political education can empower citizens to demand reskilling programmes and labor protections, as seen in South Africa’s union-led advocacy against mining automation.

2. Weak policy frameworks amplify inequality: Only 7 African countries have national AI strategies, leaving workers unprotected from displacement. Grassroots political education can

pressure governments to adopt inclusive AI policies, such as Ghana's digital-ID system or Togo's AI-targeted social programmes.

3. Foreign Tech dominance stifles local innovation: Over 90% of AI tools used in Africa are foreign-developed, exacerbating dependency and job market fragility. Political education must include advocacy for local AI hubs (e.g., Nigeria's NITDA lab) to create homegrown solutions and jobs.

Conclusions

Functional political education can empower Africans to address AI-driven job displacement by fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and advocacy. By prioritizing political literacy and inclusive policymaking, Africa can mitigate the negative impacts of AI-driven automation and harness its opportunities. This is because AI job displacement in Africa presents complex economic, social, and political challenges. Without urgent reskilling, policy reforms, and local AI investment, the continent risks mass unemployment and widening inequality. A proactive, inclusive approach is needed to ensure AI benefits all Africans.

Recommendations

From the analysis of the findings of the research, the following three key recommendations are made to address the intersection of functional political education and the challenges of AI job displacement in Africa:

1. Integrate AI literacy into political education curricula: Most African education systems lack modules on AI's socioeconomic impacts, leaving citizens unprepared to engage with policymaking. Governments NGOs should develop civic education programmes that explain AI's labour market effects, ethical risks (e.g., bias), and policy responses. For example, Rwanda's digital literacy initiatives could be expanded to include governance frameworks.

2. Strengthen labour protections through grassroots advocacy: Africa's informal workforce accounting for 85% of jobs lacks safeguards against AI-driven displacement. Trade unions and community organizations should use political education campaigns to demand Universal Basic Income (UBI) and gig worker protections (e.g., regulations for ride-hailing apps). For instance, South Africa's labour unions have successfully lobbied for AI transparency in mining sector automation.

3. Launch targeted upskilling programmes with public-private partnerships: Only 28% of Africans have basic digital skills, and women are disproportionately excluded from STEM. Localized training sessions focusing on digital literacy, labour rights, and the socio-political landscape surrounding AI should be adopted and gender-inclusive design that prioritize STEM scholarships for women and rural communities.

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