id21 education highlights #3

teachers

communicating international development research

Three million teachers needed in Africa

Africa will not achieve universal primary education (UPE) until at least 2150. Progress towards it is essential. But what about the millions of new primary school graduates? Unless children are offered opportunities for secondary schooling, the economic outcomes from this education will never materialise.

A report from the South African Institute of International Affairs warns governments and donors of the need to cope with the expected successes of UPE. Forty million African children – almost half of the continent's primary level children – are not in school; about two-thirds of these children are girls. Primary enrolment is low, gender ratios highly unequal, illiteracy widespread and there is a high rate of dropouts. The global average state expenditure per child on primary education is US$629 a year; in Africa it is US$48.

- In some countries UPE is compromising educational quality as poorer governments raise enrolments drastically without providing more resources.
- Definitions of UPE vary: some countries claiming UPE progress only offer two to three hours teaching a day.
- Basic reading, writing and maths skills in Africa are far below standards in the rest of the developing world.
- Exams require pupils to learn by rote; few pupils learn how to learn, to solve problems or take initiatives.
- Few pupils in Africa take maths and science at secondary level: in Ethiopia four percent of university graduates have studied science.
- Corruption robs children of their basic right to education: misuse of school funds and buying attainment certificates is common in some countries.

UPE has increased the demand for teachers but they are in short supply and often inadequately trained. UNESCO predicts that Africa needs at least three million more teachers to cope with increasing enrolments. Extremely poor pay and conditions mean that teaching is often a last career choice.

Educational opportunities beyond primary school are extremely limited. Uganda is a typical example of countries which have shortsightedly prioritised UPE. In 2003 secondary schools could only offer places to less than half of that year's primary graduates.

Secondary school is where students gain skills of significant economic value, become socialised and learn to understand risk. But only a quarter of Africa's primary school graduates enrol at secondary level and only ten percent complete secondary education.

Key recommendations include:

- adopt a zero tolerance approach to corrupt practices in education
- increase development aid to education to raise the quality of primary education and improve transition rates from primary to secondary school
- plan budget expenditure more efficiently
- ensure HIV/AIDS is at the core of education policy and planning
- scale up school-feeding programmes
- ensure curricula are relevant for pupils
- use mother-tongue instruction.

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Teaching large classes in Uganda

Large class sizes have a negative impact. Yet skilled teachers still manage to cope with huge student numbers. The high pupil-to-teacher ratios in developing countries will not disappear. What coping strategies do successful teachers adopt?

A report from Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick looks at a sample of Ugandan teachers and asks how they manage to teach over 70 students in one class. The author shows that it can be possible for teachers to teach large classes effectively. It can also be possible for children in large classes to learn more effectively than pupils in smaller classes.

In much of Africa lower primary grade classes are considerably larger than upper primary classes. There may be a hundred pupils in early primary classes. Distribution of teachers is one reason: instead of using more teachers in lower primary grades, head teachers use them as subject teachers for the smaller upper primary classes.

Since Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education in 1997 the number of primary students has more than trebled. Most teachers use rote learning and often complain the curriculum is too extensive and beyond the abilities of many students. They also note that many children come to class too hungry to concentrate.

The author videoed lessons and interviewed pupils to assess key lessons from successful classes:

- Enthusiastic teachers praised the children, asked many questions, explained clearly, used eye contact and repetition without letting it degenerate into mindless chants.
- Group work was effectively organised: students knew the routine and on a signal from their teacher formed themselves into groups, chose a leader, and set to work on the tasks assigned.
- Pupils were not simply asked to recite and then copy information into books.

The notion that large classes result in learning deficits needs to be challenged. As large classes will remain the norm, education planners in developing countries need to focus on the 3Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic, and avoid broad curricula. If teachers are to remain motivated they must be better paid and not be asked to work long days with double shifts.

It is also important to:

- prepare student teachers for large classes, discourage rote learning and encourage group work and effective use of questioning
- commission research on the impact of class size in developing countries – most studies are based in industrialised countries
- realise that curricula seeking to be child-centred will not work in large classes: students will not perform as well as they might with more attention
- understand that when resources are limited, it may be more cost effective to purchase additional textbooks rather than reduce student numbers
- share best practices more widely.

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'Teaching Large Classes: The International Evidence and a Discussion of Some Good Practice in Ugandan Primary Schools', *International Journal of Educational Development* 26, pages 24-37, by Margo C. O'Sullivan, 2006

Ghana's education crisis

improve teachers' conditions

Ghana is committed to making education more effective and appropriate. However its teachers are over-worked, under-motivated and mostly under-qualified. The Ghanaian state expects a great deal from its teachers but does not reward them well. Respect for education and the teaching profession are in decline.

A paper from the University of Oxford reports the findings of a study conducted in and around the capital Accra, to assess the opinions of teachers, trainee teachers, students and parents.

Schooling is mandatory until the age of 15 but many question its value. Ghana, like many of its regional neighbours, is dependent upon an archaic, centrally-controlled and under-funded schooling system which does not have room for all willing post-primary students. Significant numbers of poor children are not receiving the junior secondary education to which they are entitled.

As student numbers have risen, so have class sizes and the burdens imposed on teachers. In most urban primary and junior secondary schools, there are two shifts, requiring most teachers to work from 7am to 5pm. Teachers complain of additional non-remunerated extra-curricular activities and clerical and secretarial tasks. Older teachers report there has been a noticeable decline in pupil achievement.

Despite the pressures, most experienced older teachers remain dedicated to the profession. They are respected in their communities and active in community groups and churches. Many use their own limited funds to pay for books, charts, photocopying and art and craft materials. In order to make ends meet, almost all the teachers interviewed are forced to seek additional work.

The author found that:

- Trainee teachers – many from low-income backgrounds – are not optimistic, most hoping to eventually find non-teaching employment.
- Employers are dismayed by the poor skills of those who have completed junior and senior secondary schools.
- The basic qualifications of teachers vary widely.
- There are hardly any incentives for teachers to upgrade their qualifications – promotion depends almost entirely on connections to senior bureaucrats.
- Pupils are encouraged to learn by rote and produce lists of facts in compulsory examinations, an approach which neither stimulates creativity nor provides better foundations in English, mathematics and computer skills.

Massive changes in curriculum, pedagogy and funding are essential. The paper recommends that teachers should be:

- trained to improve their knowledge of recent developments in their discipline areas and of contemporary educational theory and practice
- given time to offer the pastoral care which increasing numbers of disruptive children need
- much better paid and less stressed: if teachers are to become agents of change, teaching must become a financially rewarding profession and working hours and class sizes must be reduced
- provided with more textbooks and teaching aids and given better laboratories, workshops and equipment
- involved in all aspects of educational planning and reform.

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'Teachers in Ghana: Issues of Training, Remuneration and Effectiveness', *International Journal of Educational Development* 26, pages 38–51, by George M. Osei, 2006

Learning to teach in Lesotho

Who aspires to teach in this small southern African state? A new report examines what newly qualified teachers (NQTs) think of the training they have received and reviews how their expectations match those of the teacher trainers. It looks at whether they are content with the teacher education curriculum they are presented with and assesses how cost effective the current teacher training system is.

A report from the National University of Lesotho and the University of Sussex examines the new Diploma in Education – Primary (DEP) training programme at Lesotho's National Teacher Training College (NTTC). This publication evaluates entry characteristics of new student teachers, delivery of the primary teacher education curriculum, career structures and management within NTTC, means of assessing Lesotho's demand and supply of teachers and sources of support given to novice teachers.

Primary student teachers are mostly women in their early twenties from modest backgrounds. Before arriving at NTTC a quarter have acquired teaching experience. However, by modelling themselves on the traditional teachers who brought them into the profession, they have adopted teaching styles based on discipline rather than child-centred education. Many trainees have significant gaps in their own education.

The report concludes that NTTC is sending out primary school teachers who are likely to use teacher-centred methods in their style of teaching and be insensitive to the needs of primary school children. It also notes that:

- Trainees struggle to develop adequate knowledge of science and many continue to suffer from low self-esteem throughout their time at NTTC.
- Teaching practice is badly planned and poorly managed: feedback from schools on how the novices perform is rushed and incomplete.
- Although NQTs manage their classes well, they fall back on question-and-answer routines which allow pupils little interaction with teaching and learning materials or with each other.
- NTTC lecturers work in isolation and have low levels of job satisfaction.
- The Diploma is expensive and only produces a quarter of the qualified teachers required to meet Lesotho's target of a 40:1 primary school pupil-teacher ratio.

The report has extensive recommendations, however the authors emphasise the importance of making sure that:

- Lesotho develops a comprehensive policy on teacher education
- NTTC practises the student-centred approach that it aspires to promote
- young teachers understand how teaching can enhance learning and acquire a better appreciation of teachers' instructional responsibilities
- assessment procedures are consistent with the theory that underpins the diploma training programme
- innovation and renewal become part of NTTC's institutional culture
- schools provide a more supportive environment for NQTs.

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