

FIFTY YEARS OF COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN  
TEACHER EDUCATION AND PERENNIAL DECLINE IN THE  
QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION-WHERE IS THE  
PROBLEM?

By

Daniel N. Sifuna  
Department of Educational Foundations  
Kenyatta university  
Nairobi, Kenya

Email: [daniel.sifuna@ownresearch.org](mailto:daniel.sifuna@ownresearch.org) and [dnsifuna@gmail.com](mailto:dnsifuna@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

- Teacher education like other sectors of African education was not given much prominence by colonial administrations. In that regard, the shortage of teachers became among the greatest obstacles to the expansion of education and was closely associated with the declining standards of education in most countries following the achievement of independence in the sixties.

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- My remarks highlight the lack of policy focus in teacher education and quality, some challenges of reform in teacher education, indicators of poor quality of primary education and future direction.

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### **Lack of Policy Focus in Teacher Education and Quality**

- It is now nearly over 50 years ago when Beeby, an Australian educator pointed out that in the context of planning education for development, attempts to change the quality of learning in schools had to be linked to improvements in the education of teachers if they were to be effective.
- Yet this area has received relatively little attention from policy-makers, donors and researchers since then.

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- As a result, the evidence base is weak, and much policy on teacher education has not been grounded in the realities that shape teacher education systems.
- In this regard, it is not surprising that, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), in Jomtien in 1990, devoted scant attention to the problems of teachers and teacher education, despite their centrality to the achievement of better learning outcomes for all.

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- It was not until ten years later, at the Global Forum on EFA in Dakar, Senegal that teacher education moved up the agenda of the EFA forum.
- It ensured that by the year 2015, all teachers have received initial training, and that in-service training programmes are operational.
- But the extensive implications that this target had for teacher training systems were not elaborated.

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- The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) for example has ten thematic international Working Groups, but Initial training and in-service do not feature as primary concerns.
- In many of the Africa countries, especially in Africa, teacher education is in a crisis. Inherited systems of teacher education have proved increasingly unable to satisfy the dual demands for higher quality training and increased output to universalize primary schooling.

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- Donor enthusiasm for new pedagogy, which frequently advocates learner-centered approaches, group work, attention to special needs, and others associated with best practice in rich countries, has sometimes sat uneasily with the realities of unfavourable environment. Much of the rhetoric of reform has been difficult to translate into real changes in practice.
- With regard to **Quality Issues** in primary education, during the 1970s and 1980s, most policy makers were concerned with education in developing countries limited their attention to school access.

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- While the gains in enrolment had been quite impressive in many parts of the world, including the Sub-Saharan African region, low quality and high dropout rates led to the perception that many of the children left school without having obtained a sustainable level of basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.
- The goal for achieving universal primary education (UPE) has been on the international agenda since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and reaffirmed by many treaties they have generally been silent about the quality of education to be provided.

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## Some challenges in teacher education reform

- Teachers remain key to the ongoing educational expansion and improvement but in many countries there is a dire and urgent need for numbers of both primary and secondary teachers.
- In the same vein, there is an equally important need to improve the quality of teaching. To achieve the twin goals, it is clear that new approaches to teacher education are essential.

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- In response to the shortage of qualified teachers as a result of the inability of face-to-face training institutions to adequately fill the gap, many countries have begun to adopt distance teacher education programmes.
- There are a few examples of successful distance teacher education institutions which have been exemplary as potential of distance learning in addressing the problem of increasing qualified teachers to improve the quality of education.

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- As a way of improving teaching skills of teachers, especially at the primary and secondary school levels, a number of countries, with donor support have mounted school-focused INSET programmes to meet specific needs of schools, and as a means of halting the declining quality of education.
- The implementation and effectiveness of these programmes have, however, not been adequately evaluated, although there are some notable exceptions which suggest their potential usefulness.

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- African governments, expect a great deal from their teachers as their agents. However, most states do not reward them well.
- Many agencies tend to ignore the critical role of teachers in educational reform. In particular, the key issues in teacher motivation and pay are skimmed over and, at times ignored altogether.

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- Many other reform programmes also seek to fundamentally change teaching practices and increase teachers' workloads, while at the same time, ignore or give insufficient attention to the very low motivation and conditions of service.
- Top down policy formulation and implementation with limited participation by teachers exacerbates the already very limited degree of self-determination.

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- In many countries, while the importance of teachers is given a lot of emphasis, including in international reports, attention given to teacher education and the professional development of teachers often lags behind that given to other levels of the education systems, even in terms of resources.

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- Although distance education in the Sub-Saharan African region dates back into the 1970s and in spite of its high potential, its training method has only met with partial success as regards government policy in teaching and organization at the institutional level.
- In many African countries, distance education is generally considered as a second best or second chance education and in a few cases, as “face-saving” strategy in response to an educational crisis.

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- Consequently, according to the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa's (TESSA) evaluation, the quality of the majority teacher education using distance in Africa is poor in terms of improving practice.
- In many countries in Africa, teacher education by distance is promoted as an inexpensive quick fix solution without governments realistically budgeting for the high costs of student support and assessments.

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- A good number of distance teacher education projects have been donor-funded. While such projects have more scope of being innovative they are quite vulnerable through their dependence to external funding which is not sustainable and time-bound.

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## Indicators of Poor Quality of Primary Education

- The UPE policies in many countries seem to have reduced an economic burden of primary education for the disadvantaged groups as well as decreasing delayed enrolment and hence boosting increased participation.
- However, the push for UPE in many countries has come to be identified with increasing deterioration of the quality of primary education right from the provision of physical facilities, teaching and learning materials, deployment of teachers, performance and transition from primary to secondary education.

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- In many countries there has been a steady improvement in the training of primary school teachers since independence, with the proportion of professionally unqualified teachers declining. However, the UPE intervention has contributed to the increase in numbers of unqualified teachers.
- Due to unequal distribution of teachers in the countries and within schools, the class size is considerably larger in the early standards.

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- It is estimated that half of the existing 2.6 million teachers in the region are unqualified. In some countries, there are high proportions of untrained teachers who are often thrown into their jobs with little or no induction. Multi-grade teaching is quite common, but most teachers are not adequately prepared for the special demands of this type of teaching.

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## Future strategies

- There is need for governments to adopt implementation strategies in line with their national policy on education to set up pre-tertiary distance education institutions to increase access to educational programs.
- Donor funded DE programmes need to ensure their sustainability by being made time-bound and are institutionalized.

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THANK YOU  
Asante sana

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