

# Dorcas Oyugi

## Excelling Beyond Exams: Teaching essential life skills in a rapidly-changing time

Education is the ultimate key to keeping up with the pace of the world, and yet, it often fails in this endeavor. The education systems of the world often demand that we, as educators, maintain a narrow focus on exam results. I believe this leads to ignoring the potential each student has to become an all-around contributor to society. I propose that effective education for an uncertain future be rooted in the teaching of life skills that empower students to excel beyond exam scores and to be prepared for the uncertainty in their lives beyond the classroom.

If individuals are given basic skills in areas such as creative problem solving, critical thinking, and effective communication, they will be prepared not only to analyze problems in an exam or to prepare a job application, but to think critically about their own lives and the uncertainty before them. Without these life skills, we, as educators, build a generation of students that can attain a high exam mean, yet find themselves without the ability to problem-solve should their job or university aspirations fail. Furthermore, life skills equip students with the ability to be effective leaders not only in their careers, but in their families, allowing future generations the opportunity for visible role models and effective guidance. Educational approaches must instill life skills in the same manner that they seek to instill rote knowledge of exam responses.

It is the responsibility of educators to provide these skills in a manner that is both explicit and contextual. Education that is centered on rote learning and basic content delivery will fall short in equipping students with tools for their lives. Instead, teachers must provide hands-on applications that allow students to combine class content with complex problem solving and critical thinking. Students must be allowed to approach problems via opportunities that are designed for the creative to succeed such as applied science labs, vocational opportunities, peer-to-peer mentoring, and student leadership initiatives.

This is not to say that exam scores are unimportant. On the contrary, they often provide helpful benchmarks to track a student's progress. However, misunderstanding these results as the ultimate goal of education moves us toward a teaching method that neglects more transferable life skills and fails to build a student into a social, political, and economic contributor.

By providing life skills, we take a step toward closing the gap between high-income people with skilled competencies and the large population of unskilled, unemployed individuals worldwide. Without closing this gap, it is a sad reality that countries will continue to lose opportunities for development and the regrettable drain of social, political, and economic power will persist.

While the future of education may seem distant and uncertain, we cannot dispute the fact that for adaptable, sensible, skilled, critical, creative, knowledgeable and educated people, we must invest in abilities and skills that go beyond exam scores and content delivery.