

Editorial

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to *Volume 42, Issue 2* of *Papers in Education and Development (PED)*, an issue teeming with thought-provoking research that offers timely reflections on some of the most pressing issues shaping education and development in Africa and beyond. The eleven articles presented in this issue engage in wide-ranging conversations around youth development, teacher education, inclusive schooling, skills acquisition, and institutional responsiveness. What emerges is not only a mosaic of rich research contributions but also a reflective mirror of contemporary educational realities across diverse contexts.

As we navigate an era marked by rapid technological changes, socio-economic inequalities, and shifting labour market demands, the role of education in cultivating relevant competencies, inclusive practices, and institutional resilience has never been more critical. The articles in this issue converge around four overarching themes: *youth empowerment and employability, inclusive and differentiated pedagogies, assessment practices, teacher development, and deployment policies and resilience and crisis management in schools*. Each theme contributes to a broader discourse on how education systems can both be strengthened to address today's challenges and reimagined to foster equity, inclusion, employability, resilience, and sustainability.

Key Themes and Scholarly Reflections

Youth empowerment, language literacy, and employability

Four contributions explore the intersection of education, youth development, and employability, with a focus on equipping young people with relevant life and workplace competencies.

Onweazu O. Okoji opens the issue with an exploration of the role of literacy education on youth development in Ilorin, Nigeria. His findings reconceptualise literacy beyond its conventional boundaries of reading and writing, presenting it as a catalyst for political participation, vocational skills acquisition, and community engagement. The study advocates for greater investment in literacy initiatives as a strategic approach to youth empowerment.

In response to changing labour markets, **Jovitha L. Mayega** examines employers' perspectives on the soft skills required of Tanzanian graduates. Employers prioritise communication, integrity, independence, workplace awareness, and problem-solving—attributes often underemphasised in formal education. The findings call for curricular and pedagogical reforms to systematically integrate soft skills into education, thereby bridging the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations.

Mgoge, Kahangwa, and Abdalla critically analyse the use of English as a Language of Instruction (ELoI) in Vocational Education and Training (VET). While ELoI enhances employability and access to global resources, it also exacerbates social stratification and stifles creativity. The authors propose a balanced approach: intensive English support and strategic code-switching to mitigate inequities while ensuring academic success.

Similarly, **Masele and Philemon** assess Field Practical Training (FPT) among university business students, revealing its significant role in enhancing employability through applied learning. However, disparities between private and public institutions persist, particularly in terms of mentorship, workplace access, and supervisory support. The study calls for structural reforms in university-industry partnerships and supervisory arrangements to optimise experiential learning.

Inclusive and differentiated pedagogies in schools

The second theme emphasises the need for responsive teaching approaches that recognise and support learner diversity in schools.

Kisanga and Foya explore teachers' understanding of the learning needs of pupils with cochlear implants in Dar es Salaam's inclusive primary schools. Their findings reveal widespread gaps in teacher knowledge and training. The authors call for the integration of cochlear implant education into teacher training programmes and the implementation of ongoing professional development to support inclusive classrooms.

Wilfred and Tarmo focus on the identification of non-academic talents in primary schools. Teacher observation, peer input, self-identification, and parental insight emerge as organic yet underutilised methods for recognising pupils' diverse abilities. The authors advocate for holistic talent development frameworks that value learners beyond academic metrics and specialised training to support a more inclusive learning environment.

Assessment practices, teacher development, and deployment policies

At the heart of educational reform lies the relationship between assessment, professional development, and equitable deployment of teachers—each of which is examined in this theme.

Hawa Mpate investigates supervisors' assessment practices during teaching practice in diploma teacher education. The study highlights both supportive and problematic practices, with some evaluations found to be rushed, inconsistent, and overly grade-focused. These practices risk undermining the formative purpose of assessment. The findings underscore the need for structured, timely, and developmentally appropriate assessment strategies during teacher preparation.

Mbunda, Nzima, and Kimaro expose restrictive study leave criteria that restrict opportunities for public primary school teachers to upgrade their qualifications. They reveal a disconnect between national policies and local implementation, calling for clearer policy communication, administrative alignment, and increased support for teacher professional growth.

Likewise, **Machumu and Mislai** explore teacher deployment in rural secondary schools, showing how staffing shortages, excessive workloads, and minimal institutional support compromise curriculum implementation. Their findings point to the need for equitable deployment policies and context-sensitive planning that address the realities of teachers in underserved regions.

Resilience and crisis management in schools

The final theme addresses how education systems respond to personal, social, and institutional crises. In a deeply humanistic study, **Zainabu Rashidi** examines the coping strategies of urban adolescents from divorced families. Her findings reveal learners' resilience and the

emotional, social, and spiritual resources they draw upon to sustain academic engagement. The study calls for schools and communities to strengthen holistic support systems that promote adolescent well-being and learning continuity in the face of social disruptions.

Challe, Mislay, and Boniface investigate the presence or absence of Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) in secondary schools in the Kagera Region. Their findings expose a significant preparedness gap, including inadequate infrastructure, a lack of trained personnel, and limited financial resources. The study recommends integrating emergency preparedness into national education plans to ensure that schools are equipped to respond effectively to crises and safeguard learning environments.

Conclusion and the Path Forward

The contributions in this issue collectively advocate for an education system that is inclusive, adaptive, and forward-looking. They remind us that education is not merely about transmitting knowledge but about designing systems that are responsive to learners' diverse needs and the socio-economic contexts in which education unfolds.

Key takeaways include:

- ✓ *Curriculum reforms* must integrate soft and practical skills to better align with labour market demands.
- ✓ *Structural reforms* in experiential learning, such as strengthened university-industry partnerships, are critical for skills development.
- ✓ *Teacher development* and *empowerment* require coherent policy implementation, equitable deployment, and continuous professional support.
- ✓ *Inclusive education* should be enhanced through targeted teacher training, differentiated instruction, and stronger school-community collaboration.
- ✓ *Crisis preparedness* must be institutionalised through policy integration, infrastructure investment, and capacity-building initiatives to safeguard learning environments.

Taken together, the articles in this issue offer both a diagnostic and prognostic lens, revealing current educational realities while envisioning transformative possibilities. Whether through rethinking language instruction, recognising learner diversity, investing in teacher capacity, or ensuring institutional readiness, the contributions challenge us to reimagine education as a socially responsive, ethically anchored, and practically empowering endeavour.

On behalf of the *PED* Editorial Team and Board, I extend our sincere gratitude to the authors for their rigorous scholarship and to our reviewers for their critical engagement. We hope that this issue will inspire policymakers, practitioners, and scholars alike to engage with the research presented here and to translate its insights into transformative educational practice.

As we turn these pages, may we do so with curiosity, reflection, and a shared commitment to shaping more equitable and resilient education systems.

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